

VOICES

Dorothy Lee

THE COMMUNITY is composed of people who really are "of the same cloth," you might say, but more and more the texture is being enriched by an influx through the years of new immigrants, from other cities, as well as from other countries. They have brought with them a wide diversity in education and skills. The thread that holds us together is the desire to maintain our cultural heritage. That is, you will find within the community people wearing different hats and belonging to different groups, but there is a great deal of interaction and blending among us. This is especially true when it comes to mutual support and aid, community outreach and services to ourselves and to the greater Pittsburgh community. We help Chinese visitors passing through Pittsburgh who need help. For example, sometimes they suffer an injury, or become ill, and we work with the local authorities to help get them medical treatment, or help translate for them, or provide them some financial assistance or personal comfort. We have Chinese doctors and others who try to help Chinese in trouble. We do a lot of other community activities. The Chinese community has changed a lot; it's not an insular group. One of the most wonderful things about Pittsburgh is that you have so many ethnic groups, and they work hard at maintaining their ethnic identity, but still are allowed to blend into the larger community.

The emphasis here has been on things we have in common, on the fact that we are Chinese. We support each other, whether we come from Taiwan or the mainland. In my own case, for example, I feel a tie both to Taiwan and the mainland. My father was a dean at the University of Nanking, on the mainland. He was a graduate of a Christian mission school. He came to the United States as a Rockefeller scholar and got his Ph.D. in physics at the University of Chicago. After World War II, he was asked by the Chinese Nationalist government (which soon was to be driven from the mainland and into exile on Taiwan), to be their representative on the Atomic Energy Commission. He agreed. But then the Communists took over power in China, and he couldn't return. We children, including myself, came to the U.S. in 1947. Originally we were to be here for only a year. But my dad stayed on as government representative, now with the United Nations. So we were of

mainland background, but my father served the Nationalist Chinese government on Taiwan. After my dad's time was over at the United Nations, he went to teach at Bethany College in West Virginia. I later moved to Western Pennsylvania with my husband. When he died, I came to Pittsburgh in 1984. My current husband is a physician at Children's Hospital and wholeheartedly supports my work in the community.

Since coming here, I have continued my community service. That orientation comes partly from my Christian upbringing; we were always taught to be of service to the community, to be involved in the community. Also, my mother stressed that we were personal ambassadors for our people, that we bore a special responsibility to speak and act for them and on their behalf. I became more and more involved with the Chinese community, and have been vice-president on the national and local level of the Organization of Chinese Americans. Locally, I am known informally as "big sister," because I try to consider others almost as members of my family. I work with various local agencies; there are any number of us who do that; I don't want to give the impression that I stand alone in this regard, because I don't; many Chinese people work with the community.

Many of us are in touch with other nationality groups in Pittsburgh. One way we do that is through the Nationality Rooms Committee at the University of Pittsburgh. Another way we do this is through the Asian Women's Institute — Pittsburgh Cluster. This is an organization of women from Asia, including the Indian subcontinent. We work to support women's education in Asia. In these ways, we feel we have become part of the overall social, political and economic texture of Pittsburgh, while maintaining our own culture and identity. ❁

Editor's Note: Dorothy Lee is Gaoying's godmother. The two met when Mrs. Lee's daughter had a class with Gaoying at the University of Pittsburgh and brought her home. Mrs. Lee, a Chinese-American woman who supports many young people, is also the godmother of a Nigerian as well as someone she describes as being of "Italian-Slovak-American" descent.

Mrs. Lee suggests that one thing that sets the Pittsburgh Chinese community apart from communities in several other large cities is that Pittsburgh no longer has a "Chinatown" district, which could provide a geographic focus for Chinese identity. She notes that the city's old Chinatown entered a serious decline after World War II, and withered away between the 1950s and 1970s. Despite lacking a formal Chinatown, Mrs. Lee reports, the city's Chinese community is vibrant.