

Interview with Alice Yeh, Interviewed by Kenneth Huynh, September 2011, in Toronto, Ontario

00:00:00-00:00:37

In University of Toronto <I see> and, and there were some other <so you must of had so many people> yeah, there were other business people. Young business men who were single and they lived there <I see> so that was a wonderful place for Church to have their meeting <and they would just come together?> Yeah come together for them to worship the, the Christ you know. And, and uh we were able to use the facilities and they were able to accommodate and learn how to live a Canadian of life. I, I  
00:00:38-00:00:47

I so look forward to actually speaking to you about that. Just to understand what that means, because I think what Canadian means to me now, and Canadian means to you then must of

00:00:48-00:02:08

Well you know, I tell you most of the Chinese families there, there aren't very many because they don't allow them to bring their families over in those days <yeah I really wanna ask you about that> yeah. And most of the, these business people if, if they bring their families they live above their stores. Uh around Chinatown and they seem to keep together in, in uh in a clique. You know like together in for, for safety and for, for social gatherings and for, for get together. They feel more safer if they're together the whole Chinese <?> and in those day they don't speak much English <they would speak?> Chinese most, Chinese. Except the business uh people, they, they learn as they went along doing business in Chinatown. You know? And the Chinese people who lived elsewhere they would congregate down Chinatown to, to buy Chinese food. You know? And the groceries, because that the only place that you can get the groceries and things. <?> down Chinatown. And in those there were only just one Chinatown <right, right> on, on Dundas Street there you know, yeah.

00:02:10-00:02:43

Auntie Alice, um I think Ken has some forms he wants you to <yeah> so, so let's do that now. <Sure okay> Um and yeah today's interviews just to speak to um just tell me about yourself, and how you came to Canada and what was life like in the Church. Just start with that and to just sort of um. Yeah, its basically to tell? Hears this interview or when I type it down to give a sense of who you are and who you are in the community.

00:02:43-00:03:38

Sure. Well first of all I'm a second generation Chinese. My father came to complete the railway the CPR railway <okay> in BC as a coolie labour. And after he finished he decided to remain in Canada, because in those days they have an option whether he can remain in Canada or they will pay for trip to return to China. A lot of the people would return to China and build palatial homes on their villages. But my father decided that he would like to stay here. It is a new life, a new surroundings and he liked to settle uh, in Canada and he decided to go back to China. He had the option to bring his wife over, and he brought my mother over and I was here. I was one of four. <You were born in BC?> In BC, in Victoria BC.

00:03:39-00:03:42

Okay, and, and just to state for the camera your name is Alice Yen.

00:03:42-00:03:49

Yeah my name is Alice Yen. I'm born in Victoria, BC <do you have> In October 10th, 1919

00:03:50-00:03:52

Okay. And, and do you have a Chinese name?

00:03:53-00:04:19

Yes, I uh my Chinese name is Ji You Lin (?) <Okay> Ji means it, it's a surname for, means vermilion red, vermilion and uh you means jade and Lin is a flower, lotus flower. Chinese people like to name their ch, their girls <flowers> flowers <My mother's name is flower> Right, right.

00:04:20-00:04:25

Umm and, and, your, your father came from do you know the village? And, and where in China?

00:04:26-00:08:41

Uh, uh umm [Chinese] <yup> in, in a rural district of Canton, Guangdong Province. Yeah. In the early days. Before 1910 because my mother came in 1910 and I'm born uh, uh 1919 and the end of the second, uh first world war. First World War ended in 1918 and my brothers and sisters already born and I was uh born in 1919 <and how many brothers and sisters did you have?> I have two brothers and one sister <two> their all gone now. I'm the only living member of the house. <Oh wow> and my, my husband died in 1970, so I've been uh here alone. But I have many friends, and I, I have the church. The church is like my family. The church and, and here. Because my father was a man of the church when he came as a coolie labour by, he was met by the Chinese Minister and he was taken to the Chinese Presbyterian church in Victoria and that's where we, where I grew up in. In Victoria, involvement with the Chinese Presbyterian Church. So when I left Victoria, I of course I would anywhere I would go I would look for a Chinese Presbyterian Church and I would become a member of the Chinese Presbyterian Church wherever I lived <wow> So I, I have been a long standing member in fact I've been with this Church in Toronto for over fifty years now <WOW> yeah [laughs] I have uh, at different been away in the far east. But as soon as I come back, I'm, I join the Church again and, and I have a lot of activities when I was involved with the church. Um, but I think it, it's wonderful because the people the Toronto they immediately will find friends if they go to the Church and always there's, there's always people who are friendly and caring you know and make you feel very much at home and not a stranger. And it's very nice because you, you have the scripture, you share the scriptures and, and you learn about Christ. And you grow as uhhh <as a person?> as yourself and as a Christian. I feel that my Christian growth is due to the Chinese Presbyterian Church, because you know when I first came and, I, I was studying the Sunday school classes. One days, uh one of the leaders asked even I would teach Sunday school. Oh I said, "Oh Ken [?] I can't teach because I don't know the scripture very well." But he says, "God, will find a way for you." And as I found, as I taught and I found I discovered that I learned more about Christ and through teaching and through indolent in the church I have come to uh, accept Christ as my wonderful Lord and saviour and I think that's what makes me, uh, feel good these days. Because you know we all encounter ups and downs and we always know that God's love is there. Beside us. You know, you can always depend on him and it, it helps you to uh overcome problems, and find solutions to them I, I'm very grateful for the Church, very. And especially during my old age now. I, I have some wonderful people who come to take me to Church, every Sunday and I, as I'm not able to go on my own now, and they bring home. So I feel very much a part of the Church still.

