



A 1948 portrait of Ah Fook and George Ow Jr.

Only the images remain

Book celebrating the work
of Santa Cruz photographer
George Lee makes it
to publication

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George Lee knew they were working on a book about him, about his photographs and the long-gone Chinatown that he chronicled.

Lee knew that his nephew, Santa Cruz businessman and arts patron George Ow Jr., had talked to his breakfast club of friends about contributing to the book, a group that reads like a local literary dream team: Geoffrey Dunn, Morton Marcus, Tony Hill, Sandy Lydon and Jim Houston.

But Lee never got to see the finished product, "Chinatown Dreams," a beautiful collector's volume of photographs and memories of the Santa Cruz that never makes it into the tourist brochures.

Lee died of a stroke in 1998, which gives the publication of "Chinatown Dreams" an elegiac quality. When the contributors to the book gather Wednesday at Holy Cross Parish Hall for a book signing and video event, Lee will be the evening's largest absence.

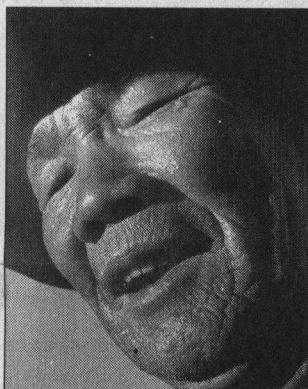
"My uncle is gone now," said Ow looking at a photo of Lee with pal Earl Towne, "and Earl's gone now too. But these pictures, you look at them, and they're young and alive forever."

The book, eight years in the making, contains written contributions from Ow's circle of friends mentioned above (Dunn served as the volume's editor), along with a memory piece from Ow's second cousin, Lisa Liu Grady, and design work from Mark Ong.

The book's cover displays one of Lee's most famous photos, a 1948 portrait of elderly fisherman Ah Fook kneeling beside a 5-year-old boy, none other than George Ow Jr.

"We were so lucky," said Ow. "He was a professional photographer taking pictures in our neighborhood, and that was very rare."

"The one thing I remember about him is that he was always taking pictures."



1941 portrait of Ah Fook

If you go

WHAT: Multi-media celebration of George Lee and the book, 'Chinatown Dreams.'

WHERE: Holy Cross Parish Hall, 170 High St., Santa Cruz.

WHEN: 7 p.m. Wednesday.

COST: Free.

DETAILS:

www.capitolabook.com.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

The faces behind the book: top row, from left are Tony Hill, Lisa Liu Grady, George Ow Jr. and, bottom row, Sandy Lydon, Geoff Dunn and Morton Marcus.

Lee

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That neighborhood was Chinatown, a small parcel near where Cooper and Front streets meet today. Lee lived there with other Chinese immigrants to Santa Cruz while working at a now-defunct shop called Webber's Cameras on Pacific Avenue.

Chinatown (the Galleria retail development now stands on the site) would be largely forgotten without Lee's vivid photos of the place and the period.

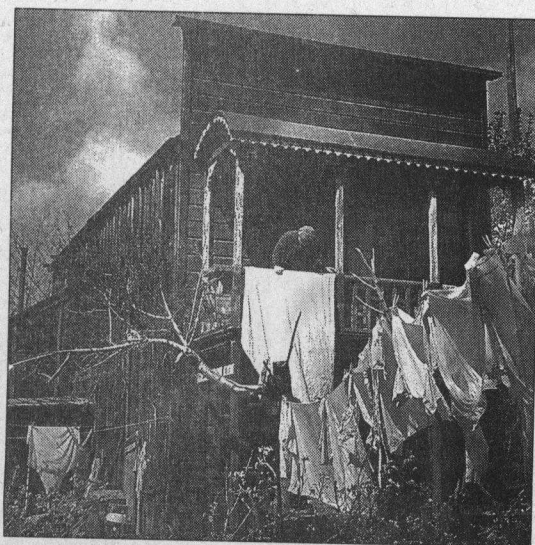
But Lee's lens was not restricted to his family or his neighborhood. The book and Lee's photos chronicle his experiences in both World War II and the Korean War, as well as his work as a freelance photographer for the Santa Cruz Sentinel.

Lee particularly loved shooting the Miss California pageant, which took place in Santa Cruz for years, and the book features a picture of Lee blushing posing with Miss Indiana of 1951 in Atlantic City, N.J.

Still the most vivid portraits in "Chinatown Dreams" are Lee's first-person images of Chinatown: the creased, seasoned faces of the old bachelors; the shadowed, haunted stills of long-gone Chinatown houses; the loving portraits of his sister Emily and his brother-in-law George, Ow's parents.

"He was upbeat," said Ow, remembering his uncle, "positive, what we nowadays would call a networker."

"He always knew where to get the best apricots, the best fish. He never made a lot of money. But he knew



Photographer George Lee took this picture of Moon Lai Bok hanging laundry at Chee Kong Tong Temple in Santa Cruz's Chinatown in 1941.

everybody, and everybody knew him."

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