

Title: Keith Lock Interview

Subject: Keith Lock

Author: Julia Lum

Manager: Melinda Richter

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Interview 1 of 2

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MHSO Chinese Canadian Women, 1923-1967

Interview Transcript

JL: Julia Lum, interviewer

KL: Keith Lock, narrator

JL: This is Julia Lum, interviewing Keith Lock on September 1, 2009 at Keith Lock's home in Toronto, Ontario.

Okay. So I'm going to start with some background questions. Where were you born?

KL: I was born in Toronto.

JL: What year were you born?

KL: I was born in 1951.

JL: And how many brothers and sisters do you have?

KL: I have a younger brother and one older sister. So I'm in the middle.

JL: And how long has your family been in Toronto?

KL: My father was born in Toronto in 1916 and my mother was born in Melbourne, Australia.

JL: And your father's family? How long have they been in Toronto?

KL: My grandfather came, I guess the 1880s or '90s. My grandmother came the turn of the century. I think 1906.

JL: Why did your grandfather come to Canada? Do you know?

KL: That I don't really know. I'm not sure.

JL: Do you know if he paid the head tax at all?

KL: That I don't know but I remember one of my parents saying no one in our family paid the head tax for just some weird reasons. Like my mother, when she came, it was the act of council as a war bride. And I don't know why my grandmother did not but she might have had some relationship with the Qing dynasty so it might have been under some political thing. I don't know. And I'm not sure about my grandfather. I don't know when they started it and I've never looked and seen his entry documents or anything, so I don't really know.

JL: Do you know if he was a merchant or what he did when he came over here?

KL: He was a merchant. He was a merchant. I think he had a hardware store. He opened a hardware store on Queen Street for a while and then eventually they opened a laundry, a Chinese laundry.

JL: And where was the laundry located?

KL: They had a variety of laundries. I know they had one on Spadina just north of Dundas and the that they had when I was born I think was St. Clair West, which has been documented in some other places.

JL: I think Valerie Mah?

KL: Yeah. Valerie Mah did some stuff with it and there's some interviews that Dora Nipp did as well.

JL: Do you know how your grandfather met your grandmother?

KL: Yeah. I believe he was travelling. He was travelling and he met her. So they were from quite far apart. This is what my father told me. And I'm not sure if he was from the North or she was from the North but I think they met in the South. But I'm not sure of the exact circumstances. Sorry.

JL: That's okay. Do you know if it was an arranged marriage perhaps?

KL: I don't think it was an arranged marriage but I think there was something that her family wanted her to marry him for some reason and then maybe come here. I'm not sure. I don't know.

JL: As a merchant and from Gold Mountain he might have been a suitable person to marry.

KL: Yeah maybe. They never talk too much about the grandparents. My grandmother my father talked a lot about, but not so much my grandfather. I think he died earlier and I get a sense he was maybe more remote. So they didn't really know him as a person that much. I think. I don't know.

JL: Was he alive when you were born?

KL: No. Neither of them were. My grandmother died some time before I was born and my grandfather died I think in the '30s.

JL: So did they come over to Canada together?

KL: No. My grandfather came first and my grandmother came later. She came to Toronto and it was so rare for a woman to come that it was in the newspapers: Chinese woman arrives in Toronto or something. We had the clipping in the *Toronto Telegram* I think. I think she was a second wife. I'm not sure. Yes. She was a second wife because my father had half brothers or something in China and they died during the war with Japan. He said they were beheaded. I don't know if that was embellishment or not.

JL: So your grandmother came around the turn of the century, maybe first decade.

KL: Yeah.

JL: And would she be one of the only Chinese women in Toronto at that time?

KL: She was one of the few women in Toronto, Chinese women, and she was probably the only one that spoke Mandarin. She was from Beijing and she learned to speak Toisan but she used to pretend that she didn't know how to speak Toisan. So maybe there's a bit of a language snobbery there. I don't know. But she was a bit of a mystery to a lot of the people in my family because even to this day, my cousins will say something like, 'It's a secret but your grandmother was Japanese.' To this day we'll have family gatherings and they'll tell me this and of course she was from Beijing but maybe she was Japanese from Beijing, I don't know. But I think that just because she spoke Mandarin she was like a foreigner to them. She was different.

JL: What about interactions in the family business or in the community? You said she pretended not to speak Toisan. Did she just sort of shy away from interacting?

KL: No. She was quite well part of the social life in Toronto, especially the church. She was really active in the Chinese Presbyterian Church. And she seemed to, you know, it's kind of funny. She was a real church lady but sometimes, like a while ago I was driving around with my dad when he was still alive and we were passing the Rex Hotel on Queen Street and my dad says, 'Oh, the Rex Hotel. That used to be the biggest whorehouse in Toronto. It was run by a very good friend of your grandmother's.' So I guess there probably just weren't that many women that the few that were there knew each other and kind of were friends. I don't know.

JL: You said she was involved with the church. How did she become involved with the church initially, do you know?

KL: That I don't know. I don't think she was involved in China. Or she may have been, but I think it was through missionaries, either here or in China. But I think that's where a lot of the social life was in Toronto at the time – the Chinese Presbyterian Church. So that was the big centre of activity, of socializing because people either worked or I guess the only time they weren't working they would be at church.

JL: What do you think appealed to them about the church specifically?

KL: Of which?

JL: The church. What do you think appealed to them? What was it about the church as opposed to say, other activities?

KL: Well I think the church at the time was a moral thing. I mean, they're very proper. They're Confucian people and it fit in with their standards I guess. And it was probably the only way of interfacing with the mainstream society. It was one way they would do it aside from business, where they were accepted because the church was always looking for people and actively engaged in Chinatown in getting people to become active in the church. So those were the good people. That's the sense.

JL: So were there other sort of organizations and social activities that were maybe barred from them at the time?

KL: Oh yeah. They were quite outsiders. I mean, the Chinese in the Pickford Theatre on Spadina, they had to sit in the back. So they weren't really integrated into society at all. My dad, I told you this story before, but all his life he hated policemen and he kind of, I kind of got that from him until I learned different and he told me one time when they were kids they needed help from a policeman and they went to a policeman and he said, 'Oh no. Our services don't cover you. They don't cover Chinese.' And after that, maybe that happened more than once, and he had just no good words for police ever. And at his store, when he had his store in Chinatown, there's a tradition that cops on foot on the beat, they have a pop for free just to encourage them to be around the store and protect and serve and so on. But at **Tom Luck Drugs** police, you know, ten cents for the pop and two cents deposit. And police never came back.

