Sharyne Shiu Thornton, PhD
Deputy Director,
InterIm Community Development Association
Clinical Assistant Professor,
Department Health Services,
University of Washington, SPHCM
Seattle, Washington

• NOTE: All photos are from my mother’s personal photo album from her army days
A Journey to Serve:
A Chinese American Woman’s Service in the Canadian Armed Forces during World War II

Paper presented at
5th International Conference of Institutes and Libraries for Chinese Overseas Studies (WCILCOS)
May 16-19, 2012
Vancouver, B.C., Canada
Mom in Formal Military Uniform
Chinese Exclusion Acts

United States: 1882; repealed, December 1943
Canada: 1885; repealed May 1947
United States: Form 430
Certificate of Identity

Required of ALL Chinese residents in the U.S.,
regardless of citizenship or place of birth,

including birth in the United States
Interplay of Gender and Exclusion Act: Impact on Identity

Multiple names:
• Mintoy Shiu (1923 original birth certificate)
• Mintoy Shiu (August 1936 Form 430 application)
• Min Toy Shiu; May Toy Shiu (September 1936 adoption decree)
• May Toy Yee (adopted name)
• May Toy Shiu (July 1943 birth certificate, certified copy)
• Moy Mee Liu
Mom as a Child
Timeline Summary

• July 24, 1943 – Form 430 approved by the District Director, Immigration and Naturalization Service, in Detroit, MI

• July 24, 1943 – enlistment date at London, Ontario per Canadian Army discharge certificate

• July 29, 1943 – Canadian Army attestation form for May Toy Yee, showing present address, next of kin and technical qualification from a radio and machinist course completed during attendance at a trade school post high school graduation
Mom - Basic Training
Mom in summer uniform: basic training
(from personal photo album)
Assignments

• Ottawa
• Nanaimo – Vancouver Island, B.C.
Nanaimo Bay 1944

Personal photo from Mom’s Army photo album
Nanaimo – 1944

Personal photo from Mom’s Army photo album
Nanaimo – Barracks

Mom (left) with friend on barrack’s porch: personal photo album
Mom at Teletype – Nanaimo

From personal army photo album
1945 – On Leave

- Marriage
- Another Name – May Toy Thornton
On Leave – Chicago January 1945 (1):
Visiting Younger Brother, Tom (USAF)
On Leave – Chicago January 1945 (2):
Visit with Younger Brother, Tom
And, Again - Name Changes

• May Toy to “Jimi”
• Name at discharge, Feb. 14, 1946: May Toy Thornton
• Final Name Change, April 18, 1946: Jimi Thornton

Affidavit and Certificate of Correction, Illinois Department of Public Health
Significance of Story

• Exclusion Policies and Identity
• Discrimination and Identity
• Military Service as Transformative Experience
Transformation

Mother’s personal story: her emergence, through her military service, into multiple new roles

• As a Chinese American woman
• As a married woman
• As an honored veteran
A Story’s Importance

Stories engage us. They can involve us in lives different from our own; absorb us deeply in the experiences of the ‘other’, yet present us with hopes and fears we may also find intimately familiar. Stories are also compositions of lives both individually and collectively lived and in their structure, bring voice to those often silenced in history. In this way, stories can function as compositions on social justice; equity and transformation.

(Sharyne Shiu Thornton, 2012)