00:08:42-00:08:59

And the Church has, has really been <yeah> this huge part of your life forever, since you were young <right, right> so what was it like growing up? I mean before we even speak about how you came to Toronto, what was it like in Victoria's Church are there differences or?

00:09:00-00:11:38

Oh no the Victoria's just as good. Its outreach program too for the community and I grew u, umm, together with, in, we lived just outside the, the outside the China, Chinatown. My, my father bought a house right outside, just near the boundary of Chinatown and the Caucasian uh, uh residences and uh, my father used our house to uh, welcome other people. Other Chinese, you know come from the Far East. So our house is always full of people, even though we only have, I only have three, two brothers and one sister. You know we have a small household, but we still have a lot of people going in and out, because our home is always welcome. Uh to new strangers, who come to Canada, and, and they often stay with us, and my mother and my father would help to, them to adjust to Canadian life. And, and often they call our house the honeymoon house because <oh really> the, the families elsewhere would send their daughters to my, my mother for her to look after until she get married. And then after they get married, they would uh, uh stay with us for the honeymoon until, until they could find a place of

their own <wow> SO they called our house the honeymoon house. <Wow> I still remember the house. Its right one 2016 Blanchard Street and of course its uh, been tak, torn down because there's a highway there now. I went back to Victoria, to look for my house. The house where I was born in and <and it wasn't> I'm sorry it wasn't there <I am so terribly sorry> Yeah, aha but that's progress hey. [Laugh] Yeah. So you know yeah Chinatown was uh, uh, a group where Chinese people have businesses and the Chinese family would come and live in upstairs in, in a business establishment <and this is in Victoria?> In Victoria. It's the same here too, until the, uh, the families grew and they bought houses elsewhere in the suburb and they have a palatial home. And then when they have families they send their children to uh, school. University and they become doctors, engineers and they become professionals.

00:11:39-00:11:41

What did your father do after he was coolie labourer?

00:11:42-00:15:53

He was just a labourer working in a warehouse <okay> at, at AP Slade [?] <Okay> I went down looking for the wholesale house, it was still there, and it was still there [laughs] but um, of course uh different people. They're different people. But anyway Victoria's changed. And, and you know in Victoria in the old days people don't like to cha, to send their children to school because they say, 'well what's the use of sending my, my uh my daughter and my son to university? Because you can't get a job anyway.' You know because their Chinese you see, <right> and there were, there was uh so discrimination and um they are unable to get professional jobs, even if they are trained to do it. So umm they, they usually just labour jobs and house work and, and rest, they open restaurants and became entrepreneur. You know and, and very uh, and uh started a wave of a, of uh restaurants. You know Chinese cooking; introduce Chinese cooking and Chinese food to the community. Which they like very much. And, and a lot of Chinese became very wealthy because they have uh, they open restaurants and they were able to make a good living on that. They worked hard, but they managed to do well. Cause they, they lived frugally you know. And they are very good citizens, you never hear anything. Uh you know, uh anything that is uh before the courts concerning Chinese except for gambling <okay> yes the gambling is cause, they don't have families to go to, and then after the work they find some amusement and gambling was the only thing they could do. And of course you mentioned about inter-marriages too because they don't allow the women to come. And they uh, they maybe get involved and, and, and meet some people uh in the community and they married them and they provide good homes for them and most of these uh, in the early days you know these uh, uh young, young women they come from good homes too. They are not professional people <are you talking about the women that they would meet in?> Yes, in Canada in the early days. In Victoria and now it's different, because once they are educated they meet people who are educated also, and then the, the professional marry professionals and you have different uh, uh component of family. Like you know and, and Chinese have come a long and I think they have in uh, the economic backbone in Canada in too [laughs] I feel, I feel this greatly because they are not afraid of doing hard work. And they're not afraid of tackling anything they will work hard and, and especially after the Second World War. When they took over jobs of the soldiers going overseas, they discovered the Chinese are loyal, faithful hard workers, industrious and so after the second world war, they began hiring Chinese, and offices uh, were open, business offices were open to the Chinese and you know even if I was um, educated an, an in secretarial work. I was able to get a job in the labour department whereas a Chinese would not be able to get a job in, in, in any Canadian offices in the early days. They can't work in banks. But they were beginning in those days after <this is immediately after the world war?> Yeah, yeah they, they learned that the Chinese are faithful and dependable so they hired them.

00:15:54-00:16:21

Ca-can you tell me more about, personally your experience about what it was like to, cause you speak about the discrimination <yes> and you speak of land, and rightly so. I think you speak [coughs] excuse

me <yeah> [clears throat] you speak with a great deal of pride about the Chinese community <oh yes, yes> Umm, but the history shows it, it wasn't an easy life <no> by any means <no, it wasn't> Um  
00:16:22-00:19:45