JL: So I'd like to return to that later because I think that's really interesting, especially in regards to your father's involvement in the war, but going back to your grandmother a bit, you said she was really involved with the church. What kinds of activities did she do in the church? Were there women's groups or other gatherings? Do you know?

KL: I think there were women's groups. There was a women's group but I don't know anything about it. They were friends with the Mahs who was the minister. So they were good friends with the son, Daniel. The family was very close with Daniel Mah. And I think Daniel worked at their grocery store at one time when they had a grocery store on Queen Street.

JL: There were few families back then. How many would you say?

KL: How many families? Well, according to Valerie Mah, there were thirteen families around this time in Toronto. So there weren't very many Chinese people at all. And of course there were more bachelors because of the bachelor society. But actual families, there were very few.

JL: So would all the families know each other and get together and do social activities?

KL: Oh yeah. Very definitely, the families were very, they all knew each other – the Cohs, the Mahs, the Marks, the Locks. They're all close. They're very close. I wouldn't say it's like a village but everybody knew each other.

JL: Were they all fairly involved with the church as well?

KL: Yes they were. They definitely were.

JL: And you mentioned to me earlier that there were Chinese annual picnics that were important social events. Was that to do with the church?

KL: Oh Chinese, the picnics?

JL: The picnics, yeah.

KL: Yeah. There was a picnic in London, Ontario. And I think it happened every year. I'm sure if it's still going on but that was something that the Chinese from Toronto would do down to London to be part of it and I guess it was a way of socializing. There were so few Chinese people in Ontario at the time. And that was a big event. I'm sure if it was to do with the church. I didn't get the sense that it was but it would be good to check with Hank Wong or one of the Wongs down in London. They could tell you more. But it was definitely an important social event. As a result of that the Chinese in London and Toronto seem to know each other fairly well.

JL: And would they come from other communities as well to these picnics? Like around Ontario?

KL: I think so. But that's just an assumption. I don't know. I just heard about it because my parents would talk about it and when I talked to the people in London – the Wongs – they would also mention it. So I know it was a big event and I know people met there and there were marriages and things that happened as a result and all that kind of stuff.

JL: So your grandparents were fairly involved with the community, especially with the church, and they also had their own business which, I presume, would take up a lot of time. So were they involved at all with any Chinese cultural, like the Chinese Benevolent Association, or any other Chinese cultural groups?

KL: Not that I know of. They were not involved in that. Even the Toisan Society, they were always trying, I remember they were always encouraging my dad to join but he never did. He was one of the founders of the Mon Sheong Home for the Aged. So I guess he put his time into that rather than the old societies. It's just another way of helping. But because he was born here he was much more Canadian. Like he was much more able to negotiate the Canadian system so I think he had more options than some of the other people who came from China and didn't really know the system here. They would fall back on the old benevolent societies and things like that. I remember there was the guy who had Sai Woo – Bill Wen – he told me, 'I'm always trying to get your dad.' And he was trying to get me to get into the Toisan Society but it was probably a bit old country for my dad, you know, being born here.

JL: And you would have maybe been the youngest member the Toisan group.

KL: He might have been. Bill Wen and my dad were sort of the same generation. I think it's just that being born here he had a little bit of that, you know, thing that people, you know, 'Oh, someone's fresh off the boat,' or they didn't use that word. They said, 'Just got off the slow boat.' But there was a little bit of that kind of stuff going on. Just in a light hearted way.

JL: That was in reference to a lot of the Hong Kong and other immigrants that were coming in during a specific period?

KL: Yeah. I remember this probably in the '50s or '60s down in Chinatown on Dundas Street. Sometimes people who come into the store who just didn't have a clue and my dad would just say, not 'fresh off the boat,' he never used that, he said, 'just got off the slow boat from China.' So there wasn't a lot of interaction between, say the newer immigrants and the established families.

JL: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. I mean later, the thing is there was no immigration. Like in the times when my parents were growing up there weren't any people fresh off the boat because of the immigration policies from the Canadian government. So the society had this really set way. It didn't change. And the language that they used was the language from when they came from China and it didn't grow, it didn't add new words. And there was sort of this unchangingness about it because no fresh people came in. And so no, I don't think they had immigrants to kind of, sort of bring new life into the culture in a sense. But later when the immigration did open up I

think there was that sense from my dad a little bit. You know, he always helped people filling out their forms, the government forms and things like that and translated stuff for them so he was caring and everything. So this is just in a light-hearted way. There was a division between him as a person who was born here and someone who came as an immigrant and didn't know the ways. Maybe their ways were a bit uncool. I don't know. A bit like that. But it was not serious. He was very involved in the community just in a lot of ways.

JL: So you mentioned Chinatown, I want to return to your family business later but Chinatown must have changed a lot over the course of these different periods of immigration. Can you give me a sense of what Chinatown would have looked like, say in your grandparents' time versus your parents' time versus maybe when you were growing up?

KL: Yeah. In my grandparents' time I can only go from photos. But in the times that I recall it had this very set feeling. And it was an enclave. People in city hall, when they were trying to get rid of Chinatown in the late '60s they said it was a ghetto, but no, it wasn't a ghetto, it was a community. But it was a community – it's very hard to explain. It was a very strong community but people took shelter in each other because they only had each other. I think there was that sense that they existed in a world that wasn't welcoming and they kind of clung together in some ways.

JL: And so when immigration started to happen maybe after the war, especially up in the '60s, did that change the community? Did that change the nature of the community a lot?

KL: Oh yes. Profoundly. I remember at one time, I used to work in my dad's store in Chinatown and then my dad exclaiming, 'There's so many **Hongin**, Chinese people, that I don't know. Where are they coming from?' And so suddenly when they opened the immigration it was, you know, you used to know everybody in Chinatown. And suddenly there would be new faces on the street and people you didn't know. It was very – it was great, but it was very different. It was really different.

JL: So when your father was growing up, were a lot of families living in Chinatown or around that area as well or did they live outside?

KL: I think Chinatown at that time was very small. It was around Queen Street just West of Yonge, Elizabeth and Dundas. In that area. And I think a lot of people lived there but not everybody. I don't think my grandparents lived right down in Chinatown. My dad grew up around Spadina and Dundas, in that area, which was not Chinatown. It was a Jewish area at the time. And my dad grew up with – he spoke Yiddish. He spoke a little bit of Yiddish from living in that area.

JL: So he had a lot of interaction with the Jewish kids growing up?

