

Interview with Alfie Yip
Interviewed by Elise Chenier
Transcribed by Candice Klein

[00;00;35-00;08:51]

Elise: I'd just like to begin by saying it's June 11th, and I'm here with Alfie Yip to have a conversation about Chinatown. And before we start talking actually um...great, thank you.

Alfie: You wanna let that recorder run?

Elise: Yeah that's fine it just goes, just means I don't have to take notes. Great thank you.

Alfie: But then you have to listen to them again.

Elise: That's okay.

Alfie: That ties up time, it takes time.

Elise: (Laughs) It does take time but I like to uh, to ensure that what I'm gonna do now is review that consent form so I like to have it recorded as well so I, we all know that we had a look at this. I just wrote at the top your numbers in case I have to contact you. Um, so have you ever been interviewed before for a research study, historical type study.

Alfie: Yes and no. Yes and no. Not often, I don't give a lot of interviews.

Elise: Okay well thank you very much for agreeing to this one. Um this is required uh by my University, it's a legal document which protects you and me too um I'll let you have a look at it and let me know if you have any questions.

(Alfie reviews the document out loud, negotiates the terms with Elise, Elise explains the project to him concerning interracial relationships, describes her interview process.)

[00;08;52-00;11;30]

Elise: Okay so, when people ask me, when they find out I'm a historian at Simon Fraser and they well what do you do, I tell them I do the history of sexuality. And people are usually surprised they don't realize that uh that there is such a thing the history of sexuality. But it's really quite a large field um in the history of sexuality you can imagine people study things like marriage, family, birth control, venereal disease, government health you know the history of medical treatments uh for whatever. The history of the sexual sciences, the history of prostitution, gay and lesbian communities, everything so it's really quite a broad field. So I told you earlier that this project, I'm extending my Masters Thesis. And my Masters Thesis was about the women who went to the Continental bar. The Continental bar was right on the corner of Elizabeth and Dundas. When I did, and who are the women, are you familiar with the Continental bar? You remember it? [Yes, yes.] And who...

Alfie: Continental tavern wasn't a bar it was a tavern, a beer parlour.

Elise: It was a beer parlour that's right. And so you knew, what was your impression of who was going there?

Alfie: That's one of the questions...[Yes.] um I wrote down you want to know the history of sexuality of course you read Hefner, Playboy (Both laugh) get those old magazine articles.

Elise: Actually there was a book that came out, The History of Playboy, just a little while ago and this is not popular history, it's scholarly history so you're absolutely right.

Alfie: We used to read that, we used to read that.

Elise: Of course! Who didn't read that? (Laughs)

Alfie: Hefner, that was one of his, in between playing with the Play bunnies that's what he used to do. His uh, Hefner okay...not uh...uh...you know about my father?

Elise: Well I don't know the details about your father but Joe mentioned that he said your father was the unofficial mayor of Chinatown is the way

he put it [Sort of yes and no.] and somebody else referred to him in the same terms too, I think maybe Valerie.

Alfie: No I'll give you the information.

Elise: Okay.

Alfie: Alright lets get started. Those are all my questions and uh there's a that's your card?

(Look over the card and Elise's credentials.)

[00;11;31-00;15;50]

Elise: Do you uh...why don't the first question was could you tell me a little bit about yourself but why don't you begin maybe by telling me about your dad. You were just talking about that um and then you could talk about when you were born and how you came into the picture.

Alfie: Alright, alright, alright. Let's uh stick to the agenda.

Elise: Yeah so where were you born where do you live?

Alfie: I'm born here in Toronto, December 1945. [Okay.] We lived in downtown Toronto our whole life until such time as I left Toronto in 1965 to go to the University of Waterloo to study engineering. When I left in September of 1965 for the first semester of my education at the university I cut my ties, whatever ties I had in Toronto and I started a new chapter in my life, associated with new people, didn't go back. [How come?] Time, no time, engineering's a very...

Elise: Oh it wasn't intentional?

Alfie: No, no just no time. And maybe that was a mistake maybe I should have kept my ties with the Chinese-Canadian community or Canadian-Chinese community here in Toronto however um I finished with high school at age 19 and got a new career to learn electrical engineering at University of Waterloo co-op program which was kind of unique for that time. [Mhmm.] And I received a tremendous education. Um after I

graduated from the Waterloo university I went to work at an engineering job with the federal government, I stayed for 39 years, I had (?) under the Federal Department of Transport, the Transport Canada you know it as. Had no desire to go anywhere else because I had a wonderful position with tremendous opportunities and tremendous scope and tremendous depth. Okay I had a wonderful career. [Great.] Thirty nine years, that's why I stayed thirty nine years you know, I had opportunities to go work for other federal government departments, the penitentiary service wanted me. Eww, I didn't want to go there. The military, they said come and work for us in the military and (?). They said come work for CEDA and internationally, (?) forget it, I'm happy at Transport Canada. I retired 14 months ago from my career and now I'm a um, mutual fund salesman and a financial advisor. And I've had a license for oh, over twenty years. I was working part time as a life insurance agent for five years from 1992, 1995 and then gave up my life insurance license and just focused on my engineering work by day and mutual fund financial advisor by night and weekends. Uh, now, the next question is my father. My father's name is Qdocyu and he used the initials "K.Dockyip". He was the 17th son of Yip Sang, you know Yip Sang in Vancouver? Uh you can go. [Mhmm, Mhmm.] He was a very, very well known man in Vancouver in the period 1885 to 1927 when he passed away at age 83. Um, my father lived until he was 91 years of age uh therefor the genes say that I could make it a dollar five, 105. And that means I get to turn the lights out when everyone else is gone, I'm that last one. [(Laughs)] Yeah we're long livers. Yip Sang, there's a lot of history on Yip Sang. He died in 1927 at age 83 and they're still writing about him. You can go on the internet and type in, Google, Yip Sang, two words YIPSANG. Quite a lot of stuff on him still. Uh you can go to Vancouver and go to 51 East Pender Street right across from the cultural centre and that's our homestead building which is owned by Bob Renning, the condo kind, you know, the condo king. You know the condo king?

[00;15;51-00;19;02]

Elise: I don't actually, I don't know the condo king.

Alfie: Oh interesting guy! [Yeah?] They say he is...gay. That's what they say. [Uhuh, yeah.] I don't know, um I have a BC license and I have an Ontario license for mutual funds so I spent a lot of time in Vancouver to go see a few of my clients and uh they said oh yeah everybody in Vancouver knows Bob Renning, the condo king, because he sells all the condominiums. [I see.] You're building, you're a very wealthy person from Hong Kong or from China you're representing the Chinese Red Army and you've got money from the army and you've invested quietly in Vancouver to build condominiums you hire an architect, you hire a developer, you hire some lawyers to get the clearances, you put the building up and you hire Bob Renning and his sales force to sell the condominiums [I see.] because he performs. [Right.] Bob Renning bought our building, paid a million dollars for it. He paid for...ah whatever, he paid eight hundred some odd thousand dollars for our building at 51 East Pender right across from the cultural centre. He sunk five or six million into it fixing it up (laughs) [Wow.] You've got to have deep pockets. [Yeah.] Our family had deep pockets but they lost it, the Depression...whatever. [Sure.] When you're in Vancouver you march down Pender Street (?) and when you see the gate that goes from one side of the street to the other side of the street make a right turn and head south. [Mhmm. Mhmm. Mhmm.] Um Shanghai Alley, we owned it. [Really? Yeah.] Canton Alley, we owned it, that building over there? [Right.] We owned it! That building over there? We owned it! Yip Sang owned a lot of property. He had to own a lot of property and do a lot of business to support three wives and 23 children plus all the hangers on-ers, his employees. The guy was phenomenal because he couldn't read or write English and he couldn't read or write Chinese! [Hmm, wow.] But uh you go on the website, I don't know if you've checked Yip Sang's website but you can read about him. [Mhmm.] He had three wives, actually he had four wives, uh, three apartments. Three apartments, three positions, fourth floor, fifth floor and sixth floor. And then the first wife died so he sent back to China for replacement, Wan Eh (?) and that's where my father comes, Wan Eh (?) [I see, I see.] So therefor because she's the replacement for number one, she got (?) over two and three. His favourite was number two! (Both laugh) At night he used to go up and down the back stairs, fourth floor, fifth floor, sixth floor and see which wife he was gonna spend time with, make more kids. [Right, right.] Because he wanted children, he loved children. [Yeah.] Not because he

was a, a, a, overly sexual or whore-y, he just happened to want children because that was the sign of a successful businessman.