For instance my sister, my brother they were uh at one point they were taken out of the public schools. You know the Caucasian public school and herded into a school for Chinese children <okay> and I remember in Victoria they called that the Chicken House because my mother and all the ? They were up in arms about this. Because they said, "How can our children learn to speak English if they are not admitted into the Caucasian school?" You know they would be speaking Chinese all the time and they won't be able to learn <yeah> so they well objected to that, and finally within a year or so they did away with all those uh, discrimination. They allowed them back into the school, the Caucasian school. So when I came along I was uh able to attend the, the schools you know with my Cauca-Caucasian friends. So the uh, um and I think it was after the wa, second world war two, the first world war two. It was beginning to crumble you know the discrimination begin to crumble. Especially after the repeal of the gri, with the immigration act allowing women to come in. You know in 19, in the early twenties, 1920's they repealed the law so uh, they, they were allowed to mingle more freely and, and be able to get, get the good jobs. In, in fact I was the first Chinese girl to work in a bank. When I came to Toronto <Really!?!> Bank of Nova Scotia, yeah, I remember <you were the very first?> First Chinese girl and I worked for the first Chinese bank manager at Bank of Nova Scotia. Mr. Yee, he's dead and gone now. But I remember he hired me. He came to the church one day and asked if there's anybody who would be able to work uh for him, you know uh because at that time, there were a lot of Chinese sending money uh to their families in China and, and they, they, they need someone to help him. To process this, you know so they, he came in and I filled the bill. Because I knew something about office <office work> yeah office work. Yeah so I was hired. Cause I was the first one, I remember my friend came after. She was the second and then were more and more you know. But you know the thing is um, they can see the, the hard work you know and the dedication you give to your work you know they see this an, and uh that was the beginning. <That was the very, very beginning> Oh yeah [laughs] but I remember in, in later days of course things are open. And now after the Second World War the picture entirely different <was it> you know the, the, the people bring the wealth to upgrade the economy of Canada <right, right Chinese immigrants who, who already had money and who were descendants of coolie labourers> yeah, right, right, yeah. They were welcome.

00:19:46-00:20:10

They were. Yes they because had the money [laughter] they quite literally had the money. <Right> was it ever hard? I mean I think you speak quite beautifully and I thank you for that. Of just your life in, in BC and your life in Toronto and, and there is this umm in speaking to you I hear the story of, of, of triumph <yeah> this is very much the story of rising above. <Well you know> above the circumstances.

00:20:11-00:21:16

I, I, I know that I have had a very uh, special life in many ways. Because when I, at the, the time, the timing of my life you know my youth is, is a very crucial time. And at that time you know there was a the, the Chinese Nationalist Government trying to uh, uh upgrade the young people to teach them uh you know [Chinese] the young, young people. With a nationalist group. They sent people to educate the, the Chinese people overseas, concerning what is happening in China and you know the, the um General [Chinese] regime you know so, I was involved with not only the English people, the speaking young people's group, but the Chinese group too. And, and I heard a lot and I remember uh, I learned a lot about my Chinese politics you know during those years. And, and I

00:21:16-00:21:20

When you say, sorry to interrupt, Chinese politics, you mean Chinese politics in China?

00:21:21-00:28:42

E Chenier 14-3-13 10:31 AM

**Comment:** She means the 1940s. Has this been accurately transcribed?

China yes, uh political. Like uh nat-nationalist uh versus the communist. Yeah, and so you know. So I'm, I'm a really die hard nationalist [laughter] Well anyway, I'm very involved in fact. When I work in, in embassy in Tokyo that was one of my, I worked for the national ambassador from Taiwan. So um, uh I really entrench in the nationalist policy. But I uh, anyway I think, I think that's part of Chinese history you know I feel I'm very much a part of it too. But anyway the thing is um, I when I was young uh and I finished high school because there was so much discrimination our young people, there's ten of us we all live within, within a few blocks of each other. And we decide we will start a young people's group to um cut down the walls of discrimination and ignorance and so we call ourselves, "The Chinese Canadian Youth Forum" we're the first group who did that in Victoria and how we did it. We thought we'll, we don't to uh make a big uh do about it, but we do it a quiet way by bringing some of our Chinese culture to the Caucasian people. To let them understand what China, Chinese are about because in the old days in, in Victoria Chinatown there they said, "Don't send you children to Chinatown because you'll be killed with a dagger. They will, they will kill you with a dagger." You will get hurt you know, and because in those days Hollywood have films about Dr. Fu Man Chu and, and all those sinister stories. <He's still around, those stereotypes> [laughs] yeah <those stereotypes are still affecting people> yeah [laughs] and, and uh this is [?] China's house, so what happened our group decided we'll open and take tours you know uh from our Church and we welcomed the Canadian churches and we take them to tour around Chinatown, share some of their food. We have cookouts and then when in bazaar we Chinese food and to serve them and, and the time at the same time we, we um earn some extra money for our basketball team and for, for different groups you know in our church and at the same time we share some of our culture with the Canadian. They loved the Chinese food and they, they enjoy so much that they want to learn. So we taught them how to cook and, and then the Chinese restaurant begin to blossom. And, and they they begin to have restaurant outside of Chinatown and it was wonderful. It was, and we were invited to put on shows. You know we thought we'll put on shows, but we Chinese Opera shows but we speak in English, so that they'll understand, understand what it's all about. <It would be almost like Beijing Opera you would> Yeah like a stage opera show. But it's not singing its, its dialogue. Okay we speak in dialogue because our group of enterprising, there's only ten of us. You know they met in our home. My mother's very good, my mother always welcomed us and always make us lots of refreshments so the kids used to like coming to us. <? To eat western> Yeah [laughs] so our group we used to meet and we used to do all these things and they like it. And, and we caught the attention of the adjudicator, the BC adjudicator drama festival and he says, "well I, I um would like you to put on a play at our drama festival. Not as a competition. But as an attraction. To attract the people on the program to come to our, our drama," and, and so we did. We used to go to the Chinese Opera and learn how to dress and how, what their stories are about. We wrote it, we printed it and studied it and produce it. And it was wonderful, so we got to uh teach them what Chinese culture is about. You know, after all our social life maybe a little bit different but it, its uh still holds people's interest. How they live, how they work, how they get married and what happen after they marry. You know what life is all about and, and you know people got to know the Chinese a lot better. And as a result you know the, the uh the walls are being torn down little by little. So you know we had a wonderful time, our group. And then I, I left the group that was in from '36 to '41 I came East because I, I was um working for the uh war department I was asked to go to Ottawa. That was during the war you see uh I, I went for a war department. So I worked there for a couple of years and one of the supervisors said to me, said, "Alice you know." <So you started off storytelling, I mean you started off in, in Victoria> in Victoria <and your job saying> and we, we I got involved in a young people and then <okay, okay I see> and then uh there was a second world war coming so <right> I was <then this was how you ended working for the war department, your political involvement with the> yeah. Then I quit then I, I travel from Victoria to Ottawa <to Ottawa, okay> and then when I was in Ottawa working for the department um I had a chance to organize the young people in Ottawa too. You know because uh there were uh, uh pockets of Chinese families in, in