KL: Yes because the Jews were also outsiders in a way. And he had a lot of friends and he was a Sabbath goy. Religious Jews, they don't do work on the Sabbath, even lighting lamps and things like that and lighting the stove. So he was the goy – the non-Jew – who went in and lit the pilot light, lit the stove on the Sabbath and just did all the household chores that religious Jews didn't do. And he spoke a little bit of Yiddish and he got a lot of his street smarts. I think he admired a lot of the sort of street smart kind of things. And of course Jews, they were the first to discover Chinese food. So they kept a lot of the people. They used to say if it weren't for Jewish patrons our restaurant would be folded. So there was interaction. It was sometimes – there definitely interaction down on Spadina.

JL: Was that due to, in part, by the proximity? Just they would be able to frequent the restaurants?

KL: I think so and they have sort of something in common. It's hard to define. I guess at the time people used to say the Chinese were the Jews of Asia, in the sense that they were, I don't know, in some places pushed around. So I think they had that kind of bond in a way, the two cultures at the time.

JL: So what about your grandparents? What did they think about your father being the Sabbath goy?

KL: Oh, I'm sure they didn't mind because my grandmother was very strict and if there was something she did not approve of, she would not allow it. You know, one uncle, he was a great baseball pitcher, my uncle Earl, and he was invited to try out for the Toronto Maple Leafs baseball team and my grandmother, she didn't think that was an appropriate occupation so she nixed it. And I think my grandfather was a bit sad about that.

JL: So what was an appropriate occupation, according to your grandmother?

KL: Well, not a professional baseball player. That uncle, my uncle Earl, he was a chauffeur, I think, for a while. And he ended up working for drug trading in some capacity. I think she had a bit of the staunch Presbyterian, maybe more than a bit, about her. And I think that was just not something she would approve of. And same with my father, he wanted to be a photographer. He did fashion design way back in the day and he used to be paid for his sketches by one of the fashion houses up here. I forget the name of it. One day he bought some photography stuff. He bought an enlarger and he brought it home and my grandmother really scolded him and he wasn't allowed to do photography. But he kept the enlarger and he gave it to me so I was the one who did the photography.

JL: So one way or the other his passion did get passed down.

KL: I guess so, when I think about it now, yeah. Because he set it up for me. He set the enlarger up in the basement of his store on Dundas and he showed me how to use it and develop the negatives and of course as a drug store there was film and he'd give me film. This was when I was probably I was grade two, so that would be seven or eight I guess. So I guess it was something that he kind of passed on to me.

JL: So how many brothers and sisters did your dad have?

KL: He had uncle Early, aunt Lil, and uncle Roy. So there were four. I think there were four kids.

JL: And when approximately were they born? Roughly?

KL: I don't know. Let's see. Uncle Earl was the oldest by a couple of years. And my dad was born in 1916. So the others would have been around that time. Probably around before 1920 or maybe around 1920. All their graves are in Mt. Pleasant cemetery and there was a Chinese section. So if you go there all the Chinese from Toronto in that time are buried there and it's really hard to find because they did not allow Chinese to have headstones that stood vertically. I guess they just didn't want people to see headstones with Chinese names and Chinese language on it, Chinese characters. So all of the stones are flat. They're lying flat down. So when you walk by you don't see them.

JL: And this is for your father's siblings as well, even when they passed?

KL: For who?

JL: For your father's siblings when they passed away?

KL: Yeah. My uncle and my aunts, my grandparents. Yeah. They're all flat.

JL: And was that just applied to the Chinese or other ethnic groups as well, do you think?

KL: As far as I know it's just Chinese. Yeah. They're right by bridge. They're just on Mt. Pleasant,

that goes up to Mt. Pleasant cemetery, they're just west of the bridge. And you really can't see them, especially because a lot of them don't get cleaned off and it's quite overgrown so you have to know they're there. And it's kind of a wild area. It's not an auspicious kind of – it's not a really nice part of the cemetery. My uncle Roy, his headstone, it didn't say Roy, it says Lloy (spells it) because I guess my grandparents had an accent and he died young so when they said, 'Roy,' it came out 'Lloy' and that's what's on the marker.

JL: So did you ever get to know your aunt Lillian at all?

KL: No. I didn't. She died before I was born. I'm not sure the year she died. It would be on her marker, I guess. But I remember my dad saying she died, he went to see *Gone with the Wind*, and someone he associates that movie with her passing. So he never wants to see *Gone with the Wind*.

JL: So it was pretty early then.

KL: Yeah.

JL: Do you have any sense of whether your grandparents or your grandmother treated your aunt different than her brothers?

KL: No. I don't. I don't have any sense of that. I know my mother, when she came, my grandmother expected her to be a very traditional daughter-in-law. And I think that was difficult for my mother because she had been educated and been to university and so on. But I don't know what my grandmother's attitude was to the daughters, to my aunts at all.

JL: Did they end up working or raising a family?

KL: Yeah. They had family. They adopted. My aunt Lil adopted a little baby. She wasn't a baby. This is sort of an interesting story. I guess there was like a lot of sex trade workers in Ctown, in Chinatown, back in the day. I guess there were a lot of bachelors. I don't know exactly. I recall Chinatown was like the margins. So there was the Ford Hotel where the gay scene was in the Toronto. And then the Continental Hotel which was where the lesbian scene was. This was in the '60s. And it was a lot of street sex trade going on even when I remember. It was just part of life. But there was a little girl. She wasn't Chinese. Most of the sex trade workers weren't Chinese because there weren't women. And she brought her daughter, who was half-Chinese, with her to work and the kid would just be wandering around by herself.

JL: This was at the Continental?

KL: No. This was not the Continental. This would be in the '40s. So my grandmother used to take care of this kid and finally my family adopted her. Her name is Virginia and my aunt Lil is her adopted mom. And she was so grateful that she had the Chinese part of her family because that's why she was adopted basically. In the '50s she met a Chinese student from Chendo and they went back to China in the '50s across the Trans-Siberian railway. That was the only way. This was during the Cold War which was really unusual. So she wanted to be part of the new Chinese nation, you know, the revolution and so on. And, you know, she polished stones at the Great Hall of People just by hand on her hands and knees. She learned Mandarin from my grandmother. So she had a really perfect Beijing accent so she became the English language voice of radio Peking. She introduced the English short-wave broadcasts in English. So she'd get love letters from all around the world. And during the cultural revolution they had to get out. So they got out with the help of an uncle. They called him an uncle, he's from Toronto, but he was in the navy and he was in Hong Kong and they managed to get out just when the cultural revolution was starting. And they went to the U.S. and they were doing very well.

JL: Did she maintain contact with your family and with her biological mother as well?

