

## Bing J. Gee (1914-2004) Memorial Scholarship

Born in Toisan, Guangdong Province, China, Bing J. Gee was the second of three children. His father was a small farmer and peddler. At age 2, Mr. Gee lost his mother. An older cousin in the U.S. (like a foster father to him) financed four years of primary education and sponsored him to come to the U.S. when he was 16 years old, old enough to be a laborer like three great-uncles who worked on the railroads in the U.S. Two of the great-uncles helped finance his passage. He never forgot their support and generosity, their giving him an extraordinary opportunity. Late in life, he wrote: "I'll never forget the time I was about to come to America. My dream was sky high."



Going against the advice of his elders, he pursued education, considering it "basic and necessary, so your thinking is reasonable." Working in private homes, he learned English at the Berkeley Adult School, graduated high school, and completed his B.S. in civil engineering in 1942 at the Polytechnic College of Engineering in Oakland. His career in land surveying and drafting spanned U.S. defense projects during World War II, to many land subdivisions and housing developments. The last part of his career was devoted to freelance land surveying and drafting. He wanted to work many years "to make it easier for the third generation [grandchildren] to get an education, so they can stand on their own feet."

After the war, he returned to Guangzhou, China, where he married Kam M. Lee. They settled in Oakland, where their six children were born.

Early in his career, he experienced discrimination, (e.g., he was paid less than a laborer despite having a college degree and white barbers refused to cut his hair.) In those days, educated Chinese citizens could not work in civil service and some teachers had lower expectations of Chinese students.

Not forgetting his roots, Mr. Gee was active in the Oakland Chinese community, serving on the boards of the Asian Health Center and Asian Cultural Center, and the Real Estate subcommittee of the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation.

From a rural background to immigrant in the S.F. Bay Area, college graduate, professional worker in defense and many housing developments, and dedicated volunteer in the community, Mr. Gee early on strongly believed in the value of education. Because he was the first among his generation of cousins to graduate from a U.S. college, he was a role model and mentor to them.