Elise: Sure yeah it was a cultural tradition.

[00;19;03-00;23;48]

Alfie: My father was the 17th so you can read up on Yip Sang and then you go and read up on Dock Yip.

Elise: And so how did your father end up coming to Toronto then?

Alfie: Oh he wanted to, he went to UBC in the 20s. My father was born in 1906, he went to uh, Strathcona School and King Edward High School, whatever was in Chinatown. And Chinatown WAS a ghetto. You can do the research, there's plenty of research, there's a radio program on CBC uh about the Chinese soccer team, do you know about the soccer team? Uh 192...uh, 1927 they won the City Cup, they were the best team in their division in Vancouver. A bunch of Chinese boys, little boys beat, can you imagine, they beat the sons of England, whoa! How did they do it? It's recorded on a CBC radio program by Kathleen (?) and she's a staff reporter on CBC Vancouver, you hear her on the network, I listen to CBC all the time. And you can get that recording and my father spoke on it, some of his team mates. And that'd give you a flavor of Chinatown and Vancouver in the 1920s. [Mhmm. Mhmm.] Um they um...Chinatown was a ghetto, you stayed in Chinatown, you don't go out. So he did get to go to UBC because Grandfather Yip believed in education, he believed strongly in education. And uh, he had four daughters out of twenty-three children. Uh that we know of, maybe he had some girlfriends who knows, nobody talks about it. I don't think so because he was a pretty upright guy, my grandfather, stiff and stern. But uh, he selected which of his sons he would educate, which of his sons got sent to the cannery to work. And he ruled his household with a strong fist, you do what I say! (Laughs) [Mm.] Otherwise I'll put you out. And that was his weakness because he should have, he should have...run the household with tough love okay? But instead he took care of everybody, he fed everybody and that was a mistake because he should have forced his sons to go out into the world. Don't rely on him and my father, because he was number seventeen, he wasn't gonna get any of the residual benefits

after his father died in 1927. He decided I gotta strike out on my own so he went to UBC, his father gave him money to go to UBC. Then he graduated from UBC, he said father I want to go to New York City. I want to study in the United States, it costs money. He said yes, number seventeen son, yes I will fund your education to New York City. You go to New York City and study hard, don't have a fun time. Well he went down to New York City and had a fun time! Uh...he got into all kinds, met all kinds of interesting people. And he made the excuse, I can't study at Columbia University, there's too much going on here in New York, too much action in the Roaring 20s. So he left New York City and went to University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Detroit and he graduated with a degree in pharmacology, pharmacy. Then the Depression, 1931, no more money. Lost all our properties, not collecting any rent, grandfather dead. Had to go back to Vancouver, had to go back to the homestead, live in a room with his brother and cousins and his nephews and uh, couldn't find a job. 1931, Chinaman's (?) you can't find a job. So because he was educated, he had two degrees at the Bachelor's level, he applied to the Chinese Consulate General at the embassy in Ottawa and there's a consulate in Montreal, one in Toronto, one in Vancouver, one in Calgary, wherever the Chinese government of Chen Kai Sheik, the nationalist governor, was doing business, they would set up a consulate general and he was the second under-secretary for English corresponding affair under the consulate general in the Consulate. And he got paid well in the 1930s didn't get much money but because the Chinese government was fighting a war with the Japanese in 1935 he got paid in Chinese Bonds, Chinese War Bonds and uh...

[00;23;49-00;26;08]

Elise: That's not very helpful in Toronto is it?

Alfie: No, Vancouver.

Elise: Oh this is in Vancouver, okay.

Alfie: He didn't come here to Toronto until 1941. [Right.] So he started going steady with my mother Victoria Chow in Vancouver and uh she had no education and the only thing she did get was working in a vegetable

fruit stand uh, (?). So then he uh, the Depression was coming to an end, he decided he wanted to go to law school. Well you can't go to law school at UBC are you crazy? Chinese can't even go, you wouldn't be accepted. So he came east to Toronto and trying to get into Osgood Hall Law School, took him three tries, he finally got in. And uh, he completed his education there uh, he got his Diploma. Osgood Hall Law School did not grant degrees, Osgood Hall Law School was a union school, owned by the Upper Canada Law Society. It was a training school. [Right.] It was, people think Osgood Hall Law School was an academia University, no it was a trade school for lawyers. And uh he got a Diplomas and went up and down Bay Street in the year 1946, nobody would hire him, nobody would hire him. And how he got into law school that's another story and I'll save that for a later time because it took him three tries. So he finally, somebody took him in and when I was a 14 year old kid at his kitchen table I said some very unkind things about Jewish people. My father got up and he hit me. Hit me hard, don't you ever say anything bad about Jewish people again! Jewish people are good people, why do you say bad things about Jewish people? Well the kids in school...you don't listen to the kids in school! You think for yourself! You listen to me. Don't you ever say anything bad about Jewish people. (Whispers) It was a Jewish law firm that took him in for two years. [Oh.] So (Laughs) here I am 14 year old kid, stupid, irresponsible teenager I was, saying bad things about Jewish people, he hit me! Didn't hit me hard, (Laughs) but he got angry.

[00;26;09-00;28;13]

Elise: Do you know the name of the firm? No.

Alfie: We should research that. [Yeah. That's interesting.] We go to the Upper Canada Law Society as Osgood Hall we find out. Uh so then ah, in 1947 he and his uh, buddy, Irving Himmel, a Jewish guy, they were army buddies. Just like Forrest Gump and Bubba, in the movie, hey Doc, what are you gonna do after we get out of law school? What do you wanna do after the War? He was in law school during the War. What are we gonna do after the war? I dunno, Irving, maybe we should go shrimping? There's no shrimp in Lake Ontario. [(Laughs)] I think we should do something about the Chinese Exclusion Act of

1923, you know about that? [Mhmm.] Irving Himmel was a civil rights lawyers for the (?) Jewish people and other race groups. [Right.] He was a great, great guy, he was the leader of the committee that went to Ottawa and persuaded the Liberal government of Mackenzie King, to repeal the Act. My father was on the committee [Okay.] he was his secretary. I made it sound like Doc Yip changed the Immigration Act all by himself! That's not true. Just like Grandfather Yip Sang built the railway all by himself in 1881 to 1885. He had a little bit of help. [(Laughs)] Uh, Grandfather Yip was the paymaster for the contractor Andrew Underdock, that's another story. I'll tell you another story when you're ready. [Okay.] Alright so, they went to Ottawa they repealed the Act, and by this time he had his license and he had a store front, legal practice. He was a sole...practitioner. He was a sole practitioner, not one of these big fancy law firms down on Bay Street, he was a sole practitioner.

Elise: And where was his office located?

[00;28;14-00;29;59]

Alfie: Right on Elizabeth and Dundas.

Elise: Oh! Wow, everybody was out there.

Alfie: About 100, 200 feet north of the corner on the east side of Elizabeth Street. And when you stood at the front stoop of his office storefront, you look across the street and there is the Continental Hotel.

Elise: I see.

Alfie: And the door is open and the men are in there drinking draft, five cents a glass in the 50s. And my father parked his car in the car park, the parking lot, of the Continental Hotel. So you ask me Continental Hotel? Yeah I know it. What went on in there? No I can't tell you. Now uh, that's my father. You go on Google, you type up Doc Yip, [Mhmm.] you'll find out he was an actor at the end of his career. A Hollywood actor, working for the Italians, called North Carolina Film Corporation of uh...someplace, Delaware is it? Anyway, on the east coast, owned by the...the Italian guys. [Hm.] The mob, it's owned by mob okay. We

couldn't go to Hollywood because Hollywood is controlled by the Hollywood gang, Jewish people. (Laughs) And the Italians and the Jewish people are like this. [Right.] Italians get the power up here, money, I'm sorry the Jewish got the money and the power, the Italians well...you know what the Italians got. [(Laughs) That's right.] They did the movie Year of the Dragon, have you seen Year of the Dragon?