KL: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. They came up here and lived here. And she had MS, which I think she was quite mistreated during the cultural revolution and she seemed to associate the two things. I don't know if it was. Actually I was going to ask you, are you any relation to Frank Lum and Jeffery? They live in California. Carol and Jeffery? Because they were relatives.

JL: Not that I know of. So being half Chinese, do you think that was attributed to some of the cultural difficulties she had when she was in China?

KL: No. They didn't seem to. She never said that that was anything that really was the cause of any friction or anything. Because she had a very high position. She was a media worker and she had to be very trusted to be allowed to do that. I don't think that was a factor. I think it was just the politics of the time. She told me that when one of the neighbours, the four year old boy, came home from school and criticized his parents and she said at that point she knew something really terrible was going to happen. And they had to get out of China. So I don't think it had to do with her being different or being a foreigner or anything. I think she was quite trusted. She's very Chiense. She embraced the Chinese culture. She encouraged me as a film maker. And she gave me books. She introduced me to LuSHUN the Chinese writer she really admired. So she gave me some translations of his books. So she was, you know, a kindred.

JL: So your grandmother must have obviously had contact with some of the sex trade workers or

how did she know about this baby?

KL: Oh just because, just walking around by itself, you know, a toddler. And just being neglected I guess basically, so she took the kid in and looked after it during the day and would feed it and so on. And then she asked the mother if she could adopt the child and the mother agreed. So, you know, it was just a fact of life. I remember, actually, my dad at the store, this was in the '60s, I'd be working there and when it wasn't busy, when no one was coming in the store, which happens at moments in the day, it's kind of boring. And my dad would stand at the front of his door and I would stand with him and across the street is the Guantong Hotel where they rented rooms for like fifteen minutes or half an hour or something. We'd watch sex trade workers go in with clients and then my dad would check his watch and see what time they came out.

JL: They were non-Chinese.

KL: They sex trade workers were never – I never saw a Chinese sex trade worker, no.

JL: But what was the attitude, I mean, there was this cross-section of cultures. I mean, you were saying the Jewish community was very close to the Chinese community and then you had a lesbian bar.

KL: No. The lesbian bar wasn't the Chinese. It was the Western people.

JL: But it was pretty close to Chinatown, I understand.

KL: It was right in.

JL: So how did the Chinese community react to that, do you know?

KL: I think they just, you know, I remember what would happen, in those days the idea of – the lesbians somehow in some ways, like, one lesbian would act like a male and the other would act like a female. And the ones who were male were like super male. They'd be fighting. These girls would fight on the street. And I know there are some kids living upstairs in the apartments above the store and they were terrified. They were really scared of these women, these really sort of butchy women because they'd be fighting. I guess they wanted to be really male and be super aggressive with each other and fight over girls and whatever. So there were fights. There were gangs. They'd come in and buy little pocket knives and stuff so they could rumble on the street. That was part of life at the time.

JL: And your parents' reaction? Just part of the day to day?

KL: Yeah. I don't ever remember them saying anything about it. Like, my dad would, it was part of life. They were his customers and his thing was you treat everybody with respect no matter who. A lot of time cross dressing guys would come in like, I was a little kid working the store, it was kind of strange. But I wasn't particularly fooled that this was a woman. Obviously it was a man but I know a lot of the salesmen who would come in selling cigarettes. They would sell the cigarettes or the patent medicines for the drug store. And it was like theatre for them. They'd never seen this. And they'd hang out and they just loved hanging out in the store and watching the clientele because it was so different. But my parents never, they didn't shun. They didn't shy away. I don't remember them ever saying anything but just sort of, it was part of life. It was just something that was going on. And it was sad, because there was this one woman, a sex trade worker and she was quite old. She was actually old and not particularly attractive and she was saying her husband, he was an invalid, and this was the only way she could support herself and him. And she would always have to have a bottle of scotch first. But she had like a lot of regular customers. And I felt really sad for her. It was really sad. I remember another time a girl came in and she was really nervous. She bought razor blades. She was shaking. And then we heard that she had slashed her wrists in the hotel across the street. So it was pretty sad. They were sex trade workers and there were reasons. They weren't bad people, necessarily, it wasn't like they were evil, but the circumstances of their lives, maybe they didn't choose to do that.

JL: And so your father's pharmacy catered to, I guess, not just Chinese customers but a whole range of customers.

KL: Yeah. It was right around the corner from the bus stop so there were tourists. And he had the first – it was a Western pharmacy – he was the first graduate, the first Chinese, him and Sam Chin were the first graduates from the U of T graduate school. And he chose to open a store in Chinatown. So he was the first. There was another one in Vancouver before him but it was pretty rare for a Chinese pharmacy. And he would translate. When people had government forms they'd bring them to him.

I think being born here he was given the opportunity to get his pharmacy degree because he was a war veteran. So they had this kind of legislation that war veterans had some priority when they returned. So they couldn't turn him away, I think. And after the war, that was a real turning the corner in race relations because I think people saw what happened in Nazi Germany – what the end result of racism is. So there was sort of an enlightenment.

But there weren't very many so his drug store served a variety of purposes. It wasn't just a drug store. And people used to come in from out of town, Chinese people. I'd be forever meeting, 'Oh yes, your dad's store. I used to come in there and my dad would buy me toys there.' You know, that kind of thing.

E. Chenier 14-3-27 1:40 PM

Comment: Title: Tom Lock, Chinatown Pharmacist, as told by his son, filmmaker Keith Lock

JL: Did he feel he had to open up a store in Chinatown or did he just want to be within that community.

KL: Yeah. He wanted to be in the community, to serve in the community. I think that was the influence of my grandmother probably. He could have opened a store anywhere but he did open in Chinatown. And it was a community in those days. It was like a village within the city. Everybody spoke the same dialect and they weren't actual relatives. They were village relatives or something. It was very close. I remember one day my dad got a phone call from the mailman, who was Chinese, and he had been pushing letters in the door at the store and noticed the door was unlocked so he called my dad right away and my dad went down and he said, 'I'll wait here until you get here.' So it was that kind of, it was community right downtown.

JL: So I want to jump to your grandmother's business. It wasn't located in Chinatown, is that right?

KL: No. Their laundries were not in Chinatown. The one that I know of – there's one on Spadina, and there's one...

(child comes in – 'See ya, dad.')

See ya, David. And there is one on St. Clair West. But they must have close, I think, after I was born they must have closed the laundry around that time. I don't really remember the laundry at all.

JL: And your grandmother was widowed at a fairly young age, is that right?

KL: Yeah. I think so, yeah.

JL: So she ran that laundry on her own?