Ottawa and they were all in the laundry business, you know they, they were not in professional uh in laundry business and some of them are diplomats but they don't mingle with the Chinese very much. But you know gradually our group of young people in Ottawa through the mission, got through to a lot of uh, uh Chinese diplomats who are stationed there. We invite them to our, our uh our church our mission and uh invite them to our, our ? And, and they, they invite us to their uh celebration. You know national celebration and everything so we got well integrated in Ottawa. And I, I remember we form a group to welcome Madame Chiang, Madame Chiang Kai-shek when she visited Ottawa and we organized where, where we choose uh, uh, uh a little girl to present her with a bouquet of flowers and, and we met her and all the dignitaries at the Chateau Laurier. WE, we had quite a time. WE had quite a <that sounds actually quite amazing. That, that's like history> yeah <literally> yeah little, by little <yeah> you know opportunities are there. You have to make use of those opportunities you know.

00:28:43-00:28:46

What you were you doing for, for the <for the pos?> for the government?

00:28:47-00:29:21

For the government I was working with the postal censorship. It's a highly ummm <censorship?> yup, yup um postal postal censorship. Not uh, English, English letters you know, English letters that they think is, is uh highly suspect. You know they say, you know and then I work in that depart, they lock me up in a room you know. [Laughs] When in a group you, they lock you up and they, they, they unlock you after the five o'clock <so this is how you ended up in Ontario> yeah, I uh.

00:29:22-00:29:32

So you started doing, and I'm sorry just for my own sake <yeah> I'm trying to put together the story here. You worked for the, the National, you formed the nationalist youth organization effectively

00:29:33-00:36:19

Well, we, no we didn't form it. We got the group together to and worked together with a nationalist government and you know who were uh who, who opened their office there in Victoria they, they, they leave there and then they offer uh, offer uh, uh young people offer groups to young people to teach them the politics. You know so wha, we were curious we want to know about China because China was at war and she was just uh, you know wakening. Waken, awakening for her sleep as a dragon you know in those days. Well anyway I, I was um after I graduate in, in secretarial work the government sent people to Ottawa to [?] school to recruit people to work in the war department, and I was one the people recruited to work. And they sent me uh, they sent me eventually to work with the uh postal censorship. You know I went through a different uh, changes of office and then to the uh postal censorship. But it was very interesting, because it was there that I, I decided to quit and go back to University to get my degree <degree in?> Yeah degree, because my, my supervisor said you can do something with a piece of paper, "Alice if you don't have a piece of paper, you can't do anything," you know you have to get the piece of paper. So <So you decided to go to University. Was it in Toronto that you went to University?> Yeah, went Toronto University <Okay so> and they don't uh, [laughs] and they didn't admit me you know. <Because you were Chinese?> Yeah because no, no they didn't admit me because I didn't have my senior matriculation. Matriculation, senior matriculation is in Ontario but not in uh <I see right> BC. BC just junior matriculation <right, right> So I went back to, I went back to Harvard Collegiate to get my senior matriculation and then the following year I was admitted to uh University of Toronto so <this, was in 19...> Yeah <doesn't, doesn't sound easy> Yeah, but I was determined [laughs] and I, I worked in uh see I stayed at um, um at the Presbyterian residence and I didn't have to pay anything because I work in the office. You know to work my way in you know I, I didn't have to pay for my room and board. So I, I was able save enough money you know to, to pay for my University fees <why, why to Toronto from Ottawa?> Well because I decided I'll get the, if I'm going get a piece of paper might as well get it from University of Toronto. <Right> and my husband who was, uh <But you hadn't met your husband?> No I hadn't yet. My husband he was in China, you know. Well anyway uh he was

