

James *Bingy* Fong interview on Creation of the Park

Interviewed by Lydia Lowe, 3/9/2026

SPEAKERS

Bingy, Lydia, Speaker 3, Speaker 2, Speaker 1

Bingy 00:00

Okay,

Lydia 00:01

So, okay, testing, testing, yeah, this seems like it's right. Okay. Well, first, let's just say this is Lydia Lowe. I'm interviewing Jim Fong. Jim Bingy Fong, on March 9, 2026, and why don't you just state your name?

Bingy 00:26

Yeah. So Hi, I'm Jim Fong in Chinatown. They know me as Bingy. That's from a Chinese name, but I actually have a name, James.

Lydia 00:37

Okay, so just first, I want to ask you to think back to growing up and in Chinatown and tell me about playing in the field where Reggie Wong Park is today.

Bingy 00:51

Okay, so I grew up on the farther end of Hudson Street, so where Tai Tung village is now, that's where I grew up. And in my teen years and college years, I hung out at the Wang, at the YMCA, the Chinatown YMCA, and we eventually got access to the Pagoda Park, what it's what eventually was called Pagoda Park. And I played there a little bit there, but my time was really like in the lead up to the to the acquiring and building the Pagoda Park, okay, and

Lydia 01:36

and so, before it became Pagoda Park, what was there?

Bingy 01:42

Lydia, literally a plot of land next to the highway, next to Kneeland Street. When you look at that site now, you see the building with the two tall smokestacks. You wouldn't go there. There was no reason to go there.

01:59

So we felt it was unused. And people used to play football there, and, yeah, softball, well, to the extent you would use an unused lot, I don't think you would play softball that needs lines and a certain configuration of space. So it wasn't and it was fenced, if I recall, in the early days. Again, the problem is

that it's on that side of Kneeland Street, so the south side of Kneeland Street, so you you kind of wouldn't otherwise go there much, other than just kids hanging around, maybe.

Lydia 02:41

And so how did the idea of creating a permanent park come about?

Bingy 02:48

Well, my view and did history again, I was probably like a college student in those days at Northeastern and I was on a committee of the Grievance Task Force of Boston. So I actually brought a couple souvenirs to show you that there is such a thing.

03:14

So the broader context is it was the 60s, and in America at that time, there were race riots, and **the City of Boston was trying to engage the community and do things to prevent such riots, which was good, right? Kevin White was the mayor at the time, and a group of people got together called the Grievance Task Force**, and many of their names are familiar.

I can tell you some of the names from these things I brought. But in previous, previous to the Grievance Task Force, there may have been a few connections with City Hall over town services and cleaning up and that kind of thing, perhaps orchestrated by the CCBA and the Merchants Association, but the Grievance Task Force formed specifically to engage with the city over services, and they chose a very broad agenda. So it was safety, health care, education, recreation, and the leaders are well known names, so I'll rattle off a couple. Davis Wu was probably the earliest chairperson or one of the earlier ones. The brothers Frank and Billy were very visible on it. Amy Guen and her husband Ed. And then Caroline Chang, Reggie's sister. So these are the people that I engaged with. They kind of mobilized the youth. So, at that time, I'm one of the youth that they mobilized. And they had meetings, they put me on the Recreation Committee, and I eventually became a leader of that group. So, the Recreation Committee at first, it was kind of easy. I was on the Knights, and so I knew one slice of recreation, the volleyball and the basketball that us Knights did. But we tried to take it a little broader. We tried to sort of say, well, not--all we have is the old YMCA backyard basketball court. That's all we have! **Early on, in my earlier youth, the Mary Knoll Sisters arranged baseball so we used Randolph field, and I even played basketball in the ancient municipal gym on Tyler Street and Oak Street. But eventually those became unavailable, and we played in the streets, and we played in the Quincy School yard, and we played it to the Chinatown YMCA, so we knew that there was no place to go.** At least as far as sports goes in, I even knew at that time, I used to ask the question, What about the girls? You know, what did the girls do? There was no answer. But at least we knew that there was something needed there. **But as far as sports go, it's not hard to look at Chinatown say what possible land is there, and the Pagoda Park site was at least open. So, the Grievance Task Force is kind of what mobilized us to think about that.** And so, plans, plans were put in space, and the adults I'm gonna, I'm gonna call the people I named, rattled off, they were the adults. They kind of addressed the challenge of, how do we approach this? And of course, the City, but it's not City land. It turns out it's whoever runs the freeways.