KL: Well, she ran it with the help of another person, **Wing Bok**. His name was Wing and he really helped her a lot. And I don't know what their relationship was but he really helped her and he was very respected in our family, he was very respected.

JL: What kind of clientele did the laundry cater to if it was sort of not in Chinatown? Were there a lot of non-Chinese customers?

KL: Oh yeah. It would be all non-Chinese. So it was like a Chinese laundry. It wasn't in Chinatown and I guess it catered to the general population. In those days the Chinese really could just have a laundry or a restaurant or maybe a grocery store. They were really sort of the unspoken law. You could not have an other business if you were Chinese. For example, my dad's commanding officer, Roger Chang, he was actually an electrical engineer but no engineering company would hire him. This was in the late '30s, '40s. So his job, before he joined the army, he was a bookkeeper in the back of a Chinese grocery store. That was the work that he was allowed to do by process of an unspoken thing, just by default. He had a degree. He was a brilliant man but he couldn't get a job in an engineering firm because they didn't hire Chinese. So that was the reality. So they had a grocery store for a while but they mostly had laundries.

And there was a real community of laundries in Toronto. So they every year they had kind of a laundries Olympics. They would have competitive shirt ironing, for instance, where they would do time trials or something – who could iron the most shirts in the shortest amount of time.

JL: Did women compete in this as well?

KL: I think so but the guys that my dad would point out, you know, 'He was the fastest,' they were all men. There weren't many girls. There were not many girls in those days. Margaret Ko was saying that in the late '40s or around the end of the war they had a volleyball team and to get enough girls for the volleyball team in Chinatown, which is nine girls, they had just about every girl. And the youngest was 14 and the oldest was 26 and already married, so they had everybody. So I think just by the numbers it was a male thing. I remember my dad was great at ironing and he'd do it very fast. He had a method. Like, you start with the collar, blah, blah, blah, and when you're finished it's perfectly folded. And, you know, sewing, in those days it wasn't just cleaning and ironing and so on. You repaired. That was part of the job. If there was a button that came off, you sewed it back on. My dad could do invisible weaving, invisible mending. You'd just get threads the same colour and you do a cross and you weave it right on the fabric. He could do that.

JL: That's something he picked up from his mother then, probably, or both of his parents.

KL: Probably. It must have been but it was part of the skills that you needed to work in a laundry.

JL: And he worked there as well alongside?

KL: Oh yeah. But I think being kids, they weren't grown up and they didn't – Yeah. He worked there, definitely. I got a feeling, it was my grandmother, like the parents, they did all the work. They worked very hard. My grandmother worked very hard. I asked my dad, 'What did your mother die of?' And he said, 'Overwork.' So I know she worked very hard. She was a very hard worker.

JL: I read a description of one of the photos we have. It was just a portrait of your grandmother but it says that she worked in the laundry but on the weekend she also waited on tables. Is that right?

KL: I think she waited on tables for a short period of time in a restaurant. I don't know very much about that. She did a lot of things because I remember one of my dad's cousins came in from the West coast and he told me, 'I always admired your grandmother,' because when he came to Toronto he didn't have a pair of pants and he had a job interview and he said, 'Your grandmother scrubbed floors on her hands and knees to get money to buy me a pair of pants so I could get a job.' So I think she did whatever. But she was canny, she was smart. She had a rule, like if she bought a pair of shoes for the kids or herself or whatever, she'd always insist that she had an extra pair of shoelaces to seal the deal, otherwise she wouldn't buy the shoes. She was frugal but she was very smart, I guess.

JL: And having no husband around but raising, was it four kids or five kids?

KL: Yeah.

JL: How did she manage between the work and the raising of the kids and looking after the home?

KL: Yeah. I guess it wasn't easy. I'm sure it wasn't easy. She did have Wing Bok to help but it couldn't have been easy. I have no idea really how hard it was for her.

JL: So your father went into a profession. Do you think her desire was, in part, for him to have a better life? Was that kind of something she pushed – education for her children?

KL: I think it probably was, but I don't think it was really, I have the feeling that she was just so involved in managing her life. My dad's attitude to education was, he was smart but it was pretty laissez faire. Just with us kids, he was not the typical Chinese dad, sort of pushing for higher grades and stuff. Because I remember he wanted to do something and my sister had to study because she had a test and I remember him saying to her, 'Why are you studying so hard? All you have to do is pass. As long as you pass you get the same diploma as the person who got 99%.' That was his. And my uncle didn't, I don't think he went to university. But I don't think he had the opportunity. I think they all had to pretty well get out there and work. My dad, because the war came up and he joined the army, and after that he was able to get an education. But my mother had to push him to really do the academic stuff.

JL: So your mother was more of an academic in that sense?

KL: Yeah. She was a microbiologist. She went to school in Australia, like a private school on a scholarship. So she was really academically minded.

JL: Let's talk about your mother's side of the family then. They were in Australia for how long?

KL: They were Australia since it was still a penal colony. It was like the, well some of them the 1840s even. And they settled in the Ruby Flats in Tasmania. They were Chinese. There weren't too many Chinese and my grandmother's mother had bound feet. And her husband, my great-grandfather, I guess, had to build a wall around their house in Tasmania because people would be peering into the windows, trying to see her. And she didn't speak English. She was a real curiosity. So it must have been extremely stressful.

JL: There must have been very few Chinese families in Tasmania at that time.

KL: Very few. They were extremely isolated and they recently recognized the family by they had these cottages near Tin Mine in Tasmania and they named one of the cottages after them. And they had a little ceremony with some government minister. It's called the Tin Dragon Cottages. I guess they're trying to encourage tourism from Asia. So they're recognizing the Asian pioneers. They have a long history in Australia. Their patterns are quite similar to Canada. And some words in Australia, the most archetypical Aussie word – dinkum, fair dinkum – that means something's really good. That is Chinese – *ding gum* – real gold. So that was what the Chinese gold rush prospectors, when they found gold they got really excited and '*Ding gum, ding gum!* Real gold, this is it!'

JL: It worked its way into the popular vernacular.

KL: *Ding gum* means something extremely good in Australian slang. You're a fair dinkum Aussie – it's the true blue. And they spoke exactly the same dialect from the four counties so the immigration patterns were the same. So when my dad, when he got to Australia, he spoke the same dialect. Toisan. My mother spoke *sze yup*. They call it *sze yup*. But it was the same.

JL: So he could communicate with your mother's family.

KL: Yeah. So it was very, you know, very similar to Canada.

JL: How was it growing up in Melbourne for your mother? Would you say it would be comparable to your father's experience in Canada?

