

## E1141, Video 1

Ever heard of Ellis Island? Well even if you haven't, there are 12 million people who certainly have. That is the number of immigrants, folks who came from foreign lands to live here that came through that tiny island off the southern tip of Manhattan since the 1890s.

In fact I visited there once and got to see where my own grandparents first set foot on American soil. Actually it was quite a moving experience to imagine what it must have been like to uproot an entire life to come live in a land whose language and customs differed so dramatically and had to be pretty discombobulating for everyone.

But I wonder what it was like for the women? A strange diet of culture clashes over dress and behavior. The Chinese custom of binding their women's feet to appear dainty must have caused quite a stir in America. And women from the Middle East with their veils and long dresses - you can talk about setting your whole world when it's here. It is no wonder that once they landed these first-generation immigrants, Chinese, Italian, Irish, middle eastern and so forth tended to form tight knit groups often taking up entire neighborhoods. Now, although their hardships were many, communities were able to flourish because of the common thread of cultural elements such as food, language, and religion.

Now of course, Ellis Island wasn't the only gateway to America. There was an immigration port on the other US coast as well. Angel Island is situated in San Francisco harbor, and it was there that over 175,000 Asian immigrants got their first glimpse of American life.

Now the nonfiction piece we will be reading in this lesson is the true story of one family's experience. And because it is nonfiction all the people, places, and events can be regarded as having really happened and not the product of the author's imagination.

But although it happens to be one particular grandmother's experience as a Chinese immigrant living in San Francisco, much of her trials and tribulations were common to many. It wasn't easy for these folks by any means. Chinese immigrants first came to America's shores in response to the 1840's gold rush. And for the time being, because of America's need for workers they were welcome. But this didn't last. Only 30 years later the US government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which put severe restrictions on the number of people who could move here. Those who were refused entrance were detained at Angel Island in San Francisco. And this happens to be the setting of our non-fiction reading, Angel Island in California.

Now the story is about Mrs. Lee Yokasui and her experience as a Chinese grandmother coming to live in the United States. Her culture is different from America's and of course they clash in some very interesting ways. Now, for one thing grandmothers in China at that time led lives sequestered from the mainstream of public life. They weren't generally seen on the street. They tended their families within the confines of the house.

Now as you read this factual account of an immigrant's life in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century America, see if you can pick out more challenges they faced when they first came to this very different land. Now read to discover the intriguing details of this Chinese grandmother's life as she goes through one of the most difficult times in her long life.