Lydia 07:28

State,

Bingy 07:29

Yeah, state, so, and we made propositions to them, and for, for me, like for the longest time, nothing happened. I mean, we'd ask, you can't even get an answer, never mind a plan. So, it just went on for a long time. And then, this is my youthful slice of what happened. I know that I, because I was on this Recreation Committee, one day I was coming home from school, and I took a turn, and I decided to go into the Prudential Center where the Department of Transportation was headquartered. Just literally looked on the panel on the wall, where is the 18th floor, or whatever? And I went up there, and in a totally unprepared way, I says, *Is there someone I can talk to about this piece of land in Chinatown?* And the receptionist behind this gigantic desk. So they said, wait there. I actually got in to see I think his name was Driscoll, typical bureaucrat in a suit behind a giant desk, and, but he came in and he listened. That's all he did. He just listened. He said, *What do you want?* And he told him about the lack of space and, and we feel that space is unused and it's probably never going to be used. So I don't want to make it sound like I went in and convinced the guy, but at least I tried, you know, and being the good bureaucrat he was, he says, *Oh, thank you for your input.* He let me go, and some weeks, soon, not that long, we got, we got the okay to go forward. So, I don't want to overemphasize that I found the land, but that's how we felt.

Lydia: That seems like it bumped it up for them.

Bingy: Maybe, you know, putting a face on it, something like that. So, I heard that we got permission, and I recall of brainstorming in the Golden Gate. We used to hang around the Golden Gate in those days with, in particular with Sloogy, who was Reggie's younger brother, Ronald. And Ronald was an architect, so he had an organized way of thinking about that stuff. And we said, what could we do with this piece of land? And we were literally thinking of cut configurations and so on. And there were so many issues to think about, like I. Uh, safety. How do people get there? You know, New England Street is, is a terrible street,

Bingy 10:10 But we said, well, let's proceed. So I recall Sloogy then went off and did some research. And he later told me, years later, he says, I just guessed on the dimensions of a volleyball court. I didn't know what the dimensions of a volleyball...And he says, I think I got it wrong, by the way. It's an unconventional configuration, but he laid it out. I think it was about three courts, and a proper fence got put up. Because, of course, since it was unused land. It was the issue of vagrants and people at night hanging out, typical city kind of stuff. We didn't know what to do about that. But that's my, my recollection of the early days, a lot of people put their effort into making it real, I think.

Lydia 11:07

And during that period that you were just waiting like, how did you communicate this request? Was it like a letter? Were there petitions? How did that happen?

Bingy 11:19

Well, of of the people that I named off, they would know how to get to the right people in City Hall. So, I don't think City Hall was the issue. In fact, I would say City Hall was a very good advocate. It was that the state, we didn't know who they were. We didn't know who to talk to, and who would care and, and who would actually be able to say okay. I would say we didn't know.

Speaker 1 11:43

We believed it was state because the state runs most of the highways, I think

Lydia Yeah. And so there wasn't, like, a clear process.

Bingy Definitely not Yeah.

Speaker 1 11:54

And that was the environment where we're dealing with, who can say yes, who can who can we talk? I don't think we knew. No again, that the adults might have had a better idea.

Lydia 12:08

So from your recollection, from the beginning, when you decided, let's, let's make this request until the end. About how long was that?

Bingy 12:21

A couple years, I think. Now, I don't remember when Reggie Wong Park was actually opened, so that would have to be looked up. But again, from my perspective, they had me on this Recreation Committee, and I only saw what I could see from those set of issues. So, we had other things that we wanted to do too. This committee, as a minor digression, this committee also started the first August Moon Festival. So, a ton of us were behind that. Dozens of kids were behind that. They made me the first chairman of the committee and didn't tell me what I was supposed to do or how to do it, but they just said, *You're in charge of this committee*. So we pulled off the first August Moon Festival, and that's what this is. This was on the 10 year anniversary of the August Moon Festival. They kind of recognized the people who started up the first one. So, I had these sitting around in my basement, and I thought I'd drag them along to show them to you.

Lydia Yeah, nice.

13:38

And so why was it called Pagoda Park? Who thought that up?

Bingy 13:46

I'm gonna guess Sloogy, but that's a guess. I think it was brilliant. They found a short name, you know, a non complicated name, and it did signify something Asian or something Chinese. So, I thought that was good, but I don't actually know how that happened.

Lydia 14:08 So you mentioned playing in the basketball court behind the Y, so that was before the Bubble.

Bingy Yes.

Lydia And when did the Bubble get started? It was, wasn't it also in the 70s?