KL: Not exactly. She said they were treated fairly well by the Australians. The Australians did have a White Australia policy which is similar to the Chinese Exclusion Act but the Chinese that were there, according to my mother, they treated them quite well. And I think judging from my family and all the photos, they tended to intermarry much more than in Canada. I have blonde cousins that don't look very Chinese at all. So I guess there wasn't that kind of stigma as much. It wasn't stigmatized as much and I remember my mother said, when she met some of the guys from Canada who were in the army and some of them had Chinese accents even though they were born in Canada, she thought that was just really strange because that meant they never left Chinatown. You know, they never talked with anybody except their own little bubble of culture. But of course they lived in different circumstances.

JL: So she and her family felt more comfortable interacting with various communities, you think?

KL: She went to a very exclusive private school and my grandmother, she made clothes for very high-end people. She designed them and sewed them. She was a seamstress but her clientele were kind of basically carriage trade. And my grandfather had a furniture factory. So they kind of mingled with a lot the society in mingle just through their work and she was quite socially capable, I guess.

JL: And they were able to afford to send her to the private school too.

KL: Well she got in on a scholarship. So I don't think they could really afford it but she was able to go. I guess she was a good student. So she went to this very English style private school. I think it's called UHS in Melbourne.

JL: How many brothers and sisters did she have?

KL: She had two brothers. She was the youngest. She is quite a bit younger than my uncles.

JL: And she was the only girl.

KL: She was the only girl, yeah.

JL: So do you think she was treated any differently or do you think she thought of herself as an equal?

KL: Oh she definitely thought of herself as an equal. No question about that. I think she was treated as a woman of that era. I mean, this was before the notion of equality so there were roles that women played that were set by society but I think within those things she was quite... But I think she also really pushed because she was educated and that was not that common probably in those days.

JL: Common for a Chinese Australian or a woman in general?

KL: I think just women in general. It was considered as important for women to be educated generally because they were going to stay home and raise kids.

JL: So her parents were obviously also forward thinking in terms of encouraging her.

KL: Yeah definitely. And I think the whole family was like that. Not just her parents but most of the extended family were like that. They stressed education and they were forward looking. Definitely.

JL: So let's talk about the circumstances of your father and how he met your mother. Maybe you could give me some background as to how your father ended up in Australia in the first place.

KL: Yeah. As you know, during World War II Chinese were not encouraged to join the military. In fact, they were pretty well discouraged. A lot of my dad's friends tried to join when Canada declared war along with Britain against Germany and Japan. They tried to join but were refused. Like Daniel Mah, he wanted to join the airforce but he was not accepted. And of course there was no reason except they were Chinese. That was often given the reason. And a lot of the Navy was White. It was just a White Navy. That was the way they wanted it. But my dad, he told me one day he was walking down Spadina and he ran into one of his Jewish friends. His Jewish friends, according to him, they always had an angle on something. They knew how to do stuff. They had the street smarts. He was in uniform and he said, 'Look, Tom, I'm in the dental corps. It's the best thing. You join the army and when they ask you what you want to do you say you want to be a dentist. And then they put you in the dental corps and you learn a trade and you don't have to carry a weapon. You don't have to go to the front lines. It's perfect.' So my dad thought that sounded pretty good. So he went and he enlisted and they actually took him because they turned back nearly everybody. My uncle Early got turned back. My uncle **Jimmy Lore**, who is a kung fu

master. The two toughest guys in Chinatown they turned away. It was a joke. They turned everybody away but somehow he got in and he did actually get put in the dental corps. And it was so rare. There's clippings: Chinese comes to Guelph to train. It was so rare to have a Chinese doing anything. And I remember my dad told me when he got in the army he was just really surprised helpless the *lofan* boys were because they didn't know how to make a bed. They didn't know how to iron a shirt. They didn't know how to sew a button. Like all these things he learned from working in a laundry and they suddenly had to do for themselves and they were really helpless according to him in basic training.

So he was in the army in 1941, I believe. And when Japan invaded Hong Kong, Britain needed secret agents that they could use just as they did in Europe, in France, but they couldn't use White people because obviously they'd be picked up right away. So the only place in the British Empire where there were populations of Chinese was Canada because Chinese had come to build the railway, as we all know. So they sent these guys from the intelligence. (doorbell rings)

Oh, excuse me.

JL: So we were just talking about your father and his recruitment to the army.

KL: Yeah. Excuse me, I'm just going to close this door. I know all this because I prepared a screenplay so I was able to interview.

JL: So he was in the army and the non-Chinese boys didn't know how to look after themselves.

KL: Yeah. That's right. And so when Hong Kong fell they needed secret agents, so Britain sent this guy to Canada. He was a major and he had been in Hong Kong, Major Kendal. He was quite illustrious. He had exploits escaping from Japanese held territory and so on. And he came and recruited. They decided to find people who were already in the army, people of Chinese heritage that were already in the Canadian army, and there weren't very many. They managed to find twelve. I know a couple of people refused. The ones in Toronto, he met them at the Royal York Hotel and he told them it would be dangerous but it would be a chance to show what they can do. They had to volunteer, of course. So my dad volunteered. He told me he thought he was being ordered to volunteer. He's either very self effacing or very sort of the street smart kind of thing. They couldn't train at Camp X, which was the training ground for the secret agents. For instance, Ian Fleming, the author of *James Bond* was at Camp X in Canada. Because they were Chinese and it would be a security thing if people saw them walking around there. So they found a place in the Okanagan Valley, a remote area where they could train. And they trained them in sabotage, they trained them in all these weapons, special weapons and radio operating. All the things that secret agents train, hand to hand combat. My dad, when we had bb guns, he was the best shot. And he never raised the bb gun to his shoulder. He held it at his hip and he could hit very tiny targets and that was how they trained because it takes one and a half seconds to raise the weapon

and sight it. That's slow. So they were trained just shoot from the hip and be a little bit faster and that kind of stuff. Very highly trained, I guess. They did underwater demolition, so they trained to attach mines on to the side of ships that were in the harbour. And they trained with these things called L pills. Lethal. L for lethal. So they carried these pills so they could avoid capture because they didn't want them to be captured. They were told that the planners of the mission, their planning was for 80% casualties for these guys. So it was basically very dangerous.

JL: Did your father know that when he joined?

KL: Yeah. They knew it. They found out or they were told or something. Of course they had this kind of bravura: 'Oh, I don't like those odds,' kind of thing, you know. But they were able to use it for their own ends. When they were in Okanagan, they told them that their Asian digestive systems could not digest the Western army food and they said they had to have Chinese food. So every week they would send an army truck down to Vancouver and they would load up with chickens and Chinese greens and then drive it up. And of course they were either laundry guys or restaurant guys so, you know, there were a lot of cooks there. And my dad learned to cook from Roy Chan who is from the Panama Cafe in Victoria. So they had Chinese food. They kept chickens on this rock, this island they called Chicken Island. I have photos of it. So they used it. Their thing was: they need us more than we need them, let's push it a bit, let's rock the boat.