one of the first students from China to Canada you know, first among after the second world war and uh he was going to do his uh Master uh at Montreal University <The University of Montreal> Yeah, Montreal and <he could speak French then or?> Well a little bit <okay> but yeah the whole thing is, is strange I was, I, I, I have a friend in Montreal who is uh very involved in the church and I sent her my ummm graduation picture from my uh, high school and because we're uh family friends she put my picture on the piano and, and one day she invited the church group to her house for dinner. And my husband saw my picture on the pi, on the top of the piano there and he says, she wanted to know all about that girl you know because she's goo, I'm going marry her you know. <Wow> and told my friend and my friend said, "Oh Alice, oh she's studying in Toronto University you know." [Laughs] So you know, why don't you go to uh, uh, um so he decided to change uh University from McGill to Toronto <Oh I see, okay> Yes, [?] came to Toronto to do his post graduate work in, in civil engineering <I see> in, in Masters. So, while he was in, in doing his post grad I met him because I was a Chinese secretary for the Student Council at the University, for Chinese students you see. So it was my job to welcome all the new students, all the Chinese new students and get them to meet you know with a group, you know so they have one another. You know they have friends you know. So I uh call him, but I call him. But before I call him, he called me and he brought my letter. My, my friends letter and introduce himself to me, to the residence you see. So I knew that the, I have too, and then the first day he met me he says, "Alice I'm going to marry you. I don't want you to go out with anybody [laughs] else." And, and I said, "oh well, I know nothing about you." You know, I says, "we'll see" you know and, and <he just said it, just like that> Yeah, he just said the first day you know and, and, and he told my friend that and I read my friends letter, it says 'oh he's a very, very nice student he's comes to our church and he wants to go to University of Toronto and please uh show him courtesy.' Uh you know, so I said, 'okay' so I said, 'well first of all I want you to join our university groups. Students group.' you know so I, I took him to uh, you know I introduced him to all the people in our group. So in those days there aren't that many people at the university, you see so I happened to be one of them <and this was in 19?> In, in um 194 uh '42 I came here, '42-'43 so I, I, I graduate '48. Three years I, I got my Bachelor of Arts. Uh Specializing in Social, Social Work <Okay> Yeah so

00:36:21-00:36:29

Do you wanna just take, it's been half an hour, so why don't we take a little break <yeah> do you want some water or some <no I'm good> [laughs] just rest your voice a bit.

00:36:30-00:37:39

I'm, I'm just, I talk to much you know. [Mumbles] Well you see umm after our, our marriage you know my, my husband had a hard time adjusting to because his uh Chinese background. You know he's born in China <from China> Yeah and, and <what part of China is he from?> He's from [Chinese Province], [Chinese Province] China <okay> and uh he's a northerner <yeah> again he speaks Mandarin. I speak Cantonese you see, so <did you speak Cantonese then, or?> I, I he doesn't speak Cantonese, I speak Cantonese. I speak Cantonese and English <okay> so we communicate in English <right which is not the easiest> Yeah, yeah so because I don't understand Mandarin you see. But when I was in Tokyo and in the Far East I learned Mandarin. I learned quite a bit of Mandarin because I worked among the embassy they all spoke Mandarin and of during those days they said, 'Alice don't speak to us in Chinese. We want to learn English. So speak to us in English.' [Laughs]

00:37:41-00:37:55

So umm, it was, it was in the 1940's that you, you met your husband <yeah, in yeah> he was doing his Masters <yeah, married in 1949> 1949 <and then> and this is when you lived in Toronto?

00:37:56-00:40:04

Yeah, in Toronto and he work in Toronto in the Engineer company. You know for a while and then one day the strangest thing happen. His Professor at his work and says, 'Ting, the Canadian Red Cross wants to uh, uh get a three man team together to go to work in Korea with the gift that Canada is giving.

A ambulance you know, fully equipped medical ambulance for uh Korea to work in the refugee camps, and the Canadian Red Cross is hiring the team of three and they want to send this team with along with ambulance to Korea for one year and after that one year if the United nations want to take over, then they can take over and that you can make a decision then. Either you want to return to Canada or to continue with the United Nations.' Well my husband went, it was hard going you know. The doctor quit, there's a doctor, a social worker and the civ and the engineer. You know public health engineer, he's a public health engineer. So, the doctor couldn't take it because it's too rough and the, the social worker he was from British Columbia a Canadian and he's very good. He, he's adjust well and my husband adjust well because he's has his Chinese background, you know so he is well aware of what conditions are like. But it was rough, you know, it was, but I wanted to go when, when uh. During the year that he was with a Canadian, under the, working under the Canadian Red Cross I couldn't go but when he decide to work for the United Nations, I could only go as far as Tokyo. So I went to Tokyo in 1952.

00:40:05-00:40:10

Why was it that you could only go as far as Tokyo? [Pause] Well why was it that?

00:40:11-00:40:24

Yeah, I went to Tokyo in 1952. He my husband went in 19, uh,uh end of the 1950. So we were for one year and then he, he switched uh <right> uh, United Nations.

00:40:25-00:40:30

Which, I guess, my question was you, you just said you could only go as far as Tokyo.

00:40:30-00:51:12

Yeah Tokyo, I couldn't go to Korea <was there a particular reason?> Yes because war, war <okay, okay> war <so they stopped you because> see yeah he was working in the refugee camp. It was hard because every time the, they moved to [?] then, the, the, the, the, the fighting got further down and they, they have to move again. The refugee camp have to move on the go all the time and they have to be very careful because of landmines and a lot of the refugees got killed by lan-landmines you know so my, my husband was very lucky. He survived it, he survived those moves an, and um anyway he was able to go to Tokyo uh for rest and recreation every three months. Once every three months so they said, well United Nations said, 'well Alice we can send you to Tokyo. But you will have to stay there. You know you can't come to Korea, but you can see your husband every uh once every three months for a week.' So that's uh what, what I did. I went to Tokyo and while I was staying in Tokyo the embassy started. the Chinese embassy started and they were looking for uh <this is the Taiwan , what would know be known as the Taiwanese> Yeah, so yeah this was the time when I was uh, uh in Tokyo and Japan regained their sovereignty signed a treaty, and the embassy, the nat started and they, they, they asked me if I would work in the embassy I said, 'oh I, I wouldn't mind you know, because have nothing to do here and it will give me a chance to learn something.' and I my qualifications was okay, because I graduated in secretarial work, you know business so uh it just fitted the bill. So it's amazing how things uh <things work out> yeah, worked out. You know, you never know you, ju, lots of my friends in Canada says, 'Alice you know why do you go to Tokyo? Everything is, doing, you're doing so well in Canada here you know and, and you going to uh a place where there's war and there's uh, you don't know what it's all about. You know aren't you afraid?' I says, 'No, no I think I'll go' [laughs] So, I just took off and went and, and um we stayed there uh until 1956. <So four years> yeah four years and then I came back, we came back and um we, we see we bought uh. We had money kept in the states because we couldn't take all the money with us. You see part of our salary was in the States, you see. So when we came back, we have uh some savings so we were able to buy a six-plex and then we were able to buy a summer vacation property and, and in that's our, our um, uh our savings from our savings you see and so, so. But in 1970 my husband died and from I think is, I think it's from all the stress that he suffered in Korea you know during his work there and, and he just collapsed one day. He, he just went out walk out the door and, and, two minutes later he walked back and he collapsed and we took him the hospital and, and I was



