

Josephine Maria Riss Fang

90th Birthday Celebration



FOREWORD

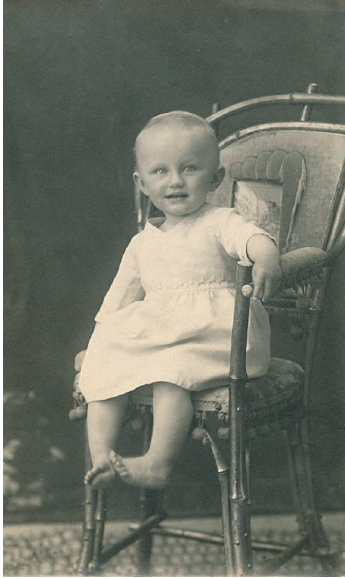
On March 31, 2012, the Fang family celebrated their mother/grandmother's 90th birthday with a high tea at the Colonial Inn in Concord, Massachusetts. About 70 people joined in the celebration. I gave a brief talk illustrated with a couple of dozen photographs, followed by Josephine telling stories about her life. This booklet gives an edited version of the two talks.

Jim Crawford

April 3, 2012



www.craw.us/fang



Age 0-30: "Sefi", the Austrian girl who survived the War, came to America and married a Chinese man.

Age 30-60: "Mom", who had 10 children in 12 years, and raised them while being a Professor of Library Science.

Age 60-90: "Oma", grandmother to 18 grandchildren.

Age 90-120: to be continued...



**Hugo Riss with his brother-in-law
Franz Fetter, his sister Maria Fetter,
and his brother Joseph Riss**



**Josy with her parents
Johann and Josefa Knettner**



Hugo and Josy were married September 17, 1918

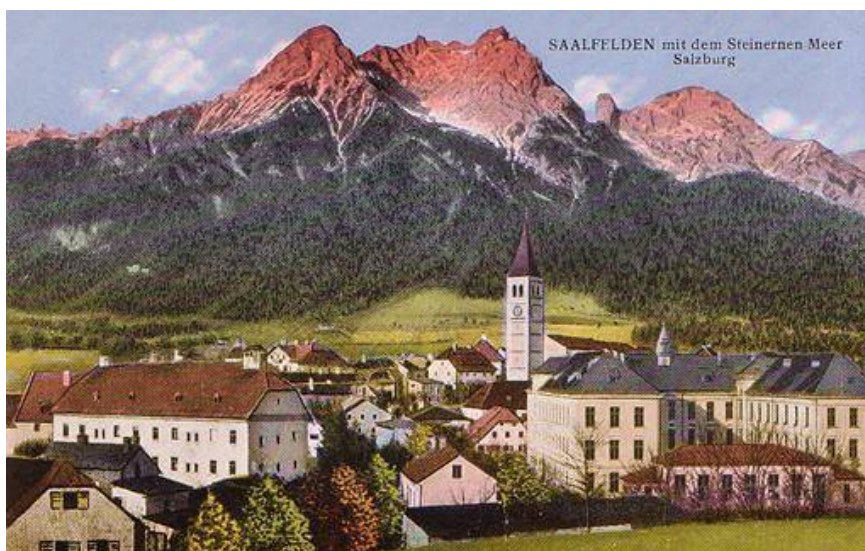
Speech given by Jim Crawford

I'm going to give you the facts about Josephine's life, and let her give you the color commentary. To understand Josephine's life, we must first introduce her ancestors.

Her father, Hugo Riss, was born in 1882 in Korneuburg, 10 miles north of Vienna across the Danube River; three generations of the Riss family lived there. Hugo's father was a barber; other Riss ancestors included a tailor, a grocer, another barber, a gardener, and a wine grower. Hugo raised himself up by his sheer intellect; he was smart enough to go to college, earn a doctorate, and become a judge.

