

Lydon, Sandy

✓ Jung San Choy's legacy of the 17th green

Hindsight



Sandy Lydon

IF YOU DIG a hole deep enough you'll end up in China. That's what we were told as kids, and I can remember digging in the backyard and imagining what it would be like to pop out of the ground in China. Did they tell Chinese kids that if they dug they would wind up in America?

Would I meet them somewhere in the middle, tunneling this way? As the work got harder I dug slower until, about 2 feet into the trip, I decided to stop and wait for the Chinese kids to get here.

Little did I know at the time that the notion was true. Not literally. Allegorically.

They meant that anywhere you dig in the history of the Monterey Bay Region you'll run into Chinese, because there's not a place in the region that was not touched by Chinese immigrants and their descendants. The Chinese stories are down there, in the most unlikely places, buried beneath the accumulated historical detritus and waiting for the historian to bring them to light.

There's no more unlikely place than the 17th green of the Pebble Beach golf course. How much farther from China can you be than on this hallowed place in golfing history? The carpet-smooth green sits on a small, rocky peninsula jutting into Carmel Bay, and the history we are told of this place is that of the "Shot Heard Around

the World" in 1982, when Tom Watson chipped in an impossible shot from the rough and beat Jack Nicklaus in the U.S. Open. The image of Watson, arms raised in victory, dancing through the long grass and onto the green will probably live forever in the history of sport. Watson's triumph over Nicklaus and that impossible lie in the long grass is the stuff of American mythology. Triumph over adversity. The thrill of victory. Against all odds. The underdog wins.

I am sure that neither Watson nor the assembled multitude who witnessed that moment knew that this breathtakingly beautiful spot had witnessed earlier triumphs. Others had overcome adversity here. One of them was Jung San Choy.

CHINESE CAME to Pebble Beach to hunt abalone as early as 1856. Diaries kept by the Gore family, owners of the property in the 1850s, tell of leases they signed with Chinese abalone hunters allowing them to work the coast for \$20 per month. One of the Gores noted in his diary that the Chinese were treated in an "abominable manner."

"They are denied the privilege of voting, cannot appear as evidence in the courts of justice and are also denied the privilege of worshipping their own God and in their own way."

We do not know exactly when Jung San Choy (Chinese name order has the surname first, so he would be known as Mr. Jung) came to Pebble Beach, but it was during the 1860s as a teen-ager. When David Jacks acquired the Pebble Beach property from the Gores (the Gores always contended that Jacks did so illegally), the Chinese continued to lease the land for their fishing village from the new owner. Sometime during the 1870s, Jung San Choy married So Young and they had the first of what would eventually be 13 children, all born on the site of the present-day Beach Club next to the 17th green.



Jung San Choy, right, his wife So Young and four of their 13 children at their home, which eventually became the 17th green at Pebble Beach.

Photo courtesy of the Monterey Public Library (Photo on Page D1 courtesy of Pai Hathaway)

Nobody started toward the goal of the American dream buried deeper in the rough than Jung San Choy and his fellow Chinese in California. The fires of anti-Chinese sentiment burned furiously across Central California, but Carmel Bay was something of an oasis, sheltered and out of the way. On this beautiful spot, the Jung family grew. When the Pacific Improvement Company (the land development arm of the Southern Pacific Railroad) bought Pebble Beach from David Jacks in 1880, Jung San Choy signed a new lease. Later that year, after the 17 Mile Drive was completed (built by Chinese laborers), Jung set up a souvenir stand where the road passed

his house and the Jung children got their first introduction to American-style merchandising.

The children collected and polished the shells and often spent long hours tending the stand during the day.

The shell stand did so well that Jung set up another one over at Cypress Point, and for the next 30 years, the Jung family sold shells and trinkets to the tourists who streamed past. When the Jung family found that their children were unable to attend the public school in Pacific Grove, they sent them to a small missionary school set up for Chinese children.

Jung San Choy and his wife were ineligible to become natural-

ized American citizens, but all 13 of their children who were born at Pebble Beach were citizens. Over the years, as the children grew up, they moved away to the San Francisco Bay Area to find their fortune. When the Pacific Improvement Company decided to subdivide the Pebble Beach coastline and build the golf course they terminated Jung San Choy's lease and he moved to San Francisco where he died in 1917.

In 1987, 75 years after Jung San Choy left, the Jung family returned to Pebble Beach for a reunion. As they walked about the spectacular grounds they told family stories about Jung San Choy's talents as a seaman, fisherman and

entrepreneur. Bert Jung, the lone survivor of the 13 Pebble Beach-born Jung children, stood in front of his birthplace (the Beach and Tennis Club) and smiled while five generations of Jungsworlds swirled through the Cypress trees that his father had planted a century before. Bert's smile was the "Smile Heard Around the World."

So, when you hear about Tom Watson's "Shot Heard Around the World" during the up-coming U.S. Open and see the replays of Tom Watson in 1982, imagine Jung San Choy standing there too, surrounded by his descendants, his arms raised in triumph.

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