[00;30;00-00;30;54]

Elise: Mm no but I've hear of it.

Alfie: My father's in there.

Elise: How on earth did your father uh, end up becoming an actor? (Laughs)

Alfie: Well uh...if you are a lawyer you have to act, you have to go to the Magistrate court and you have to defend your clients, you gotta put on a show!

Elise: What kinds of cases did he take on?

Alfie: Real estate, mostly real estate, immigration, uh...mortgages uh, property transfer, small legal cases, small criminal cases, civil cases, whatever came through the door. And his motto was I charge what the traffic will bear. Uh as an independent sole practitioner, he didn't make a lot of money, he wasn't a filthy rich lawyer. [Yeah.] But it would have been nice if there had been more money in our family but that's the way it was, that's the way he did it. He did it the K.Doc Yip way, which was not very efficient. (Laughs)

[00;30;55-00;33;57]

Elise: Can you tell me where you lived and what it was like growing up for you?

Alfie: Well uh, I was born in 1945 December and uh, we lived right on Yonge Street when I was a little child uh, 2, 3, 4, 5 years old. Uh...at 359 Yonge Street which is today the Zanzibar Tavern, better known as a

strip club! [Mhmm.] You go in there for trouble. You want drugs, you want girls, you want whatever. Okay, drinks, so we lived on the third floor it was a fire trap, it was the uh, during the War it was a restaurant a Chinese restaurant, The Palace...it was The Palace Café, I can't remember the name it will come to me in a moment. Um and uh...uh my mother worked as the, as uh between 1942 when she got married and the time that the War was over and um...and we sold the, they sold the business and we got out of the restaurant business. Because after the War it was recession and quiet. [Sure.] During the War uh...you know soldiers come from Camp Borden down to Toronto and all this money you'd spend and uh, somebody, oh somebody's at the bell...so she was the...she was the cashier and my mother was attractive, a good looking woman but more important than a good-looking woman was she had this personality. For a person with grade seven education she had personality. And when she was working in Vancouver selling vegetables to the white women or the cooks that come down from the white big houses you know, Shaughnessy Heights and all those kinds of places, you refer to, no you're not a Vancouver person.

Elise: No but I've been living there for six years so I...

Alfie: So you hear about these things. She could sell, and the boss really gave her a good bonus of fifty cents a week or something and she could sell. Oh you know, she'd upsell them. Oh we have some very nice oranges, the boss went down and got some nice oranges, they're on sale today, I'll pick the best one for you and you know, sell it. Because the cook in the big house, he's got a budget, he's gotta have food and so my mother puts the touch on him and they're gonna sell. [Right.] So during the War she was at the front window of the restaurant and she used to meet these, these lonely Canadian prairie boys from Alberta and Saskatchewan and Manitoba and they're undergoing their training in 1943 and '44 and then ship out and she'd get letters from these guys, lonely boys. Farm boys right? And remember Joe? Yeah he's dead. Remember Sam? He tapped your bud out in Germany, oh he got his lungs blown off. Gee, I don't know (?) my mother kept those letters.

Elise: They would be really valuable.

[00;33;58-00;40;06]

Alfie: They weren't in love my mother you know [No, but...] she always happened to be the personality and they came in there you know, they got money in their pocket, they don't know where to spend it you know so they don't see uh, go get something to eat in that restaurant, there's a cute woman, is she married? Yeah she's married. Oh doesn't matter she's Victoria, you know they remembered her, [Right.] (?) over there to fight the War and then they send these letters back, Joe's dead, Sam he got blown up this guy, Charlie got captured. [Right.] And so sad when my mother (?) going to law school. And uh anyway that's what happened during the War. We lived, we lived there at 359 Yonge Street between Yonge and Gerard. Then we ,loved to a house on Parker and Jarvis Street, in a basement, stayed about a year there. And then we moved to Mutual Street uh...four Chinese guys, friends uh, bought a house, a quatroplex, four sections, right across from the Terrace, the Mutual Arena skating rink, did you go there? [No.] Before your time. [Yeah I think so.] Very popular place. [Yeah.] Very popular arena on Mutual Street at Dundas and Jarvis in fact, in fact, the United Church of Canada is now 85 years old and we just had our celebration. Uh over five churches got together, we were there and uh the minister here, Reverend Baker he participated and they said that in 1925 when the four churches amalgamated, (?), part of the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists and another one, I can't remember who it was, amalgamated to form the United Church of Canada in 1925, the first, first service was held at the (inaudible sentence) anyway we've been there for thirty something odd years and it was located about twelve minute march to Elizabeth and Dundas and my father had his office there, right in Chinatown. Uh, everybody knew him, everybody knew my father, clear across Canada. Everywhere in Ontario they knew my father's name. All the way up north because well, what he did, they talk about him. (?) mentioned in the Chinese newspaper which was distributed all over Ontario so um, it wasn't really in Chinatown, we didn't live in Chinatown, we lived close to Chinatown uh, on our street there was all kinds of people. There was Chinese people, there was white Canadians, Irish Canadians, Scottish Canadians, there was immigrants that came from the DP Camps the (?) the Latvians, the Baltic States, the (?), everything was on our street and uh it was quite a good, yeah it was good, we got along with everybody and everybody

knew my dad and he knew all the other Chinese people and then uh in 1953 my mother forced me to go to Chinese School in the basement of the Chinese United Church Mission, it wasn't a Chinese United Church, it was down two ranks, the Chinese United Church Mission, where the white missionaries would come down to Chinatown and rescue the heathen, not rescue, how you say it...

Elise: Yeah that's the right word.

Alfie: How you saw recruit, recruit the heathens and convert them in good Christians, United Church Protestant Christians and uh how we got into the United Church was through my mother and that's another story, we're focusing right now how close was Chinatown, it was 12 minutes march and I could ride over there in about five, six minutes on my bicycle and I road my bicycle over to my office and you know of course that Jesus was a carpenter, the reason why he was a carpenter because Joseph was a carpenter. So when Jesus was a young boy before he got into this religion business he would have more than likely followed his father to the carpenter shop [Mhmm.] and helped his father and learned the trade. Likewise when I was 12 years old, 11 years old my father said you come with me. Yes father. You come with me and you go to Chinese in the morning, my secretary will teach you Chinese and then you work with me and you run errands and you type. (?) documents, deeds, titles you know, learn the legal business. Later in life I asked my father, father should I be a lawyer? No you'll never make a good lawyer, you haven't got the right stuff you have to be a son of a bitch, SOB, to be a lawyer. Your brother, he will be a lawyer. Your son David could be a lawyer, this man here could be a lawyer, not you. [Hm.] Lawyers have to judge people, a man comes into your office, he wants an appointment, he wants a consultation, go in the back room, close the door, take his watch off, change by the hour if you can get it. But you gotta be able to judge that perspective client within five minutes, try and figure him out. [Mm. Mm.] Find out what he wants. You watch Bruce Lee movies, Enter the Dragon? Bruce Lee? He teaches the young apprentice, you stare into the eyes of your opponent. You watch him carefully, find out where he's coming from, find out what he wants, find out his plan of attack and then you know how to defend. Same thing. [Hm.] Alright so I went to Chinese School in 1953 at the United Church Mission, I lasted about four or five weeks and I quit.

Elise: Oh okay so weren't you, wouldn't you have been speaking English in regular school? [Yes.] Oh okay so this was to learn Chinese? [Yes.] So you weren't speaking Chinese at home? [No.] Really, no Chinese spoken at home yeah?

[00;40;07-00;43;00]

Alfie: Very little. Uh...we have (inaudible sentence.) So my father asked me to work with him and because I went to his office and I spent time in his office as a kid, law clerk, uh I was able to (?) be Chinese, even though I quit Chinese school after four weeks. And now at age 64 I regret it, I regret quitting Chinese school. [Yeah.] Deep regret. How come I wasn't smart enough to stay with it and learn to read and write.

Elise: Yeah and it's probably not about smarts, it's probably about...I mean I feel the same way, I'm studying French now because like you, my family, I'm third generation Ontario, so my grandparents grew up speaking French.

Alfie: Where were they?