Josephine's mother and grandmother were also named Josephine. Her grandmother was called Josefa, her mother called Josy, and she was called Sefi. The Knettner family were a close-knit German-speaking family who lived for at least 4 generations in the town of Prossnitz, 25 miles northeast of Brünn in what is now the Czech Republic, but back then was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Perhaps the Knettner family were a little too close, as Josy's parents were 2nd cousins when they married, so all four of Josy's grandparents had Knettner as their married name. The family moved to Brünn, where Josy was born in 1895, and then to Vienna in 1902, where Josy's father worked as an industrial consultant. Josy was raised an only child; an older sister died at the age of two, and Josefa was always very protective of Josy.

Josy and Hugo married in 1918, he at age 36 and she only 23. Hugo was a singer, and Josy was a pianist, as was her mother. They probably met as members of a music group. The new couple moved to Saalfelden, where they lived on the third floor of the Court House where he worked as the district judge.



The Riss family lived on the 3rd floor of the Court House, which is seen in the lower right corner on this postcard.



1924



1926



1929



1930



1931



1932



1932



1933



1933



1934



1935



1936



1936



1937



1939



1942



1950



1950

Sefi's brother Hans was born in 1920, and two years later Sefi was born there, (as Greg puts it) "over the jail". Sefi was close to her brother as evidenced by all the photos taken over the years of the 2 of them, often in complementary dress, often with the same pose over several years.

The family moved about every 3 years as Hugo progressed up the ladder of district courts: first Saalfelden, then Zwettl, St. Poelten, Vienna (where Sefi attended Catholic school), and finally ending in 1937 at Linz with Hugo's appointment to the Regional Court (the Austrian equivalent to the US Appeals Court).



Sefi graduated from high school in Linz in 1940, followed by studies at the U. of Vienna aimed at a PhD in English literature.



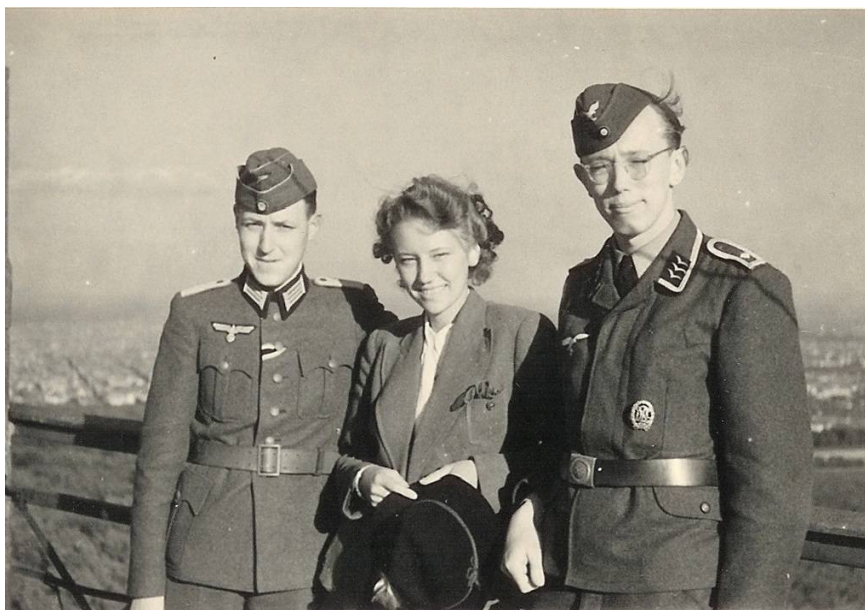
The War affected the Riss family immensely. For starters, on the day Germany annexed Austria in 1938, the Nazis forced Hugo to retire. He died in 1943 of a stroke or perhaps a brain aneurysm.



This photo was taken Sept 14, 1943, one month before Hugo died.

During the allied bombing of Vienna, their apartment on Taborstrasse had a direct hit and was ruined, while they were in the shelter in the sub basement. The family had to leave and find living arrangements in Hietzing. In February of 1945, the building where Grandmother Josefa was staying also had a direct hit, and the walls collapsed on her. She was severely injured and survived only a few days.