just signing him in and they came and told me that they revived him for me to go in and see him and I just went in to see him and he had another attack. Another heart attack and, and didn't, that did it. I lost him, I lost him and, and they couldn't do anything more. They, it so sudden you know, it was so sudden. Well anyway I think his smoking did him in too. He's uh chain smoker, yeah he uh wasn't in very good health and anyway. In 1970 so that's many years ago. So, well you know thank goodness I was able to uh, I have a son Peter to uh look after. I have, he was only fourteen then, you know so I said, well we'll have to carry on and I looking after my niece who was attending university, we were supporting her in university and I said, 'No we'll do what we can.' I was working as a social worker at the Catholic children's aid so I said, "we, we have to uh sort things out. But we'll manage somehow you know." And what happen is when my husband died he has a lump sum payment so I was able to pay off my mortgage for the house. So it wa, it helped me you know, so. But with, with my um salary we were able to put niece through university and everything fine, everything worked out okay because I , I was working luckily you know and so it was okay and uh they asked me to go back to Taiwan because they said, 'you don't have nothing to worry Alice if you come back to Taiwan we'll all look after you.' You know his family, but I said, 'No.' Then eventually they eve, they even sent their children over here, you know as they attend university all my nieces and nephews. so, we had a wonderful time and, and I uh, I God has given me good health so I was able to continue and do what needs to be done. But all those time I was always involved in the Church and um, uh I was [clears throat] especially interested in the Chinese community in those days because after uh, I told you before the Chinese Presbyterian Church worship at the Y at the corner of Dundas and University and then when they move to uh the Church where we are now in 1970 we were uh, uh in great in very strategic place to help the Chinese people in Chinatown, because there were a lot of people in Chinatown in those days and they are beginning to have families now because they are able to bring their wives over and uh. The young families, the young children they come to our Church for Sunday school and nursery school you know beginning of those days and then later on in years we have the public school now don't we uh Eugene. We have the [?] school, yeah. They uh and then high school right, yeah but in those early days it was the beginning and I got involved with the women's group because the women need a place to go. To meet with one another and unload you know and, and learn about Canadian life you know. Canadian living, self improvement, and learn about uh Christ at the same time. So we had a wonderful time, we used to have a bazaar and the women used to do cooking, you know and, and they learn how to make pies and to do different things and, and they teach us a lot of things. cooking Chinese food too you know and English food. So it was a wonderful time. the young people need um, uh you know uh, uh the young ladies and young women you know in the homes they come. They have nowhere to go, but they come to our group uh once every Wednesday night, I remember yeah. Or Wednesday afternoon and we used to take them to uh different places like Centre Island you know and different places so they know how, how to get uh how to ride the subway and different things and then I remember them. See this is where Ruth Mah and Miss [?] came in. They were working as deaconesses and they look after the young children, young children. Nurses or <Margaret, Margaret Near?> Yeah Margaret Near yeah < I spoke to her> Yeah she's uh, Chinese deaconess and, and she took the mothers to doctors. to see the doctors because they don't speak English and Margaret learned how to speak some Chinese. <Yes> She can interpret, yeah, yeah. So it was uh, uh, um a lot of give and, and take to you know. They, they were uh very pleased because they uh these ladies were able to get help from our Church and it's a first time in their lives they're able to get out and do something socially. You know otherwise they'll be uh in their own home and as their own family children grew up and become pro-professions themselves, professionals themselves they, they move out of Chinatown. they buy homes in suburbs and you know it is a very good life they become integrated into the Canadian way of living and, and they made a contribution to the society. but I think the women they, they work hard. they work hard [mumbles] yeah <fix this cord> Oh [pause] But you know I'm so glad because I, I feel I'm, I'm at the right time, at the right place, at the right moment and

had an opportunity to be able to be involved with the group of women. And later on we have uh ESL classes, to teach them you know and after the second world war and, and uh yeah its quite interesting. I learned a lot from them.

00:51:13-00:51:43

Did people speak about um, did people speak their hardship, did people speak about the discrimination that they knew. Did you endure some of the discrimination and did that affect. I mean you speak very proudly about, you know from Canada <yeah, yeah> But you were specifically Chinese from Canada and, and what was your life like in Toronto with that, that level of discrimination? <yeah, well they> People around you?