Elise: Uh well my great grandparents were from the Oche area of Quebec and then they moved to farm in the Kirkland Lake area, and then around Sudbury. And they lived in a small, farming French farming community. So they grew up speaking, you know they only spoke French but then my grandparents generation moved to Toronto for work because they wanted to leave the farm. So then their children, my parents generation, spoke French to their parents but English in every other aspect of their life. And then my generation we don't speak any French at all. So you see it's the same history, just like your family so now, I'm studying, now I'm studying it. [(Speaking fake French.)] (Laughs) So I know what you mean.

Alfie: Travaille, uh, dans la place de Quebec epuis uh, travaille pour la government federal...

Elise: Plus commes bien totes?

Alfie: We operate in French and English in the Federal government so you know I...

Elise: Yeah you need to know how to speak it. [I like to speak French.] Oh that's great.

Alfie: And also I have another reason why I need to learn French, speak French. [Why?] Because when I was in Quebec I used to go with a Quebec girl. [Ah.] Was it love? Don't know, I was confused and I stayed in contact with her and was in love. But uh, she taught me to speak it a little bit, along with my time in Quebec but uh, (?).

Elise: No, no I'm not shutting it down I'm keeping it going. (Both laugh)

Alfie: My wife would not be pleased. [Oh well we...] She knows, she knows. My wife is Chinese and that was a conscientious decision, uh, this part of the interview of what you want to know. So that's where the name Chenier comes from? Chenier, parle Francais. Alright so we lived close to Chinatown.

Elise: Yeah, yeah, so can you, well okay so that's interesting what you're telling me about Mutual Street and very mixed ethnicity.

[00;43;01-00;47;15]

Alfie: Yeah very mixed uh, we had everything there, the dirty DP's came over, ah you dirty DPs go back to where you came from you're taking our jobs! Sound familiar? (Laughs) [Yeah, yeah.] 1952? You dirty DP's, you too Alfie, go back to China go back to where you came from you're taking our jobs. [Yeah.] Kids, they don't know nothing.

Elise: So that was mostly other kids saying that? You must have experienced that quite a bit though growing up?

Alfie: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, we, we had, in the 50s uh there was discrimination, racism, but not as bad as when my parents were growing up before the War. The War changed a lot of that and have you, have you met Alex Lui in Vancouver? [No.] you should give him a call, he's a friend of mine, uh, he'd be twenty something odd years

older than me uh he wore the uniform of a soldier in Canada during the War. And he speaks on the TV, movie, or the movie internet site redressremix, redressremix. [Remix huh?] redressremix, look on Google for redressremix, the website just came out recently uh, it's by Stitch Media, which is a young company here in Toronto and there is a TV version of a documentary based on Lui. What you see on redressremix on the internet, there is a movie and uh, we were invited to the premier showing, screening of the redressremix about three weeks ago in the Toronto Underground, sound like the Atlanta Underground? The Toronto Underground Theatre on Spadina Street, Spadina, and the reason why I was into the, invited was because I interviewed for that movie. I didn't make the cut. I'm in the internet site, Channel Number 3, 15 seconds, I didn't make the cut because you know it's up to the editors. And it will be shown on Omni TV Network, about the 24th of June, I'd have to get a confirmation. 24th, 25th or 27th, somewhere around there, Omni TV Network owned by Rogers. [Okay.] And uh it will be screened, and uh, as part of your research you may either want to watch it [Yeah.] or have somebody make a tape of it for your archives because it talks about uh, the uh, discrimination, the racism, they interviewed people all across Canada from Halifax right through to Vancouver. And uh you'll see three soldiers dressed in Veterans uniforms, not soldier's uniforms, veteran uniforms, dressed in the uniform of the Army Navy Air Force Club of Vancouver, not the Canadian Legion, because Chinese Canadian soldiers are not allowed to join the Canadian Legion after that War. [Mm, yeah.] Wow, you know. When you get to Vancouver you call Alex Lui, and I'll give you his number and you ask for an interview, you tell him you spoke to Alfie and you [Mhmm.] wanna go and see him because you heard so much about him. [Mhmm.] And he will give you what it was like, growing up in Vancouver before the War, during the War when he was uniform and after the War. And he said that he told me that the White Restaurant chain in Vancouver, maybe related to the White Spot [Yeah.] I don't know, I don't know if there is a historical, historical relationship between the White Spot chain and the White Restaurant. [Mhmm.] If you were Chinese before the War and you went to the White Restaurant they wouldn't let you in. [Mm.] After the War, uh during the War if you went in your civilian clothes they wouldn't serve you, they'd let you in, seat you, but wouldn't serve you. So...the Chinese boys got dressed up in their soldier uniforms,

went into the White Spot Restaurant, you think they're not gonna serve then? They served them, they had to.

[00;47;16-00;49;56]

Elise: Yeah, yeah, yeah, because they're in uniform, yeah.

Alfie: They're in uniform, they're ready to defend Canada and uh Alex Lui will tell you that story. [Yeah.] So you speak to Alex Lui and uh he may know. Your questions about the laundry and the companionship, the prostitutes, I'm not the one to answer that question I'm too young. [Yeah, Mhmm. Mhmm.] Uh...I'm 64 years old, born in 1945. Between 1945 and 1960s really it's not between those years, it was up until '65 when I left so I was too young.

Elise: So you don't remember like from '60 to '65 before you left Windsor. [I do, I do.] Right so, um...

Alfie: I'll tell you something about laundries, but it's not first hand it's, [Okay.] I don't have the experience.

Elise: Okay, that's fine if it's not first hand.

Alfie: I might be able to introduce you to...what are you looking for to find out about this, this issue of...laundry men, bachelor laundry men and their prostitute girlfriends, you've gotta speak to people who are born before 1940. [Mhmm.] You have to speak to those people you gotta find them and speak to them and hopefully they'll be open minded and share. [Mhmm.] Now me, I'm open minded, very open minded, I don't mind sharing. And the reason why I consented to this interview is because uh...I'm interested in recording the history of the Eighth Nation, we are the Eight Nation. You, French, Second Nation. The First Nation are the Natives, the Indians. [Mm.] Okay, First Nation, the Inuit, the Eskimos and the Natives, I call them the First Nation. [Right.] They liked to be called the First Nation. [Mhmm.] The Second Nation are French, the Third Nation are the British, the English, the Fourth Nation we'll give that to the Germans, because of Lunenburg, okay. And a couple other ones in there and of course you know that eight is

a lucky number right? [Mm.] Eight, eight, eight. [Right, oh I see.] Chinese.

Elise: Well do you know, do you still have my card? [Yes.] Did you notice that that address they gave to Simon Fraser?

Alfie: Oh! 888! Oh! That has to be on purpose.

Elise: They did it on purpose.

Alfie: Really? All eights? Oh! I didn't notice that.

Elise: Yup. They did it exactly for uh, to appeal to the Chinese community because of course we have a large Chinese community.

Alfie: I wanted to go to Simon Fraser to hang out after...(Inaudible sentence)

[00;49;57-00;51;00]

Elise: Let me just, let me just clarify a few things. First, I'm not just interested in...I'm not just interested in laundry men, I'm not just interested in laundry men I'm interested in all men, all men right? Not just laundry men. That's the first thing. Second thing is uh, it's, I'm interested in what you remember from your time there so...and then, thirdly it's okay to tell me second hand stories. You heard from somebody else so...

Alfie: What are you interested in? What is the first?

Elise: It doesn't have to just be laundry men, all men.

Alfie: You want to know about men?

Elise: Just men's experiences right? [Men's experience.] Since, since, since it was hard, there were not a lot of Chinese women around...

Alfie: You wanna know ethnics?

Elise: Well, no, no, no, Chinese Canadians in Chinatown right? There's, you know, it's called a bachelor society for a reason. There's not a lot of women around.

Alfie: You want to know about second hand stories?

Elise: Well I'm just saying if you know, if you have a second hand story that's okay, it doesn't just have to be your own experience.