And when they were trained they were shipped out. They were under American command. So they shipped out through San Francisco and through Hawaii and then down to Australia. They stopped in, I think, New Guinea and then to Australia. But because they were Chinese they couldn't travel in United States territory so they had to each get a sponsor, even though it was war time, they were under military service and under American command. So they had to get a sponsor. So to get to Hawaii they had to have an American in Hawaii sponsor them. So my dad had this woman, Viola, who we always called aunt Viola, who sponsored him. She was his sponsor. It was just like a paperwork thing but she grew quite fond of my dad. She really seemed to like my dad and they would go visit her after the war. And she had a house right on Waikiki beach so she's quite wealthy and she always said she was going to leave all her money to my dad. And I think she did mention him in the will because he did get a phone call from a lawyer saying your aunt passed away, your aunt Viola in Hawaii. And my dad said, 'She's not really my aunt,' and he just hung up. So it was one of those things that there was a bond. But just the restrictions, you know, it's really unthinkable that they would do that.

And at the time when they were in the Okanagan, they were visited by a general, very high ranking guy, General Pearkes (spells the name), and he won a Victoria Cross in World War I. He was a very distinguished soldier. And he met them and the talked with them in their camp and he was astounded. They told him all the things that Chinese were restricted. And he was astounded. He didn't know this. And he didn't know that Chinese could not vote. And I think he realized the injustice. I think they all did. And he wanted to help. And he promised them that when the war was over he would help them get the vote. I guess he was moved because it was new information to him and here they were putting their necks on the line and they didn't have the basic citizenship rights as everyone else. And after the war he kept his word and he did work for

Chinese enfranchisement in B.C. And the fact that the Chinese served in World War II. That was the irrefutable evidence that Chinese Canadians were worthy of full citizenship. And I think that was part of the reason they did not want Chinese in the military because I think they knew if they were allowed to serve in war time that they would have no choice. And there was a lot of anti-Chinese feeling.

So they went to Australia and my mother was working at Melbourne General Hospital in, what was called bacteriology in those days. It's now called microbiology, I think. So they met. I think they met on the beach. And there weren't that many Chinese in Australia either so they hung around and they were in a group and my parents met and eventually got married.

JL: So they got married in Australia.

KL: They were married in Australia. I think it was 1945. So the war wasn't quite over yet.

JL: And were any of your father's family able to come to the wedding or was it mostly your mother's family?

KL: No. They weren't. In fact there's a letter from my grandmother saying: You're getting married, oh, Bessie is really surprised. So I guess that was one of my dad's friends in Toronto, who I knew, aunt Bessie. She wasn't Chinese but she was part of the Christian thing.

JL: So your dad had dated...

KL: I guess they must have dated or were pals, they were friends or something. He never really said too much about it.

JL: Do you think your dad felt that he should marry Chinese? Was that something your grandmother probably expected?

KL: Probably. Yeah. Quite possibly. I don't think, I mean maybe they dated, but I don't know how serious it was. It's hard, because you're talking about your parents and they don't really tell you everything. But I did notice, because there was this letter on V-mail. They take letters and then they photograph them and shrink them so that it took less weight and then they would fly them. It was just a war time thing. I can show you an example. And I just noticed I was reading one and I noticed 'Oh, Bessie will be surprised,' and there seemed to be more to it than that so I don't know. I mean it was war time and you're thousands of miles away and I'm sure the situations are not easy to unravel, especially when it's your parents. But my parents really got along well and they

seemed to really be compatible. And I don't know if that was something that was in the back of my dad's mind. I don't think so because they were pretty integrated, you know, being born in Canada. I don't think it was that. I don't know.

JL: But they had a lot of similarities in terms of thinking and background, do you think?

KL: I think background because they were both born outside Asia and they spoke English and Chinese. They spoke exactly the same dialect. There weren't many choices probably in Toronto for a young Chinese man. There weren't many girls in Chinatown so there would be a bit of an imperative I guess to go far. So I guess they seemed to...I don't know about the nature of the relationship. My dad said he got married because they were going to send him on a dangerous mission and if you were married they wouldn't accept you because it was for single men only, which is true.

JL: What did your mother think about this when he said that though?

KL: It's probably I think my dad's personality, like you know, that's a bit of it, not the hustle but the street smarts thing. But it's also the way they talked, as veterans. They're kind of, I don't know, tough.

JL: Valerie Mah was telling me that she did a speech at your mother's funeral said that, 'Well Joan saved Tom's life.' Which is true in a sense.

KL: She saved his life. That's right. Because he was supposed to go on this mission and because he was married he wasn't allowed to go and they went to Sarawak and they were behind the enemy lines and the other guys they all won military cross, which is one of the highest decorations. They were just behind enemy lines for a few days and then the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan, the first atomic bomb. And so they held, everything went on hold because they didn't know what would happen and then Japan did surrender after the second bomb and it wasn't too long after that so they were lucky. They all survived.

JL: And your dad, did he stay behind in Australia or was he sent back to Canada for duties?

KL: No. He was in Australia. And then they all returned to Canada, I think it was either '45 or '46 but they all went back as a unit. And they were told when they walked off the boat, the customs people, 'Don't touch their bags,' because they were this elite secret force and it was too secret they couldn't go through their bags or they couldn't question them, 'Where were you?' or anything like that. So it was a very elite thing and it was very secret. In fact I didn't know about it until the '80s

when Roy MacLaren wrote the book, *Canadians Behind Enemy Lines*. He was writing a book on the secret agents used in France and in the archives he came across some reference to the Chinese Canadians and he didn't know about this. So he ended up writing a book on it. So he came to the house and talked to my dad. And up until that time my dad always said that he was in the dental corps. And he never mentioned this other thing. I guess they were told to keep it secret. They were under the Official Secrets Act. They couldn't tell anyone for 40 or 50 years and they all just kept quiet about it.

JL: Including, well your mother would have known a bit about it.

KL: My mother would have known a bit but she never said much. I guess she must have known but it was not something that they talked about, certainly not to us. But, you know, war time. My mother she had secrets, she was in charge of secrets too. She had penicillin. It was like a secret, it was a very secret thing because it was the first anti-biotic. Especially because if you get a wound and it gets infected you die. But with penicillin it was worth whole divisions of extra soldiers because you could keep people alive and she was in charge of culturing it in Melbourne and she had to lock up the formula. It was this whole secret thing.

