

In 1975, as new housing units and the health clinic were under construction, the elderly voiced a need to be more physically active. The idea of building a garden in the International District designed specifically for the elderly gained lots of support. It was

natural to look at the hillside property above Main Street. It was vacant and available.

Danny and Wilma Woo owned the hillside property. Danny was a descendent of one of the oldest Chinese families in Seattle. His grandfather, Woo Quan Bing, was associated with the Quong Tuck Company, one of the pioneer Chinese businesses in Seattle. Danny and his wife Wilma were successful in owning and operating several restaurants in the International District. Their New Chinatown Supper Club was a popular jazz club and dance hall in the mid-1950s during and after the Korean War. Later, they sold the New Chinatown and built the Quong Tuck Bar and Grill on South King Street. The "QT" soon became the hangout for local activists.

I approached Danny one day at his restaurant about using this property for a community garden. He listened intently, puffing on a pipe as I told him how much we wanted to build a vegetable garden for the elderly and how we wanted to acquire the land on a long-term lease. "How much you can afford?" he asked.

"Well, you know, Danny, we are a non-profit agency."

"And Bob, you know I'm a businessman."

"We could probably afford \$1 a year." He almost choked on his pipe. Danny told me he'd have to think about that.

The next week, he called me in and agreed to donate the use of the land. He insisted, however, that a long-term lease was not an option. Danny didn't want to commit to a long term because the possibility existed that some developer might come along and offer huge sums of money for his property. He also wanted the flexibility because one day, he might have other ideas for the property. Luckily for us, that day never came. No such developer stepped forward or if one did, Danny never told us about it. After a few years, Inter\*Im paid the Woo family the equivalent of their property taxes for rent. When Danny died, the garden was renamed the "Danny Woo International District Community Garden" in his honor.

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first task was to clear Danny's hillside property, a jungle overgrown with blackberry vines, four-foot high weeds, and piles of trash that had built up over the years. It wasn't hard to recruit the young activists who showed their great energy in marching up and down the streets just a few years before. We harnessed those energies to good use. Our hardy crew of volunteers chopped and hacked away at weeds and overbrush with their trusty machetes.

As the hillside became cleared of the growth and trash, plans were drawn up so easy to read that even we, the Inter\*Im staff, could follow the drawings and build the project from the ground up. Natch and Yosh Ohno from the Ohno Landscaping Company volunteered their time, equipment and labor to cut four terraces into the hillside. Darlyn set up meetings with officials of railroad companies who had mixed feelings about donating railroad ties to the community. We reminded them that Chinese and Japanese workers had played a major role in building the railroad system in the West, including Washington state. Eventually, we hustled more than 1,200 railroad ties from Burlington Northern.

Volunteer crews showed up for weekend marathon work parties while a small crew which included Denise Louie, Lorraine Sako, and I worked throughout the week. Lorraine was a landscape design student whose expertise was very helpful. With the growing season fast approaching, it became imperative to finish the garden. We recruited volunteers from social service agencies to work alongside the regular crews. On a typical Saturday, the hillside was filled with hard working, sweat-soaked bodies. I can't speak for the others, but for me, it always felt good to work up a sweat and get my hands dirty.

The Alaska Cannery Workers Association sent several crews to the garden work parties. I will always remember the sight of Gene Viernes, a farm boy from Wapato, running up and down the hillside with loads of heavy gravel, hardly taking a break, until the entire load was spread. I will always remember the sight of Silme Domingo backing down the narrow road to the staging area in his maroon Monte Carlo, stepping out on a rock, wearing his black Italian shoes, and directing truck traffic to the dump site while never working up a sweat.

Working like those chain gangs in the old movies, we dug four deep trenches in which we laid an intricate drainage system. Then, we meticulously installed an irrigation system. To shore up the garden, a crew of landscape architecture graduate students headed by Glenn Takagi from the University of Washington built the walls from railroad ties and utility poles.



We used the top terrace as the staging area where trucks backed down a makeshift road made of railroad ties, dumped their loads, and went off for another load. Work teams of four, male and female, picked up the ties, weighing as much as 200 pounds, and carried them downhill. Other dump trucks made regular trips with full loads of fertilizer dirt from the Longacres racetrack. When they dumped the dirt, work teams were ready with rakes and shovels to spread the fertilizer and topsoil. Other work teams constructed makeshift bridges, which allowed our sweaty group of volunteers to maneuver wheelbarrows, loaded with dirt or sand or gravel, out and back.