[00;51;01-00;56;22]

Alfie: Alright let me continue. So anyway I went to Chinese school, I quit after four weeks, I regret it. Um I used to go with non-Chinese women, white women, and uh my mother and father they didn't like the idea but they didn't say anything because times were changing in the 60s and 70s before I got married. And I made a conscientious decision, I better marry my own kind, my father said you should marry your own kind. It's easier, and him being a lawyer and he had a lot of experience, he travelled all around North America you know, he knew, you wanna try to have a mixed marriage, interracial marriage, being the 50s and 60s would be very difficult and I experienced that. And so I made a conscientious decision I'll marry a nice Chinese girl from back home, teach me Chinese. That was my objective, that was my target and that's what I got. Love? Well, no comment. Alright, so when I was a teenager I rode my bicycle in the 60s over to the Chinese Presbyterian Church on Beverly Street. And it was a new building and uh there was a youth group there, a youth group lead my Miss Ma, Ruth Ma, the daughter of one of the preacher men. She's still living, a piano teacher, never married, living in Gravehurst. Uh (?) I don't know if she's speak to you. [Mhmm.] She can tell you a few things about because Ruth Ma would be twenty years older than me. [Mm.] Okay she'd be, I'm 64 she's gotta be 84 I hear she's still alive. Uh she could tell you...really what you wanna know from your time period you really want to get people born in the 1930, 1940s, not me. Not my generation. [Mhmm.] Oh yeah we, we'd tell you some of the things but you know it's not the period. Why are you, you are just interested up until 1960 is there is a reason?

Elise: The end of the 60s, yeah.

Alfie: Yeah, '69, '70. Okay so I used to ride to my bicycle as a teenager irresponsible teenager over to the youth group at the Chinese Presbyterian Church uh, Miss Ma was the leader. There was a few girls and guys and we used to get together and ah we had a good time, a Fellowship eh? Pray to God and uh...you know used to hand out with the guys over there and the girls. [Mhmm.] And I sort of lost contact that was in the 60s. We didn't have any dances or social events, well we had the high school dances I went to Jarvis Collegiate Institute downtown. [Mhmm.] Very well know high school, very unique high school because um...there was quite a few Japanese Canadian students there, quite a few Chinese Canadian students, quite a few immigrant students, quite a few poor white folks, English, Irish, Scottish from Regent Park. Um...there wasn't much immigration in the 60s, immigration really didn't open up until after and that pretty much...(?) Chinese immigration I can tell you about. [Mhmm.] But uh...they had the upper middle class students from Rosedale go to Jarvis Collegiate, now you've got an interesting proposition. The poor kids, the ethnic kids mixing with the pure you know, en francais, le purlais. [Oui, je comprends. Yeah.] Well they don't use that expression, purlais is used in Quebec, purlais, the real Canadians, we call them the REAL Canadians as opposed to the Chinese Canadians or the ethnic Canadians and uh that was an interesting mix let me tell you because their value are different then ours. [Hmm.] But today uh...we still keep in contact with some of those purlais, can you imagine? This it he high school reunion, May, 2007. (Shows a picture to Elise) Thirty-seven months ago, I attended the high school reunion and uh very interesting to attend high school reunion and as a direct result of that we set up a email groups line. You type to the uh, Google Group and it shows up on 250 screens around the world instantly. [Oh wow.] And uh, so uh...member of the posse down in Florida he typed back bullshit, what are you talking about what are you smoking, Alf you're full of shit. (Laughs) It was this way. And then the one over in Australia she typed, you're both wrong! You're both full of shit. [(Laughs)] (?) And then the guy in Switzerland who's mouthy oh god...he says you're all wrong it was like this so...that's what (?) we have so much fun!

[00;56;23-01;01;28]

Elise: So you did some, some dating you were saying. You dated some of the women. [Yeah.] And these were women you met in high school?

Alfie: Yeah girls, not women, they were girls, teenagers okay. [Right.] And uh they you know it was frowned on so therefor what we did in 1962, we made up our own Chinese High School Association, the Chinese Canadian Student's Association modeled after the Chinese Canadian Association. [Okay.] Who was lead by Margaret Ko, Mrs. Margaret Ko, probably ninety-something, still alive and she was president of the Chinese Canadian Association who had a hand in running Marriage Camp. [That's right.] Margaret Ko. I attended, did I attend, yes I attended during (?) 1962. [Okay.] But let's carry on with Chinatown. [Yeah, yeah let's talk about that.] Uh so we had our own Chinese Canadian Student's Association, we used to have dances and get together and picnics and BBQ's and met in the, in the Chinese Community Centre at 14 Heggeman Street, which was a three story building owned by the KMT. Which is the Chinese Nationalist Party Chiang Kai-Shek. The big, meeting hall, with a room twice the size of this and was a picture of Chiang Kai-Shek up on the wall we thought he was a hero. Listening to my uncle, Henry, he was a crook! (Laughs) He took all the money and his Minister of Finance was a guy named T.V. Soong, he stole all the money when the Republic of China collapsed in 1947 because Mao took over. Chairman Mao, and I don't know if you know the history of China, [Yeah a little bit, mmmm.] little bit? You read up on it. [Yeah.] So that's Chinatown, because I worked in my father's office when I was a kid, uh, right through high school riding my bicycle I worked there until maybe 1962 then after that I got a summer job working at a factory, dollar an hour, in Chinatown. It was a white man factory making silverware, (?) okay? And I used to deliver in shopping bags on my bicycle or just carry shopping bags silver, silverware, plates, pots, tea, you know cream and sugars, serving three layer, all wrapped up in oil paper to prevent tarnishing, carried in shopping bags because Mr. Grey the owner of the company, didn't want us robbed, you know silverware's worth money. And I delivered to Burke's, I delivered to Eaton's, and that was my job one dollar an hour. [Hm.] And uh, there was a woman there named Francis Deer (?) came from small-town Ontario and uh, she used to talk to me. Well what can I say, that's it I'm not gonna tell you about Francis Deer, we had some very interesting conversations and uh, those were you

know, all during that time. Now I'm gonna tell you about my father's office, I'm gonna draw you a picture of where my father's office was because you were interested in the Continental Hotel.

Elise: Yeah maybe you could draw that on back of...(?)

Alfie: I'll do that okay, north is this way...

(Begins to draw a map, describing different directions for several minutes describing where his father's office was compared to the Continental Hotel)

[01;01;29-01;04;55]

Alfie: But all the girls, the prostitutes and the lesbians [Mhmm.], and the butches [Mhmm.] they all used to hang out in here, Wing's Grill. The bus drivers used to go in here and buy their coffee and the girls used to solicit the bus drivers, they used to, all the men, all the immigrant men they were looking for girls, they used to come up here and the, the cops, police were all around here and here I am watching my father's office, answering the telephone, and uh occasionally some of these kind of people would come and want stamps or want service or you know. The going price, the going price in 1958, I would have been 13 years old, '58, '59, '60, ten and three. Ten dollars and three dollars, so the girls would come up to me and say ten and three? I go...the girls come out of Wing's Restaurant and see the guys come out on the street, ten and three? Ten for the girl, three for the room.

Elise: Oh!

Alfie: Three, there was three hotels that I can remember in my head. [Yeah.] Continental, um, right at here, The You and I, I don't know if it was U.N.I. or You and I Hotel...and then up here it was called the Elm Bay, up here. Building still exists. And the Chinese United Church Mission was here.

Elise: Oh I see right beside the Elm Bay.

Alfie: On the opposite side. [I see.] Okay and the Elm Bay was owned by I believe Mr. Chong, and his name was Jan Du Him Bak (?) and he was

the unofficial mayor of Chinatown. [Okay, not your father.] Not my father, Jan Du Him (?) and he owned this building and his descendants are still around and if I got time maybe I can you in touch with them and maybe you could find out what went on in the Elm Bay. [Okay.] What was the rate? Was it three dollars for half hour or what?
(Laughs)

Elise: Right, well I heard from...

Alfie: I don't know I didn't go in these hotels.

Elise: Where is uh...um, Tom Lok's pharmacy?

Alfie: Tom Lok pharmacy? Right here.

Elise: Because I heard stories about him standing in the doorway, watching sex trade workers go in somewhere with their trick, the Jon, and he would time them and he would make a comment when they came out, oh that wasn't very long. [That was a quickie yeah. (Laughs)] That took a long time, whatever so he must have been looking at this hotel [Who knows!] the You and I. Now I also know from newspaper research I've done that some of the rooms that were used were Chinese rooming houses. [Could be.] So you don't know anything about that? Because your dad never talked about [My father was open minded, open minded.] dealing with these kinds of issues.