JL: Tell me how she got into microbiology or bacteriology I guess it was called.

KL: She read a book called *Microbe Hunters* when she was a kid and she gave it to me, I actually have the book. And it really influenced her. She just loved it. It's this story of Louis Pasteur and Leeuwenhoek and different scientists who discovered historically that there were micro-organisms and she just was fascinated so she did bacteriology as it was called then in university.

JL: And what university did she go to?

KL: I'm not sure. I think it was University of Melbourne.

JL: And was she was one of the only Chinese Canadian women there at that time?

KL: I would assume she must have been at the time. But you know, she didn't really mention that. I don't think it was a big deal in those days to her. She had this kind of private school background and she had that sort of establishment thing about her. She never remarked on it and she was quite aware because she would say, 'Never buy Outspan Oranges from South Africa because they have this apartheid system.' And one of my uncles he was a tennis umpire. They were kept out of South Africa because of this and so on and so on. So she knew about it. She never really made any remarks about university. I never really thought about it.

JL: There weren't many barriers to her profession or to rising to the level that she attained?

KL: I don't think so but as I said, she had this kind of elite schooling. And I think in the sciences it's a meritocracy in a sense so if you are capable academically you're able to do the work, I guess. Her boss won a Nobel prize after she left for isolating the influenza virus and when he found she was going to be emigrating to Toronto he said, 'Oh, I'll send a letter to my friend, Charlie,' and Charlie was Dr. Charles Best. Another Nobel laureate, the co-discoverer of insulin, of course. So she had this letter, from two Nobel laureates, a letter of introduction from one to the other rather and so when she got to Toronto, she went down to Sick Kids Hospital and they gave her the same job. And they said, 'Do you want to start tomorrow?' So I don't think she suffered the way my dad partly did, as much. It didn't seem to be that big an issue to her. I don't remember her ever remarking about how she was kept out of something.

JL: In terms of coming to Canada though, there was no virtually no Chinese immigration when she came – 1946 I guess. So what kind of process did she have to go through as a war bride to get permission to enter?

KL: Yeah. After they got married, I think their first choice was to live in Australia but because of the White Australia policy my dad was not permitted to settle there. And then Canada had the Chinese Exclusion Act so my mother could not go to Canada. So they were basically stateless as a couple and there was an act of the privy council which would allow Asian war brides to come to Canada. And I think it wasn't just for my dad's military group. There were war brides married to regular White soldiers because they were in the Far East and they wanted to bring their bridges back. And in Europe there were tonnes of war brides, no problem, but because of the Exclusion Act, the Asians, that's a problem. But they realized that's a bit of hypocrisy I guess. So the privy council, which is a way of enacting a law that the cabinet can do without going through parliament, so they can just basically make a decree. So they put an act to the privy council that would allow Asian war brides – it was basically Chinese war brides, it says Chinese war brides – to come to Canada. So that's how she came to Canada and it waived on her paper, as I recall, it says that it waives the head tax. So they had the Exclusion Act but they also had the head tax.

JL: So you couldn't come, but if you did come, you would have to pay.

KL: Yeah. You're not allowed to go, but if you did go, you would have to pay. And when she left Australia my mother told me that as she was leaving the Australians officials said, 'You're welcome to come back anytime as an Australian citizen but don't bring your husband and don't bring your children.'

JL: That's pretty prohibitive.

KL: Yeah. So she was really pissed. So she left and she thought that was pretty bad. And of course my father was in Australian uniform. He was a member of the Anzac – Australian New Zealand Army Corps. So it's a lot of, I don't know, injustice? What's the word?

JL: So when she came to Canada there was her and another war bride, is that right?

KL: Yeah. She came with Myrtle Wong who is from Bendigo and they came on the same boat together.

JL: Was it just the two of them or was it the whole special operations?

KL: No. They came separately. I think they must have come after. The guys returned to Canada and were demobilized and then I think she came in '46. So it was a little bit after because I remember that the commanding officer, Roger Chang, met her at the port and got her on the railway station and everything. Because she didn't know a soul here except for the guys. And there's actually a bond here because my mother's cousin, they just came to Australia just to visit, this was just a couple of months ago. And when they come they visit the Canadian war vets every time they come. So they must have hung out quite a bit.

JL: She and Myrtle must have had a bond as well, making that journey.

KL: I think so. Yeah. She told me that Myrtle, they had a little bit of money to bring with them and Myrtle exchanged her pounds, the Australian pound was based on the British pound, before they left and they got on the boat and my mother exchanged hers after when they got to Canada or vice versa. It must have been vice versa because in the time that they made the trip the English pound dropped in value against the American dollar and the Canadian dollar so much by not exchanging her money before she got to Canada she did, or maybe exchanging her money before she left, she ended up with more than she would have if she had exchanged her money later, or something. Yeah, I mean, they were still friends and I saw Myrtle I guess a month ago, a few weeks ago.

JL: Myrtle's living in London?

KL: No. She came up with uncle Hank Wong for their son, Rick Wong's birthday, which they also do. So I saw them there. And Rick and I are friends. We met not knowing our parents had this

common history. So I just met him and we were talking and I said, 'My mother's a Chinese Australian.' And then he said, 'Oh that's funny. My mother was a Chinese Australian.' And then we sort of kept comparing and comparing: 'My father was in the Chinese special operations group – the commandos.' 'Oh, my father was in the commandos.' And then we realized oh, they were in the same group. And then we found they were in the same boat coming back together. So that was quite a coincidence. So I see them every so often. I see Myrtle and Hank. Myrtle still has a touch of her accent.

JL: Australian?

KL: Australian, yeah. And my mother had a touch. I mean they've been in Canada so long that they pretty well lost most of it.

JL: Were they a bit of a sensation when they finally settled? I mean, there's that newspaper article on them.

KL: Yeah. The newspaper article says something like: Chinese war brides or something. And I'm not sure, like the one that you showed me said Chinese war brides come to Toronto or Canada or something but the one I recall and I'm not sure if it's in our collection. I don't know if they changed the heading for a different edition but I think it said Chinese Canadian or part of the article used Chinese Canadian. It's something to check. Because I remember thinking, 'Wow, they used that word: Chinese Canadian.' And that's kind of unusual.

(child speaking)

JL: You talked a little bit about what your mother's impressions of Canada were when she first arrived here. Because she was from Australia and slightly different, was this, was she a bit of an oddity or did she fit in with the rest of the community would you say?

KL: Excuse me.