00:51:44-00:55:55

Well, uh to tell you the truth in Toronto there wasn't much depth. out there discrimination isn't that deep. <as opposed to?> Yeah, yeah not like Victoria. Victoria was really deep seeded <do you think some of that was the time? Do you think?> I think that it's because the progress that Toronto has made, has uh Toronto is, is far, far ahead of Victoria in many ways you know. they have overcome a lot discrimination already in, in, Toronto. A lot of the Chinese who graduate from university they say, 'don't, don't work here in the west. go, go east, go east go to Toronto Go, Go to the east and then you really get somewhere.' You know they always say that you know this is [?] So I think that the momentum in Toronto is far ahead of the momentum in, in the West. Because I think the concentration of Chinese is more, the people <in Toronto?> Yeah, I-in the West, in the the west its more. See they come they come through the doorway from the West coast to the east coast. And people who settled in the West are, are more progressive in their thoughts. It seems more progressive. But the pockets of these newcomers you know, especially the women who are newcomers and, and their husband tend to keep them in, in, in their own home. You know sometimes the husbands won't even allow the women to go out and I, I remember I have to go and talk to the husband concerning being helpful you know to them to, to ask them permission to bring they, their wives to the Church. To attend our, our meeting you know. Sometimes, I knew two or three like that and there are some that we, we went into the home with Ms. Near to, to help take her to the medical. To see the medical, uh to the doctor because in those days there are no Chinese doctors not very many you know. <This is back in 19> That in 19, the forties <Okay> In the forties and in, in the fifties you know. In this uh but in time there were more doctors as they graduate in university. In, in, in medicine but in those days there weren't very uh many so they all have to go to Canadian doctors and then Ms. Near was there to interpret for them. Or to get their medication and how to, to make sure they take the right medication, right medication at the right time and not to mix them up you know and so they. The women uh were beginning to get a handle on taking good care of themselves yeah. But I think umm, and I, I saw a lot of young people. Like Richard for instance you know in our Church now, I saw when Richard was a small kid. His Grandma used to bring him to Church. You know his Grandma and his Grandma used to be one of the member of the women's society and, and they, they used to uh work very hard uh in the Church. you know cooking and doing things in the kitchen and I always remember how welcome they are. They, every time they see the younger people they always invite us into kitchen to give us a piece of cake or a piece of this chicken or something to eat you know there, their very, very um motherly. You know very nice. Um we don't see that now because the young people are all working in offices you know, they're doing professional work so there's hardly any women in the, in, working the kitchen anymore in the Church. Instead, instead we go to the restaurants, right? So we have um, we have a events many, many, uh many years in many ways, uh anyway.

00:55:56-00:56:04

But life in Toronto was, I mean you didn't directly experience any did? <No I, I didn't experience any> Compared to what you grew up with

00:56:05-00:59:35

Yeah, yeah I did. I, I in fact I was welcomed. There was one case at court. where, where, uh, um the adversary clients said that I should just quit and go back to China. I stood up and I said, 'I'm born in Canada. I'm just as much a Canadian as you are.' [laughs] <what was this persons response?> Yeah, the person response, he was just a client I was uh, I was trying to get custody of his children because they were neglected you know and abused <this is when you were a social worker?> Yes when I was a social and of course when you're in that adversarial role, <someone is going to say something> yeah they, I even have my uh telephone uh unlisted because I have <right> because I have to pay to unlit it, because other people will, calling me you know and, and, and, and um you know very unpleasant phone calls so I have unlisted number. But anyway in those days that adversarial role is a very difficult role to undertake. you have to take a lot of lemons you know. But anyway it was something that has to be done. Usually that kind of protective work is very hard for social workers they don't like to work in that role. but I worked in it for eighteen years <this is after you came back?> After yeah, after I came back yeah. But you know from the diplomacy to adversary role is, is quite a difference you know. <Its quite a [?]> Yeah [laughs] But anyway it was umm part of my work, I was able to. but I don't mind and I learn from them too. A, a lot of people they, they still contact me you know, sometimes people that I know that I give my number to. They contact me and tell them uh what they're doing and how they're doing. Cause they want to. They need someone, that can encourage them. People need encouragement you know very badly. and I find that uh in, in life no matter where you're from a little bit of encouragement goes a long way. You know and, and uh I have no regrets. [laughs] Well anyway the thing is well uh that s how I lived my life and then I retire and then I still involve in not in the community. mostly in the Church I, I get, I do what I can. I help Stephanie start the Chu, the Church school you know by knocking on doors. On the neighbourhood, asking te-telling about our Church uh school and, and opportunities for their students and at that time there were a lot of new comers from China and they don't know any English you know, so this was a very good opportunity for them to go a Chinese setting where they can learn English to prepare them for Caucasian school settings you know. And, and it was a good time that, that they started the school at the Church. Yeah.

00:59:36-00:59:58

Would you find, and I think we should probably be wrapping up cause we've been talking for quite a while <yeah>, and I don't want to be tiring you <that's okay>. So are most of your social interactions, I mean I can see most of from what you tell me a lot of your social interaction happens because of eth Church. <yes, yes, yes> Would most of your social circle be Chinese then, or?