Bingy 14:20

Yeah. My YMCA backyard days were in the 60s, when I was a high school student, because clearly I remember coming from high school back so that would be, you know, mid 60s, and the Bubble was coming forward several years after that. I'm probably, yeah, several years, maybe 75, 70...

Lydia Something like 70s, I remember people saying, Okay, any other particular moments or stories that you recall from this whole experience of forming Pagoda Park that that you want to tell, that, the one about going to the office was really good, but anything else that you want to tell?

Bingy 15:12 Yeah, again, I don't want to over-emphasize, it was just something I spontaneously did. But those little things that, they make a difference. You know?

Well, I do recall that we felt kind of overwhelmed with, you only have to look at the map and realize there's a tiny handful of even possibilities. So now you're talking about major facility. And of course, the a better solution to that eventually came along when they rebuilt the Quincy School. And the Quincy School had a proper gym. That was the first proper gym in, you know, with real dimensions and backboards. And we used, we used to play in that backyard, which was a postage stamp kind of thing.

And you might know that the volleyball teams, when they were in the tournaments in those earlier years, they used the parking lot across from Bob Lee's Islander. That, at least it was big, and who knows what amount of payments had to be paid to somebody for us to let us use that. So there was just so little space that we quickly had an attitude on Pagoda Park that something, something possible is better than, you know, imaginary hopes of something coming up, like, like a major building. You know, that in those days, we weren't thinking that way.

Yeah, I'd have to think about that. Something might occur to me. But, yeah, yeah, the volleyball probably was the main impetus. I think that was instrumental, because, again, the adults that I'm referring to in the CCBA and the Merchants Association, they could relate to: *Oh, volleyball. We understand what they're talking about.* When you say recreation to them, they don't know what you're talking about. But because it was volleyball, the Knights and the Gung Ho club and other organizations that they knew were all playing volleyball and something they could resonate with. So that helped elevate, I think, the, the practicality of trying to secure that space. Otherwise, we would have done the typical scattered, kind of unfocused kind of effort. So, in this document that I brought, I just wanted to show you the article. I don't know if you're familiar with the Historical Society, the one that has Davis Wu as the Sojourner, it talked about this issue of the grievance tax bill. Okay, I don't know if I want to try to find it for you now, but one of these articles was Davis Woo with the Sojourner Award. I don't know if there's an index in there that. In there, but Amy Guen's was a little bit before all this. I'll just take one second if I can't find it quick, we'll defer the topic.

19:03

Lydia This has the memorial to Reggie in it.

Bingy 19:06

Yeah, this one's a very pertinent issue, 2011 but the one in in that was Davis Woo was given a sojourner award, enlisted all of his accomplishments around Chinatown, and one of them was he was the earliest Grievance Task Force Leader. What was significant about that, from kind of a personal point of view, is many of the people I rattled off, and somewhere in this text is about the Grievance Task Force. They...so, you know the thing about jook sing kids and jook haak kids. So I was jook sing, obviously, and it was just easier to deal with Davis, and Amy and Billy and Frank, because they could relate to us if, if they wanted to, they could relate to us in English. And that kind of helped mobilize a lot of the activity. Prior to that, you either knew how CCBA worked or you didn't, you know, like there was no it was very mysterious, very opaque.

Lydia 20:21

I feel it's still kind of mysterious, even if you speak English or Chinese.

Bingy 20:29

But now you're dealing with the City Hall, and so that that that opened up some possibilities for the English speaking side. Prior to that, the merchant solutions had their connections in the city hall, I'm sure, but not on a kind of, like a transparent way that a lot of people could participate. So, I think in the Grievance Task Force, it made a difference, at least to people like me. Oh, okay, I can deal with Reggie, and I can deal with Davis. They know how to talk to us, and Caroline was really important. The City was pretty open. They were, again, I feel they were doing a good thing, trying to avert violence and stuff in the community. So, they were very open. When we ran the first August Moon Festival. So that's 1970 or so. The City gave us a liaison person. His name was John Huang, and he was plugged into the Office of Cultural Affairs of the City. And they just said, Hey, do some good things in the community. And anything you need, you got it. And John Huang actually made that happen. The August Moon Festival compared to present day, was really gigantic. We had multiple stages. We had the whole Chinatown walled off, and the city made that all possible, not just the same, tell us what you want. They actually helped us make something big out of it. So I'll keep thinking about the Pagoda Park. That's pretty much what I would I recall.

Lydia 22:21

Okay, well, thank you. And anything else you want to add?

Bingy 22:27

No, it was fun for me to pull this out. This is probably more meaningful to me now than it was when they gave it to me, but they did appreciate the work that everybody put into this.