Sefi had to suffer through one more death in the war. She became engaged to Johannes Honigmann, whom she had met in 1936 at the age of 14 when both families vacationed in the summer at Saalfelden. He was a brilliant law student who earned his JD at the age of 21, but was drafted into the army and sent to Romania; he was reported as missing in action.



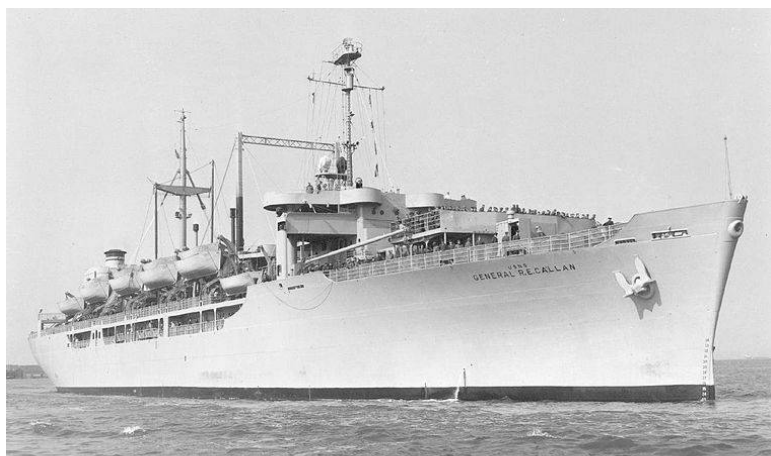
Sefi and her mother were living in Saalfelden when the War ended. The Russians occupied Vienna, but the Americans occupied Saalfelden and Salzburg, and Sefi got a job interpreting for the American civil command.

Sefi applied for a scholarship to come to the US for a year, but the grantors (the Institute of International Education) said it would make more sense for her to finish her degree in Austria first. So in



July 1948 Sefi was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Graz, with her thesis written about American author Sinclair Lewis.

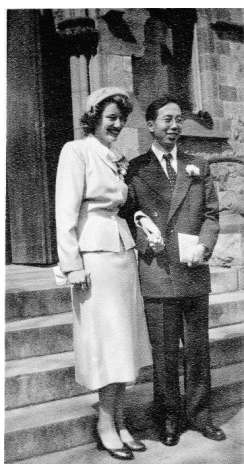




By 1950, Sefi was ready to come to the U.S. to study at Catholic U. However while skiing in the Tirols, she had a serious ski accident that gave her a concussion and a scar on the head, which delayed her trip until the fall. She used this extra time to become engaged again, to Peter from Boston, who was with the U.S. State Dept in Salzburg. While Peter stayed in Europe, Sefi came to America on the USNS "Gen R.E. Callan", a Kaiser liberty ship, landing in NYC on Sept 12, 1950 after 10 days at sea.



In the same month that Sefi arrived at Catholic U., another foreign student, Paul Fang, also arrived to study for his doctorate under Prof. Karl Herzfeld, a physics professor from Austria. Even though Sefi took 3 or 4 trips to Boston to see Peter's family (he was still in Austria), her heart soon turned to the persistent Paul, and they were married March 31, 1951. Perhaps it was music that brought them together, as it had brought her parents together.



I will let Sefi tell about those first days.





The next phase of Sefi's life started quickly, as ten months later she gave birth to Paula. In fact in the first 13 years of married life, she was pregnant 60% of the time. This is even more astonishing because 2 different doctors in Austria had told her that she would have a hard time getting pregnant and may not have any children.

There soon developed a serious problem looming over the family. Paul was granted permanent

residency in the U.S. as a refugee from the Communist takeover of China. However there was a strict quota system for 'ex-enemy aliens' as she was classified, and Josephine was only allowed to stay one year for her fellowship, even though she was married to a resident and her children were US citizens. After three years of anxiety and monitoring by the immigration officials, on July 19, 1954, Private Law 546 was enacted by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives that granted Josephine Maria Riss Fang permanent residence status.

A124

PRIVATE LAW 546—JULY 9, 1954

[68 STAT.