[01;04;56-01;05;54]

Alfie: He dealt with many things but the lawyers like the priest, the minister. [Yeah keep it to themselves.] You know you keep your mouth shut, you're expected to keep your mouth shut whatever the client tells you in an interview you're supposed to keep your mouth shut so you never talk about cases. Hey, Mr. Lawyer is that client guilty? (Laughs) That's a stupid question. [Right, right.] You heard of Jon Rosen? [No.] You do not know Jon Rosen? [No.] Jon Rosen is a big time criminal lawyer in Toronto, I used to work for him. [Okay, okay, yeah.] Way back before he went to law school, or maybe when he was in law school. Jon Rosen defended Paul Bernardo. [Oh!] You read about him in the Toronto papers, you read about him all the time. [Yeah, yeah.]

Him and Fast Eddie, Eddie Greenspan. [Right.] (Laughs) Eddie Greenspan's son.

Elise: So did you ever go into Wing's Grill?

Alfie: Oh yeah.

Elise: And what was it like in there?

[01;05;55-01;07;53]

Alfie: Oh you get the girls hanging out at the tables there and they're drinking their coffee and they're loud as anything and you know, wild you know. They, I was too young to get solicited oh, there's a could of them they needed money so you know, ten and three, ten and three? (Laughs) And there was one woman, and I don't know if she was a woman or a guy, she was a woman but you know, shaped like a woman, big, but she was butch. [Mm.] Butch means she was playing the male part of the lesbian relationship. [Mhmm.] And she said to me ten and three and you know, I didn't get mixed up in that, the disease and everything else you know. [Mhmm. Mhmm.] But uh I guess I (?) a few times but the Jon's, typically the, I don't know who they were, I didn't ask them, I knew...not very many blacks around those days. All the women there were white, there was no black women. Over on our street there was, a few black hookers. And uh there used to be a beer parlour right next to our street uh, right next to our house and the women used to go in there and come out and have street fights right in the laneway. Oh wow! (Laughs) You know cat fights, cat fights, [Yeah, sure.] pulling hair and everything else, pulling (?) this is the type of people that very low class entertainment, not what the uppity ups from Rosedale are used to. [Sure.] And I don't think the preacher would like to hear me talking about that of course but anyway I'm telling you the truth.

Elise: Yeah no that's important, it's...

Alfie: As we used to call them chocolate layers, the black hookers. [The black hookers.] Chocolate layers. [Yeah.] (Laughs) Terrible right? Jokes. But

yeah we remember that. Uh now you want to move on to the laundries. I'll tell you what I need a break.

(Takes a break)

[01;07;58-01;14;34]

Alfie: Wing's Grill. Alright so I don't know much about the Continental I never went in there. [Okay.] My father used to park his car here, uh You and I, I never went in there. Tom Lok Drugs was here and uh Doctor Lau (?), Henry Lau was Chinese Canadian doctor and he was a character. [Yeah.] He's dead, they're all dead. Tom Lok, I used to see Tom Lok about ten years ago here on Bayview. He's still, ten, fifteen years ago he was still practicing, still dispensing drugs for his buddies. He was right on our corner drugstore, our neighborhood drug store, Tom Lok. And you know like you talk to some of the old druggists around and they all know. Everybody knew Tom Lok. [Yeah.] I was looking at a photograph of Tom Lok yesterday, he was in the war. He was a member of Force 136 [Hm.] and you can go on the internet and look for him, Force 136 and there's a picture of Tom Lok, Doug Joan, my uncle Eddy and a few other ones ready to get on the submarine, they were a special force spies, British Army spies. [Really?] And that's the history of Canada. And you'll get that when you go to interview...the leader of the Chinese Canadian Military Museum on Columbia Street in Vancouver, right around the corner from the Cultural Centre. [Mhmm.] Third floor, there's the, you should go there. [I didn't know that.] Just type in that, Chinese Canadian Military Museum, and uh Alex will tell you about it. But whose the guy, the guy that runs the place I met him...[Okay well let's get back on track.] Oh so uh, you know about the, the story of the Paper Sons? [Yes.] The story of the Paper Sons started...about 1949 or '50 after my father changed the Immigration Act, because he only, he and Himmel and the committee you know there was ten from Vancouver and ten from Toronto, and ever since 1923 [Mhmm.] there's been delegations from the Chinese community going up to Ottawa to try and convince them to change, repeal the Act, it's not fair. It didn't get repealed until all the soldiers joined the army, fight for Canada, wear the uniform and come back after the War, is we died for Canada or we were ready to die for Canada, what did we die for? Can't vote, can't go to law school, can't

do this, can't do that, can't bring our families in. So then things were changing, times were changing, and uh that opened up opportunity for our generation, tremendous opportunity compared to laundry men. Alright so you know the Paper Sons and as a result of the Paper Sons and restricted immigration practices the 1947 repeal of the Immigration Act only opened the door slightly so during the 50s and early 60s there was a shortage of women. Too many men because the Paper Sons keep on coming in you know, we're not very proud of the Paper Sons but it's a fact of history. And uh one set of papers sold and sold and sold until...John Diefenbaker in 1958 changed the government, changed the Liberals to Conservatives and the Minister of Immigration, Ellen Fairclough, she slammed the door okay. She sent to Hong Kong, had the Hong Kong police come over here, help the RCMP with the Chinese language, then went into Chinatown and arrest everybody, threw them in the jail! My father got investigated but he didn't get to jail because he was a lawyer and running a clean business. [Yeah.] He wasn't selling papers. The others guys, the so called immigration consultants, when read of course about immigration yesterday and today, uh you know, Jason Kenny gonna clean everything up, try to clean everything up. But this is the promised land this is a wonderful place, where else can you come to Ontario and have all the benefits? Anyway uh...there was a man power shortage during the '50s and early and part of the '60s so where did the uh, where are they gonna resort to? Gonna see if they can date non-Chinese women. Now there was a lot of Pilipino nannies here, you know them? [Mhmm.] You know the story about that? [Mhmm.] Something about the US government occupied the Philippines during the War, they wanted the (?) so they occupied the Philippines and they let the Philippine nurses into the US during the '50s because they needed them and then they could only stay three years and they evicted them, didn't know where to go so they came up here. Uh they were looking for Chinese boys to get married. So uh, interracial marriage? Well, back in the '50s, not very many of the Chinese boys had opportunities, so if you gonna go either you get a job in a factory if you could find one, or get a job in industry or try to be a salesman somewhere, but it's a hard time, they not gonna buy from you in the '50s so you open up a laundry, you take over a laundry or a restaurant go in the restaurant business, or fruit stand. Uh, initially you get a cart, you go to wholesalers, buy your vegetables, go down the street selling door to door. And then from there you set up your fruit stand or your

fruit store so that's basically, fruit and vegetable store, laundries, and restaurants. [Mhmm.] Generally speaking, one of your questions was do I know anybody, any Chinese laundry men that married or lived with a white woman? And the answers no, I don't know any. Uh, did you research the history of Harry Yip and Velma Demerson? [Yes, yes.] Okay, that's on the internet.

[01;14;35-01;15;51]

Elise: Mhmm well there's also books about it and articles about it.

Alfie: Yeah a book, a book. Thelma wrote a book. So you know that story?

Elise: I know that story yes.

Alfie: Harry Yip, well of course when that hit the newspapers everybody saying, you related to Harry Yip? (Laughs) I says no I never heard of him and everyone says you read the story in the Globe and Mail today? And I read the story and oh, wow this is quite the story. She got arrested by her father, the police broke in on them and the police arrested them for being incorrigible. [Mhmm.] What kind of law is that? [Mhmm.] Put him in the, in the, in the jail, not the jail the workhouse, [Mhmm.] but uh no, the answer is I do not know anything about laundry men consorting with white women. Uh, never seen it and I don't know it. [Okay.] You keep looking in the...interviews and you speak to people, maybe they may know. I didn't see any. The reason I didn't see any because who the laundry men I met in 1950s when I was following my father around, they were all bachelor society and how many of the Paper Sons went into the laundry business? Very few I would suppose.