00:59:59-01:03:45

Well Chinese and English too because what happen <English being Caucasian?> Caucasian yes, because other Church uh, uh groups they invite us to share with them or to show them how to do certain things or what a piece of Chinese culture is about. Like for, for instance cooking they like to learn Chinese cooking, you know. I remember I wrote a, a recipe book uh and I sold it a t bazaar you know, recipe book. I, I think I still have it somewhere I don't know. But I used to collect the, the recipes from the women. Each of them would give me a recipe, Chinese recipe and I write it in English and, and we sold it to the English uh, uh, uh English friends you know uh from other churches. Yeah we used to go around to different churches at different times and, and we have uh, uh activities sometime. Joint activities and sometimes we don't and, and well you know in those days things do happen. You know things do happen they, they come out they, they uh people come knocking on your door you know and, and sometimes if you have opportunities, like for instance we have a cottage by the lake and, and the young people will have their uh retreats. Summer retreat and until they started to want to be want to go to a place where they did all the cooking for them. They didn't want to do anymore cooking anymore or set up their tents. So they decided to go to pay for it when they were, they, they were uh wealthier so they were able to pay for their retreat. but when they came up to a cottage is just free. they do, do whatever they like themselves and go swimming enjoy, enjoy the summer fun. That fine, yeah they're welcome

but it was fun, you know it was fun. I remember [?] and Mary, you know they used to come here every summer and they bring a whole lot of young people up, up to the cottage too. They have to pay their own way to come of course and they bring their own food. But it was a time of good fun and, and good fellowship yeah. I remember uh some of the ministers used to go up there and they uh have they, they invite all the people around the lake to come to our Church service and they have the Church service because we have a lot of birch trees there and they called it, 'Birch Cathedral'. It was very nice, very nice yeah. Yeah. <that sounds really wonderful> Yeah we have some pictures uh from the cottage to, the young people's cottage and I have some pictures from where we used to put on the shows for the drama, you know for, for drama to interest the Caucasians about Chinese culture and to introduce Chinese culture to them and uh and we used to uh at this end of the second world war there was a big parade in celebration in Toronto and they asked the Chinese to dress up in their own costumes and come out for the parade. And we took some pictures uh like that too. So there's a lot of um, uh documentation about all these things, yeah. The But anyway I, I, I don't want to keep you either you know .

01:03:46-01:04:39

oh no, no this is wonderful I, I suppose I mean. I think that umm that the attention in a lot of the work that we do as historians and, and as sociologists is that we come in with a certain um because Elise's project specifically means to examine how people endured not so great living conditions <yeah> and, and you speak to this in the sense that <yeah> you know you did experience some discrimination growing up and there were. I mean you spoke to the stereotypes already <yeah> in the films and what not. But you, you seem very happy and you seem very content and when you look back on that time um it didn't seem to affect you as much.<no> I mean I think that you also have lived, quite an exceptional life and I think that you sort of recognize that being in the right the place and the right time.

01:04:40-01:09:21

yeah and, and you I look upon on it as its not work but enjoyment. you know and I remember you know just being together with our group you know the fellowship together is so wonderful. You know instead of a whole bunch of kids standing at the corner, you know just doing nothing you know [laughs] you know. But we were able to, to do something that is meaningful <right> not only to ourselves but to the community you know. It was fun, it was fun yeah. Now <So even if the community ever had issues and if you ever. You never felt that heavy weight of?> No, no it was a joy and we looked forward to it and very often when the summer comes there is a we develop a bazaar a community bazaar like you know people bring things out to sell and, and raise money and so on. And, and we're part of that you know and we look forward to it and then we raise money for projects like uh, we go uh you know making a program and advertising and we ask peop-people to pay for it and then we give them something in return. I uh, by increasing their business people coming to their hou, to their store to buy things you know and, and they, they in turn get a, become more open minded because they know more about Chinese culture and what the Chinese people are all about you know in, in it was amazing to see. Even at one point the governor general of, in Victoria he opened his house to welcome the, the Chinese group into their garden party. You know for, for before they never did that before. you know they included the Chinese group because now we're on the map you know. Our name is on the map it'll be and we got the patron we have letter heads and we have uh people Luitenant Governor as our patron. So when we start a concert or a raise money for a project or for a, a Madame Chan's orphan we would uh, uh you know put the letter and, and ask them to be a patron and then their names there and sometimes they donate money to the project. But we're very careful because where money is concerned you have to make sure that everything is ,is upfront in front. You know nothing is covered and everything is, is clear no you see and every time we raised for a project everything is very clearly defined. Very clearly and, and as we get somebody who is in the business you know to auditor, au-auditing you have to be very careful about those things. Yeah and we just enjoy doing you know in the whole group yeah we, we had

such fun. But that's our, our fun [laughs] in [laughs] our group. Yeah it was good because you know. I think you have to find your own group and your own activities and you like to do activities that is helpful and not harmful you know and, and meaningful. and, and we learned a lot because there's a lot of things we don't know. We don't know how to put on a show. But we learned a lot we invite to, who are in the know to teach us you know and then we learn ourselves. And it's really, uh its uh yeah it's you have to move forward to, to uh get things moving if you wanna do something and learn something you have move the box. Anyway it was a joy, it was a real joy and I think it, now I, I reflect on it and it gives me double joy [laughs] [sighs] And especially when I have pictures, I look at it and it reminds me yeah. But you know life is like that, it's what you make of it. You know really. I don't know I think maybe you should just uh, uh edit out some of the things that I've said

01:09:21-01:09:45

No, no, no Alice I, I don't think that I mean in the end its um....interview stuff, <I will> there's many different ways of seeing the world and it's, it's an immenseness, immenseness privilege and a pleasure is both mine and Eugene's just to hear your story. Umm

01:09:46-01:10:09

I was just wondering if you have a email address I can send you uh. Did I send you Sabrina's, Sabrina's uh <no> oh that is she <I just got the> I will send it to you by email you know, you know its I think it's about eight pages long. Is it too long? <no, no its fine> <that's wonderful> [laughs]

01:10:11-01:10:17

Uh I think that I'm pretty much done. I, I think <should I stop the recording?> Yes please. I think what I will