Private Law 546

CHAPTER 539

July 19, 1954
[S. 1050]

AN ACT

For the relief of Josephine Maria Riss Fang.

Josephine Fang.

Quota deduction.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That, for the purposes of the immigration and naturalization laws, Josephine Maria Riss Fang shall be held and considered to have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence as of the date of the enactment of this Act, upon payment of the required visa fee. Upon the granting of permanent residence to such alien as provided for in this Act, the Secretary of State shall instruct the proper quota-control officer to deduct one number from the appropriate quota for the first year that such quota is available.

Approved July 19, 1954.



Photos taken 1956 and 1957.

Josephine was not one to sit at home and take care of the kids. She found a succession of au pairs to care for them during the day while she worked first in an Assistantship in Library Science at Catholic U. from 1951-53, then as Special Cataloger at Catholic U. from 1954-60, Associate Editor at the Catholic Library Assoc. from 1961-63, Research Editor at The New Catholic Encyclopedia from 1963-66, and Editor of Corpus Instrumentorum from 1967-68. She also became Associate Professor in the Dept of Library Science at Catholic U. during the summers from 1963-68.



1968 saw the Fang family move to Belmont, where she worked for a year in the Boston College Libraries. Finally in 1969 she moved to the Graduate School of Library Science at Simmons College where she taught for over 20 years, and where she is now



a Professor Emerita. She has traveled extensively, not only back to Austria, but also to China multiple times, and to library conferences all over the world such as Iceland, Egypt, Kenya, Australia, the Philippines, and Russia (she was in Moscow during the 1991

attempted Soviet coup).

Actually her first trip abroad after being married was probably the most traumatic. The family moved to France for a year while Paul carried out research at the Fourier Institute in Grenoble. After a 10-year absence, Josephine was able to return to Austria. Two incidents occurred at the start of the trip that she will tell us about.



At the age of 60, in 1982, Josephine entered a new phase in her life, with two landmark events: Teresa turned 18, ending her official career of Motherhood, and her first grandchild, Ashleigh, was born. From this point on, Josephine's name changed to Oma.



She now has 18 grandchildren, and I am sure is looking forward to the day she has a great-grandchild. She still travels; she has already been this year to Colorado, and this summer will head back to Austria.

Speech given by Josephine Riss Fang

Thank you, Jim, for this detailed chronology of the highlights of my life. I like to mention that Jim is a historian and the genealogist of our families, having himself illustrious ancestors – his great-grandfather James Harvey Crawford was the founder of Steamboat Springs, Colorado and I have spent many happy vacations in the beautiful mountains of “Ski town USA” in the stone house his great-grandfather had built. The beautiful scenery there reminds me of the Alps in Austria.

I am very happy to see all my family and so many dear friends gathered here for this happy occasion. Last time we assembled was for the sad departure of my husband Paul in October 2011.

Nine decades is a long time, though I assure you that the years seem to vanish exceedingly fast. Let me try to add some comments, especially for the sake of my grandchildren.

As you heard, I had a very sheltered and carefree childhood in Austria. School and learning was most important and summers were spent in Saalfelden in the beautiful mountains. I was an anemic child and was forced to take daily portions of cod liver oil and biomalz. When we attended church on Sundays, I very often fainted from weakness due to an empty stomach. Breakfast came after Church. (And yet I made it to 90!) At school we had ski vacations with our gym teachers and walked up the mountains without ski lifts! In summer we mostly swam and hiked, read, played games and enjoyed music.

This life came to an abrupt end in 1938 when Hitler invaded Austria and my father not only lost his position, but was prohibited to practice law. After high school graduation in Linz and after I finished my civil service (Arbeitsdienst) required by all young people, we moved back to Vienna and I enrolled at the University. Here again, Providence watched over me. I wanted to choose Mathematics, but when I realized that it had to be combined with

physics and chemistry, subjects which I did not like (though I married a physicist!), I decided to study English. Thus my future was planned, since I would probably never have come to America and my life would have been completely different!