The first phase of the garden, resulting in 40 terraced garden plots, was completed in 1975 with a ribbon cutting ceremony and a pig roast. The second phase of the garden expansion began in 1980 with our request to the city Board of Parks Commissioners to use Kobe Terrace Park for the community garden. We were accompanied to a city Board of Parks Commissioners hearing by 30 elderly gardeners who came in support of our request. The Parks board was concerned that this transfer of parkland would start a dangerous precedent, allowing other communities to build gardens on park property in their neighborhoods. Prior to our request, the Community P-Patch Program had been limited to vacant city property. We testified that the community garden enhanced Kobe Park, and they agreed. The Commission granted us the use of land on the lower portion of Kobe Terrace Park and the expansion proceeded.

Funds for the expansion came from HUD's Neighborhood Self-Help Development Project Grant Program. The grant, prepared by Dan Rounds, included the entire history of the I.D. from the Great Seattle Fire in 1889 when the original Chinatown was destroyed to the construction of the first phase of the garden in 1975. The proposal was 160 pages, with a narrative, photos, and maps. On page 80 of this massive proposal, we inserted an envelope that read, "You are halfway through. Take a break on us," and inside the envelope was a tea bag. We had local and headquarters staff visit the site after we learned our proposal was the only non-housing application out of 700 submitted to be considered.

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One key supporter was Gerry Johnson, a high ranking staff member in U.S. Senator Warren Magnuson's office. Gerry, legislative aide to Seattle City Councilman John Miller for many years, was well-acquainted with both Inter\*Im and the I.D. Nothing was as impressive

as calling Gerry for help when I was in Washington, D.C.. I had made the rounds lobbying with HUD staff for the garden expansion funds without much success, just curt denials to requests for meetings while in their offices. A call from Gerry of the "Chairman's Office" (Magnuson was chairman of the Appropriations Committee) would result in a meeting within the half-hour. Needless to say, we were awarded the grant funds plus a few thousand more because our funding application scored high enough to earn bonus points.

Unlike the first phase of the garden development when Inter\*Im used only a part-time staff person, the second phase allowed us to hire a full-time construction crew headed by Ben Masaoka. I helped operate heavy equipment such as bulldozers and fork lifts. Dan Rounds, who had a degree in architecture, drew up the design. Once again, the call went out for volunteers. Six days a week, Monday through Saturday, young activists, older professionals, and elderly gardeners formed work crews who attacked the blackberry vines, dug trenches, and carried the railroad ties. The expansion of the garden took six months to complete and resulted in an additional 60 terraced garden plots. Once again, the ribbon-cutting ceremony was concluded with a pig roast and picnic.

The hillside flourished. The garden gave the land back to the old folks who left it in the old country to strike it rich here. They never realized just how much they missed the earth. The elderly residents who lived in the I.D. took an active role in developing and maintaining the garden. Cappy Capistrano was the in-house carpenter. Leo Lebreer built the pig roast pit. Others built planter boxes and a cold frame, brought in their own composting material, and purchased seedlings and seeds for their own use. These gardeners meticulously cultivated their plots, yielding a bountiful crop of herbs and plants such as bok choy, shiso (beefsteak plant), garlic chives, chrysanthemum greens, scarlet runners (beans), minaly (watercress), mustard greens, and garlic.

One of the most involved was Jack Takayama. Jack was a familiar sight every day in the garden until he died at the age of 79 in 1981. Jack was one of the first tenants of the International Terrace when it opened in 1973. He had spent most of his adult life operating a farm, east of the Cascade Mountains, in the Yakima Valley. Jack was also known for his design and construction of scenic parks in Yakima (a city in central Washington). He generously shared his expertise, particularly in the redesign of Kobe Terrace Park, where he directed the planting



of trees and shrubs around the four-ton stone lantern and the planting of trees in the expanded orchard area.

The four-ton stone lantern in Kobe Terrace Park was a gift from the mayor of Kobe, Japan, the sister city of Seattle. It had been originally hand-carved in 1916 and for years, stood in the "Garden of Seattle" in the Kobe Municipal Arboretum. In 1976, it was transported to Seattle and reassembled in Kobe Terrace Park by a delegation of 10 artisans from the Stoneworkers Guild of Japan. The accompanying tablet was engraved from granite found only in Japan and traditionally reserved for the Emperor. The inscription on the lantern reads, "May the Lantern shed light on the Friendship between the Peoples of Kobe and Seattle."

The garden provided the community with many benefits: nutritional, because the residents grew their own vegetables to eat; aesthetic, because the garden provided a green landscaped area with trees and walking paths; social, because residents and community volunteers could work together; economic, because the previously vacant lots were used in a productive manner; and political, because the garden was pointed to with pride by civic leaders and elected officials as an example of what can happen with strong community involvement.