

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR

Celebrating the Chinese New Year With Our Residents from China

The Chinese New Year officially began January 31, 2014, starting "The Year of the Horse". In this issue get to know some of our residents from China.

A Cup of Tea With Margaret Ma



TGN: Tell us about how you plan to celebrate the Chinese New Year this year.

Margaret: This is a time for family to come together. I plan to have the family dinner at my place this year on Saturday, February 1. It is also a time to honor our ancestors, give thanks for what we have. I expect 12 family members. There are many special dishes for the New Year dinner including chicken, duck, seafood, many vegetables and usually ends with a whole fish, which symbolizes abundance for the coming year. Also I will decorate the table with plum, azaleas, cherry blossoms, and a bowl of oranges, which represents good fortune. We also traditionally give each of our grandchildren red envelopes containing money at dinner. These envelopes are called "hongbao".

TGN: Where do you come from in China?

Margaret: I was born in Changsha, in central China, and lived in many parts of China. I left China at age 22 and have been in the US 66 years.

TGN: Tell us about your family background.

Margaret: In 1909 my father won a scholarship to Yale after taking a national exam. This was the first Boxer Rebellion Scholarship which was provided by the US for Chinese students to study in the US. He met my mother in New York City (my grandfather was a minister who established the first Chinese church in New York City and my grandmother had a strong Dutch background). After they returned to China, I was born in 1925. After World War II, I came to the US. I attended Ohio State University where I met and married my husband Jim. He was from Yunnan, China, and had won a Yunnan State scholarship to study in the US. He obtained his PhD in chemical

engineering at Ohio State, and we lived in Philadelphia for several years. Then we came here in 1976 for Jim to work at SRI, and we lived in Palo Alto for the next 24 years. Jim retired in 2001, and in 2007 he passed away. We had four children, including Philip who lives in San Carlos and has three children, Prior moving to San Carlos, they lived in Shanghai for five years. The children speak fluent Mandarin. Our daughter Kathryn lives in San Francisco with her family. She is a writer and educator. Our other daughter Louise is a lawyer, who also lives and practices in San Francisco. Our son Christopher died two years ago after serving as vice president of the Washington Post. He also served on the Board of Trustees at Sidwell Friends School - a well-known Quaker school in Washington, DC. There are more than 200 descendants of my grandparents, some in Europe, China, and the US. I also try to stay in touch with Jim's family in Yunnan, China. I consider myself with my diverse family background a bridge between different cultures and different generations.

TGN: When did you come to Menlo Commons?

Margaret: Jim and I moved to Menlo Commons in 1999. I moved back here after Jim died in San Francisco in 2007. Since 2008 I have had a caregiver, Missy, living with me. She is cheerful and very capable. I consider myself very lucky to live here at Menlo Commons, in an area close to San Francisco, Stanford University, and also with fine weather. My neighbors are wonderful, caring people.

TGN: Describe your activities.

Margaret: When I was more mobile, I volunteered with the English in Action program at the International House at Stanford University. The volunteers were paired with graduate foreign students and their families to practice the English language and show them around the area. I also was active in the First Congregational Church of Palo Alto, including helping prepare and serve monthly luncheons for the homeless. Now I wish to keep my family connected with their Chinese heritage, and continue to keep in touch with our extended family in the western world.. Every four years our large family has a reunion. The last one was in Berkeley and this year it will be in Maryland. I don't think I can travel to make this one.

TGN: I enjoyed having tea with you, Margaret. Thank you for your sharing with me.



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Jim & Ruby Chang Describe Their Chinese Background



TGN: Where in China are you from?

Ruby: I was born in Shanghai and came to the US in 1963.

Jim: I was born in Wuhan on the Yangtze River. I came to the US in 1962. We both attended college at the National Taiwan University in Taiwan, and then we both continued graduate studies at UCLA, where I obtained my Master of Science degree.

Ruby: I obtained my MBA at UCLA. We met at UCLA and were married in 1965. We lived in Fullerton, Southern California, until we moved to Menlo Commons last year.

TGN: Tell me about your work after college.

Jim: I worked in the aerospace industry, first at Boeing for 10 years, and then at the Aerospace Corporation for 30 years, where I oversaw space program development. I retired last year.

Ruby: I worked for a CPA firm and then did accounting at Cal State Fullerton.

TGN: Why have you selected Menlo Commons as your residence?

Ruby: Both of our children live in this area.. Our daughter Peggy lives in Palo Alto and has two of our grandchildren, and our son Kevin lives in Berkeley and has our other two grandchildren.

TGN: Tell us more about your family..

Ruby: Kevin is an architect and Peggy has developed a website for summer camps and after school activities for pre-school to pre-teen children. Our grandchildren are from age 4 to 13. There are ten of us when we gather together. I also have brothers and sisters living in Southern California too.

TGN: What do you plan to do for the Chinese New Year.?

Ruby: We will have a family dinner, with a "hot pot" - vegetables and meat cooked together. The grandchildren get red envelopes with money in them and put them

under their pillows at bedtime.. The traditional expectation is that the money will increase overnight.

TGN: How else do you continue to maintain your Chinese tradition?

Jim: During my employment, I visited China and other Pacific Rim countries many times. The Chinese learn for themselves by doing a lot of copying. For instance they could produce an airplane they claim looked "just like a 707". They also have copied some Russian and Israel fighter airplanes.

Ruby: We watch Chinese language TV channels and speak Chinese whenever we can. We now attend the Home Of Christ Church where they speak Chinese at the services.

TGN: What do you like about Menlo Commons?

Ruby: I think it is very nice and quiet here. The people are mature, and I like the level of activities. We like our unit. We decided to put in wooden flooring instead of carpeting.

TGN: Describe your present activities at Menlo Commons.

Ruby: I am in the ladies exercise club which Margaret Ma has organized. I also take the Tai Chi exercises organized by Shirley Stewart. I also continue to paint. I have an easel for art work in the other room, and have various pictures that I have done hanging on the walls.

Jim: I use the machines in the exercise room. I also have some art work from my grandfather in our bedroom, which is more than 200 years old.

TGN: We will take some pictures of your art. Thank you for sharing about yourselves with us.



Jim's art work from his grandfather - more than 200 years old.



Ruby's paintings of women on each side, with the Changs in front of a center landscape painting.