Politics penetrated all areas at that time and my choice of Sinclair Lewis for my dissertation was only approved because he was a critic of American life and thus there was no danger of being accused to be an Anglophile! However, reading Sinclair Lewis's novels helped me tremendously in learning and understanding American English and its idioms.

The War brought bombing and that was perhaps the worst experience in my life. To be in the confines of an air raid shelter or several stories underground, completely helpless and hearing the thuds of the falling bombs sounding closer and closer, is an unforgettable and frightening experience. I vowed then that I would never complain of anything in life, if I only get out alive and I have kept this promise throughout my life. My grandmother, with whom I was very close, was hurt by a direct hit of the house where we were staying and was assigned a room with some strangers in Hietzing, a district of Vienna. My brother, who was a medic in the Army, was able to take morphine from the lab so that her pains could be relieved. Vienna was in total chaos and there was no way to get her to a hospital or any doctor. She was released from her pains and died in about one week. My mother and I fled to the countryside to Saalfelden (in the Salzburg province) and thus escaped the Russian occupation of Vienna and we ended up in the American Zone – little Austria with its 6 Million people had been divided into 4 Zones by the Allied Occupational Forces and we were very lucky to be in the American Zone. My dream was to go to America to study there. The first time I applied I was rejected and advised to finish my studies. I was crestfallen, but it was the best thing that happened to me, for without a PhD I would not have been able to have my career here. Again, my mother was most supportive financially and I went to the U. of Graz, where my dissertation was approved and I passed the oral exams. The



graduation I consider a highlight in my life. This is an achievement due to your own persistent work and research and nothing equals it. Most of all, it made my mother very happy.

In 1950 I had a skiing accident in Kufstein, Tirol, when a local racer, who tried to make a jump over a hill and did not see me slaloming down a mountain, hit me on the head with the steel edges of his skis. In the nonchalant way of that time, the country doctor did not come to the local hospital immediately, but waited until several injuries from ski accidents made his time worth while! However, after some stitches I recovered and seemed to have no permanent damage!

Finally, America! I still see the Statue of Liberty and the excitement of our group; we were about 40 students from Austria and before landing had to experience a terrible hurricane. My friend Rosmarie Scully, who came on the same boat but was a young student, whereas I was a postgraduate and much older, can testify to that. Thank you, Rosmarie and Bob for coming!

As Jim mentioned, I had gotten engaged to a very nice young man, a Proper Bostonian, but I wanted to take advantage of my scholarship and see the country for myself first, besides, my fiancée was still working in Austria for the State Department.

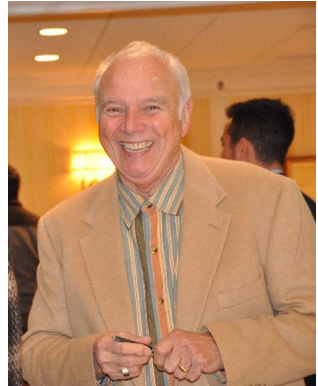
Dormitory life at Catholic University was also a new experience for me, but I was eager to learn and make friends. As a post-graduate student I could enroll in any classes of my liking and made good use of it. The International Institute gave me a monthly stipend for books and other essentials, but I was allowed to earn up to 60 dollars a month under the visa regulations. Being a very good typist I had no trouble finding part-time work for the Head of the Art Department, which was located in a separate building on the Campus. This leads me to the story of how I met Paul.

While working alone one afternoon sitting at the typewriter, in comes a young Chinese man with a stack of books under his arms and asked me very politely, where he could find a certain building.