Elise: But can I just...um I just want to remind you that I'm not just interested in laundry men though, I'm interested in any Chinese men, any Chinese Canadian men.

[01;15;52-01;16;06]

Alfie: Well there was quite a few Chinese Canadian men that married white women. [Mhmm.] More from the vegetable business and more from the restaurant business. Um...

Elise: And do you think it's because they had more money, a little bit more money in those businesses?

[01;16;07-01;20;36]

Alfie: Yeah, yeah oh well you know you're a sociologist so you understand men and women, you study men and women you study men you study women of course you have to study women. You study gays, lesbians, homosexuals, whatever, men and uh what does a woman want? And you have to identify what does the woman want? What does the man want? It's all summed up in everybody's favourite radio station, WIIFM, What's In It For Me? I'll write that down so you can take it home. [(Laughs)] WIIFN, What's In It For Me? Likewise that expression, when you approach people for the interview the first thing they say, you want an interview me? [Mhmm.] Why you want to interview me? First question. What do you want form me? Two. Third question, WWIFM? Okay. [(Laughs)] And you ask you know, I'm willing to share with you because my age I come to the realization why take it to the grave? [Mhmm.] I could be dead tomorrow! The angels come...3 o'clock in the morning in my house, turn on my life, you named Alfie Yip? I am, who are you guys? We're messengers. How come you got wings on your backs? We're from God. What's the deal? This a transportation warrant, you're coming with us! [(Laughs)] Who signed the warrant? [Uh oh. (Laughs)] Saint Peter, Saint Peter in Purgatory. Is that where we're going? Yeah come with us now. Wait, wait, wait, I gotta get dressed. You don't need clothes. Wait, wait, I gotta get my money from my mutual funds account. You don't need any of that. [(Laughs)] I gotta get all my toys. You're coming with us now in your birthday suit! You're dead, that's it game over, so I want to share with you because I want it recorded. This concept of laundry men, nobody ever looked at laundry men! [Mhmm.] Who looked at laundry men? [Mhmm. Mhmm.] Very few. Uh maybe we should be, maybe Dora and Nick should do interviews about laundries and what it was like?

Elise: Well what do you, what do you...okay so if I, if I didn't have any questions at all, you feel like you want this history recorded, what to you is the most important...story you think should be recorded? What's the story you want to tell?

Alfie: I don't know I have to think about it. (Laughs) I can't answer it. [Alright. (Laughs)] I take the amendment whatever...[The Fifth Amendment yeah, yeah.] I need more time to think about this, that's why you asked me for an interview I'm going to grant you for an interview, first question what's in it for me? [Yeah, sure.] Right so what's in it for me is that I fulfill what I want is to record history. [Yeah.] And, and, and, and uh, and make sure that the future generations of the Eight Nation will come to understand and have it available too. Because this new generation of Chinese that are coming in from China they haven't got a clue what it was like here. [No, no.] Not a clue! And it's through you and Dora and Nick and, and Bernice Hune, write that down Bernice Hune, she's a story teller and she performed last week at the story teller conference or the story teller annual meeting, a very small meeting in a restaurant and she wrote a story or she developed a story called Third Daughter. Based on the third daughter of a Chinese laundry man. [Oh yeah, oh that's interesting.] And I will send you by email, now that I've met you, uh, some writing, half a page by Lorne Brown, Lorne Brown. And he is leader of the Storyteller's Association of Ontario. And uh, so they had their annual meeting and Bernice said come, come, come to the restaurant called The Butler's Pantry and the size of a small place and have dinner and listen to all the stories and she spoke for about minutes on Third Daughter of the Chinese Laundry Men. And it just happens that a couple days later you start asking about laundry so I'll send you her story and you, you can get ahold of...you might be able to call her, she might cooperate with you, maybe not. Uh...because these people that deal in history, I don't deal in history, I don't write history, maybe I should uh but I'm not in competition with you, alright?

[01;20;37-01;22;49]

Elise: Mhmm, no I'm not. To me it's a not a comp...history is not a competitive sport. (Laughs)

Alfie: But there's a guy out in Vancouver named James Wong Chu and he's a historian, historian type and he told me when last time I saw James Wong Chu he said you've got to realize that when you're asking people for interviews and asking about history, there are some people, some of us won't tell you nothing. No cooperation because they feel that you digging up the history are trying to get the history that they got and you want their artifacts and books and papers and we won't give it to you. '

Elise: What do you mean they feel like you're trying to get their history they got?

Alfie: They're trying to leverage whatever they got to try and write something or you know, like Paul Yee, the famous Paul Yee. [Yeah.] He wrote, where did he get all this stuff from? He interviewed people just like you. [Mhmm.] Okay and he got the information he tried to make it accurate but some of it's fictional but [Mhmm.] he wrote it and it became very successful, he was a very successful young guy you know him? [Mhmm, no.] A young guy, he's here in Toronto I met him once. And uh nice guy but he was the first he wrote Saltwater City. My grandfather's in that book, Yip Sing is in it. [Okay, okay.] You know he's written but uh yeah, just go, just go to the gate across Pender take a right turn go down Shanghai Alley there's a circle around there.

Elise: Yes, yes my hairdresser is on Shanghai Alley (Laughs) so I know that street.

Alfie: Well it's Shanghai Alley or Canton Alley, one of the two. There's a bell [Yeah, yeah.] a replica of a bell from Canton City because Canton City, twin city of Vancouver. And on the fence, when you get back to Vancouver you'll see the panels, size of this quilt. [Mhmm.] And the panels are in metal and there's one panel of seven dedicated to Yip Sang and his family. And in fact you can get the family tree of Yip Sang, his family tree on the internet. [Mm.] UBC, UBC Archives, somewhere in there.

Elise: Yeah, no it's very, your family is a very famous family in Vancouver for sure. Yeah.

[01;22;50-01;27;24]

Alfie: Interesting history. Oh very well known. And uh the patriarch is my cousin uh, number three two oh what's his name uh Yip...he's ninety something odd years old. [Mm.] You better speak to him you better ask for an interview with uh, with uh, with the patriarch because he's my cousin. [Mhmm.] He's from number three I'm from number seventeen so it's quite a difference [Yeah.] in age. He's uh, he's gotta be ninety-four now you better go now before you know what, kick the bucket and you're gonna miss it. One of my cousins just died the other day uh, last month, no April month, Ed Yip and um...Ed Yip uh he was ninety something odd years old, brother of number three, he was also number three. Ed Yip was number three dash five I think and you should have interviewed him because he might have known the story of laundry men. He might of known about uh...Chinese men going out or going steady or having affairs with white women. [Yeah.] Uh the three groups more than likely...see what does a woman want and I'm telling you but you should be telling me, you're the lecturer not me I'm an engineer, I deal with electricity, I deal with transportation uh, society is leveraged and this my theory. I don't know if it's, you can, if we got time anyway, uh, the women are on this side, [Mhmm.] the boys are on this side. [Mhmm.] And everybody has a rank, me, I'd be somewhere in here as a retired government official. [Uhuh.] Um I was a manager, from time to time but yeah, I was in this level here not the high level not down here. Down here the you know lower rank Chinese boys and a girl, you know, fancy was her name, be nice to the guy you don't know what you're gonna get you know they can move up through marriage or relationship one or two ranks so therefor these guys down here, who they gonna marry? [Right.] Over here? [Yeah.] Well these girls gonna go up here so these guys...losers. [Yeah.] And not much I can do for them unless they educate themselves and I know some of my relatives in this rank here and they say to me oh Alfie, you're successful you're government official, you travel here there, everywhere you got engineering education, you the son of blah blah blah, you know, help me move up! I say well you only got a grade ten education, you had a chance to get more education go to school and get some education, get a trade go get something, do something! You're a taxi driver you know? Do something! [Yeah.] Go, go, go, go to chef's school or but these guys you know so...so, some of

the guys on our side they're looking to go up so what do girls want? They want status, they want security and that comes with money and they want to be entertained and they want to select the right man to build a life, have children or you know they have some status in life. [Mhmm.] Uh so the ay they do it you know, if you're a laundry man's daughter you're looking to move up here, if you're up here you go up here, if you're up here, you're parents and you're family, you don't go down here you go this way, you go this way! [That's right.] So what do the girls want okay? And what's love but a second hand emotion? (Both laugh) You know what I mean? It's interesting going dating in our time, I started taking an interest around 1961, '62, we formed our own Chinese high school, Chinese Canadian high school association. By that time we had our own girls so we dated within our community. [Right.] And I keep in touch with them, Bernice was one of my crowd, she's my age. [Mhmm.] And uh you go on the website you type in her name she develops stories and she goes around to schools and she's hired to tell stories to the kids. One of her stories in a Chinaman, the Chinese laundry Third Daughter. And she tells other stories, I don't know how she makes a living out of it, makes a living out of it on grants I guess. [Really that's interesting yeah.] So you speak to Bernice and find out her sources, she may not help you, I don't know, I don't know. Haven't' seen her in maybe years.