All the buildings on Campus had their own names. Being new to the Campus myself, I was not quite sure, but thought it was one of the nearby buildings. Noticing my accent, the young man asked me where I came from and when I said Vienna, he just put his books down on my desk and started a conversation. Honestly, I was slightly annoyed, since I was there being paid by the hour to work and not to chatter. However, Paul explained how much he admired Beethoven and was so pleased to meet for the first time in his life a girl from Vienna. After a while he finally left. The next day, when I arrived for work, Paul was waiting for me outside the building (I have no idea how long) with a copy of Time Magazine, which showed on the front cover the newly restored Vienna Opera House. He brought it for me to see and read and I must say I was touched. Paul was the first Chinese I had met in my life, but soon I discovered the extent of his native culture and his education, e.g., he had read most of the Western literature classics in Chinese translation. He introduced me to the Chinese cuisine, which at that time was much more interesting than the old American fare and – well – the rest is history. I broke my engagement and Paul and I got married on the 31st of March 1951, which is today, it would be our 61st anniversary. So this is a very special day for me.

Another milestone came through our stay in France from 1960-61. There I met Waldi, who was an au pair with a French family and was interested in coming to America. Waldi was our first au pair and made it possible for me to restart professional work. I owe her a great deal. She was a hard worker and managed the children beautifully. After Waldi, we continued to have au pairs from all parts of the world – Austria, Germany, Sweden, Taiwan, and Hungary. Thank you Waldi, and thank you for coming today to celebrate my birthday! Please raise your hand! And our friend Gisela, who made this special trip all the way from Bonn!

Here I should tell the story of our trip with 7 children to France and me highly pregnant. We had bundled up our family on passports to avoid a separate passport for each child. E.g., Paul had David on his, etc. Paul planned to go with David to Geneva and



then to our final destination, Grenoble, and make arrangements for a house to stay for us, while I would spend the summer with my family in Austria. We took the Belgian airline Sabena and when we arrived much delayed in Brussels, Paul and David had to rush to catch their connecting flight. Well, the airport officials, who probably never had to handle a family like ours, got confused and gave him my passport with some of the children on it and I got Paul's and David's passport. We did not discover this until we landed in Munich. The airline Alitalia, which first did not want to take us to Vienna due to our lack of proper papers, finally relented after I signed various papers releasing them of all responsibilities. The Munich Airport personnel had been extremely nice and helpful and provided various toys that occupied the children. Finally, it was time to board the bus taking us to the plane. I looked around to check on the children and to my horror discovered that Anna was missing. I started to yell "Stop the bus, I lost a child." and the bus driver had to turn around. I had terrible visions of my poor child being frightened in a strange country and not seeing her mother, but when we arrived, here was 5-year old Anna still sitting contentedly in the corner and playing with her dolls. She had not even realized that we had gone.

The reception in Vienna was no less dramatic. After 10 years of absence I was so relieved to see my homeland again and be in the bosom of my family, who already waved at us when we landed. Then came the surprise: the criminal police waited for me and would not let me pass. Alitalia had notified the Vienna Airport of our lack of proper papers to enter Austria. The police told me that they had a number of cases, where American divorcees arrived taking their children illegally with them. Being at the end of my endurance I used the ultimate weapon – I burst into tears from exasperation – upon which the Austrian compassion came through. Now they just wanted to get rid of me – "Aber gnaedige Frau... etc." I did not have to open a single suitcase (and we had many) – I probably would have had a hard time to find the matching keys anyway.

After our return from France we decided to spend summer vacation in Quebec Province to keep the French language alive, which the children spoke fluently after one year. Thus we eventually got a summer cottage on Lake Orford.

When Paul joined NASA, we had an opportunity to visit the facilities in Greenbelt, Maryland, where astronauts prepared for space flights. After his death we found an Award from NASA in which he is given thanks for his participation in the First Moon Landing. This was an exciting time for all of us.

I was very fortunate that I was able to have a great family and also a very rewarding career. This is also thanks to all their hard work and the example of Paul, who has always supported me professionally and set an example to share in the work that has to be done.

My first major job was with *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, published by McGraw Hill and with the editorial offices located at Catholic University. I was appointed Research Editor of the 17-volume work. This was a great learning experience for me and a very exciting project. I also was offered my first teaching positions in the library and information science field at Maryland University and Catholic University.

Paul's interest in research and not administration brought us to Boston. I applied for a teaching position at Simmons, but did not succeed. Later I found out that Dr. Shaffer, then Head of the School had expressed his disbelief that a mother of 10 children could fulfill her obligations as a faculty member. I therefore accepted a job at Boston College library and this turned out to be an excellent experience for me for teaching later in these areas. A year later, Simmons needed a teacher and I joined the faculty until my retirement. Teaching, research and involvement in professional organizations were most rewarding, especially the contact with our very intelligent and motivated students. I am very grateful for the patience and understanding of my family, when our huge dining room table was covered with papers, galley and page



proofs of my publications, so that eating was relegated to the kitchen for some time.

Being internationally involved helped me being a better teacher and gave me an opportunity to meet colleagues from many countries, some of whom became life long friends. In this respect, Paul and I gave each other much space and encouraged each other professionally. He also had to travel extensively in his work.

At Simmons I was able to introduce new courses that were of great interest to me and I believed to be relevant today. Among them, International Librarianship and Preservation Management. I am very grateful to my children, who established a Scholarship in these areas under my name and I wish to thank those who made a contribution to this lasting memorial. I also appreciate the support of Dean Emeritus Robert Stueart and Dean Michele Cloonan, who is an expert in the field of preservation.

Our family grew and sometimes my memory gets blurred trying to recount events. I have never considered a child a burden, but rather each child a miracle, which brought another dimension to our family and enriched our lives. For instance, I went through the American school system through my children. I have always appreciated how much I learned from my children, having entered American education at the graduate studies level.

Another factor was that Paul and I were completely alone in this country. Our children did not have the experience of an extended family. To make up for this lack of support, the siblings enjoyed each other's company and became very close. They now have their own families and I am grateful for their love and support. I am also grateful to have wonderful daughters-in-law and sons-in-law who all contribute to the peace and unity within the family. May you continue to live in harmony and peace and always keep open communications to avoid any misunderstandings.

Now I see my dear grandchildren grow up – you are facing so many more new challenges as the previous generations and I

assure you of all my love and support in your endeavors. Always stay close to your cousins and continue to remain friends.

Throughout my life I had the benefit of mentors and friends who deserve my deep gratitude. Unable to list all, I just like to mention a few who have passed. There is Mr. Donald Bennett, a Justice Department lawyer and president of the Washington chapter of the Ohio State Alumni association (Paul's alma mater), who simply in his kindness wanted to help us, invited us into his home and was responsible for the House and Senate Bill which enabled me to stay in America. His loving and generous family introduced us to American customs.

Then my mother, who always was ready to travel and come to us, when desperately needed, e.g. between au pairs or other emergencies.

Sister Claudia Carlen, the Index Editor of the New Catholic Encyclopedia, a brilliant and wise scholar, who was my mentor and gave me spiritual strength and comfort.

Our dear neighbor, Marie Burke, who watched over our family and was always ready to be of assistance.

My offer of wisdom of my 90 years?

Life is a continuous learning experience and the older I get the more I realize how little one knows and how much there is still to learn!

Life itself is a great gift, it is beautiful, be grateful for family and friends and count your blessings; above all, don't lose your sense of humor!

My deep thanks to all of you for coming to celebrate, especially to my family, who has so thoughtfully arranged this party.

God bless you all and I promise I will do my best to celebrate with you again in 10 years!



Ode to Dear Aunt Josephine Riss Fang's 90th Birthday

By Guangyi Li,
Nephew-in-law on behalf of the Fang family in China

Once a comely lass dared to love *Long's* lad,
Making him a good and loving wife,
Sharing a happy and fulfilled life.
A tender matriarch to tens of folks.

A shining star lightening the low tracks,
A sage godsend among the race puzzled,
A walking history book of the past world,
An inspiration to the way of the flesh.

With a corresponding poem in Chinese (对应中文诗) :

约瑟芬·方伯母 90 寿辰颂

洋淑龙子爱，
绵绵六十载。
幸福人生渡，
深情育后代。

寿星人间耀，
苍生可问道。
世间万事阅，
天机众人昭。

侄女婿，李光毅，代国内方氏亲人赋诗敬贺 2012-3-31