[01;27;25-01;29;54]

Elise: Well I, I um...

Alfie: Next part of the story, I have to consolidate my notes.

Elise: I think we're, I think we're done um but I just wanted to say that actually I...

(Tape cut out, back to Alfie)

Alfie: When I was working with my father he used to take me around because I was his number one son and on Sundays we'd go to, on Sunday afternoon he'd be going down to Chinatown, to the gambling places uh in Chinese Ou Pak Kwan(?), in our dialect gambling establishment. Ae Yee Gwan(?) is laundry establishment. Ha Tan

Gwan(?) is an eating establishment. Ou Pak Kwon(?) is a gambling establishment, Kwon is a business or establishment. [Okay.] And we'd go there looking for his clients to sign papers. And we'd go to Ou Pak Kwon and of course I'm a little boy and the guys would give me money because lucky money you know. Uh dey lay see (?) uh, lay see(?) is lucky money in a red envelope but they'd just give me a few coins off the table and uh some of them were laundry men. So their big passion was gambling. [Mm.] Now a girl wanna marry the Chinese man, she gotta have a little bit of statues, gotta have a little bit of money, so what status the laundry men got? Not much so therefor I never heard of white women going, falling in love with a Chinese laundry men, never heard of it. Uh white woman falling in love with a restaurant man possible because he's got status. Uh Harry Yip, I don't know why Velma fell in love with him, don't know, that's love. [Yeah.] Okay so I used to go with my father to laundries he'd bring the papers to the laundry men, a Will or property transfer or immigration and sign the papers and there was on Mutual Street, the, a laundry just across the laneway, and I remember, uh I remember looking into the back yard of the laundry mat and they burned coal, they burned coal to heat up the, boil water. And I remember those bachelors and I remember what the neighborhood kids used to, they used to say on the fence and say very, very terrible things to the guys until they came out and give them money but yeah, through the fence, I remember that.

[01;29;55-01;34;08]

Elise: They would call, like call them names?

Alfie: Yeah chinky Chinamen (goes on unintelligibly in a high voice) something like that and then the guy would come out give them money, the neighborhood kids. And I knew that was wrong because I knew that the laundrymen worked so hard for their money even though you know, I saw that with my own eyes and uh they were good guys. Never got into trouble with the law but it was a hard life. And uh...what woman would have fallen in love with a laundryman, what kind of life is that? Uh many restaurant guys had Chinese girlfriends uh, white girlfriends, white wives. Uh...French and Irish, the two groups that most of them came from, most of the white women, French and Irish.

Elise: I noticed a lot of French Canadian names and do you have any idea why so many...French women? [Quebec women.] Yeah Quebecers.

Alfie: There was a woman on our street named Madeleine and she went with a waiter named Gabby, a Chinese guy. They lived on our street, Mutual. And uh Madeleine, you have to interview...one of our neighborhood kids Pat, she knew Madeleine quite well. [Mm.] Find out from Pat why Madeleine married Gabby, what was the attraction. [Yeah.] Uh I used to have a Quebec girlfriend.

Elise: Yeah but you lived in Quebec though, you were living there so that makes sense how you met them.

Alfie: Yeah but I still keep in touch.

Elise: But I'm just, it doesn't. it's curious...

Alfie: Open-minded. The Irish girls and the French had different attitudes than the Anglo Saxons, the English and Scotch. [Mhmm.] I attribute it their open-mindedness, maybe because the Irish were poor, maybe because it comes back to this, what's the girl want? She's gonna take a look at what's available [Yeah.] in the inventory and take the best that she can get so she can move up. If a laundryman's at this rank and she's at this rank she's not going down. If she's at this rank she's not going down she's going up so therefore these guys what are they gonna do for sex? Buy it. And who they gonna buy it from? The women that would service them. [Mhmm.] And who were they? Either Irish or French because open-mindedness. The French, French women must have a different attitude, don't know maybe because the French in Canada were pushed down by the Anglos in Quebec. The Irish certainly were pushed down, you know the history of the Irish and the Scotch and the English, dirty, dirty filthy Irish you know that. (Laughs) [Yes.] You couldn't say that about the Kennedy Clan but a lot of the Irish. [Mhmm.] Okay so maybe, that's part of your research, that's what you want to establish you want to start asking questions. Why the French and why, why so many French and why so many Irish? [Uh yeah, that's my question.] Bobby Bu, his mother was half Irish, her husband, she married a guy and she had three kids, Bobby, Barry and Barbara, start with "B", Barry, Bobby and (?) and we call him Bobby

Bu, but um, she was half Irish you could see it in her face. Bobby, he was only a quarter Irish but why Irish? Okay because Bobby's uh, grandfather or Bobby's father, was Audrey (?), hotel owner owned a building. Collected hotel rent. Maybe rent room by the half hour I don't know, but the thing is that he got more money than a laundryman so what woman is gonna go, go, go live with a laundryman to have that kind of life? She wants to be kept, she wants to be kept like you say, go to the opera, well they didn't go to European opera, they might have went to the...

[01;34;09;01;37;18]

Elise: No the Chinese opera, that's what I meant, the gambling houses and the Chinese opera and other cultural...

Alfie: You know she wants society eh? [Yeah.] Uh there was a couple of very famous white women in Chinatown, one of them is in, Paul Yee's book and what was her name? But she married one of the Yips, and uh, she was a nurse, midwife, she was a midwife in Vancouver and number uh...oh what's that guys name it will come to me...the guy that's ninety-four years old, I gave you his name. Uh you go interview, he knew her and she spoke 100% Chinese, perfect Chinese, she was white. Used to come, used to come to the wife of number three and play Mahjong. Nelly, Nelly, Nelly Yip was her name. [I've read about her.] Famous, very famous, [Yes I know about her.] and uh you better go and talk to my cousin in Vancouver, he lives out in West Vancouver, book an interview before he kicks the bucket. Make sure you get him.

Elise: I appreciate the references to Vancouver people but unfortunately I can only focus on Toronto.

Alfie: Why because it's funded by Toronto?

Elise: Oh no it's not funded by Toronto it's just because I only have a limited amount of time right? [I see, I see, I see.] Um so what I'll do is I'll keep this in mind if I know anybody doing similar projects in Vancouver then maybe I'll out them in touch with you.

Alfie: Yeah but the thing is that was there any women that married, moved in with laundry men, I know of none. Any relationship they had I don't know, I haven't heard, you've got to talk to more people in the Toronto area who may have known laundrymen uh...there's a guy that we were just discussing today, 1940, you interview him. Uh also if you want to know more about Geneva Lake I went to Geneva Lake with my cousin Gilbert born in 1938 or '39, he's seven years older than me. And he went up to Geneva Lake looking for I don't know, he was a young guy, he had a new car and went up there and the girls from New York City used to come up to Geneva Lake. And uh I went up there when I was 15 or 16 years old too young, don't understand what's going on. Don't understand it's a meat market [Yeah.] or a marriage place, I didn't know that things. And I just enjoyed my time up there and watched what was going on, I had no idea what was going on so maybe you' better speak to Gilbert and see if he'll talk to you. And uh...there's a few other people here in Ontario at the, that uh, that uh you may depending on how much time you got and who you meet and uh how much time you want to allocate to these guys, the phone interview. I guess you like, prefer this?

Elise: Well I prefer this but you know it's, I do what I can right? It's a...

Alfie: Interview over, three o'clock. [Yeah.] Take you're picture? It's on the internet.

END OF INTERVIEW