

Bachelor's Project: Edmund Benny Wong  
Interviewed by Bradley Lee  
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"Ed Wong, the biological child of a man of Chinese heritage and a young white female, describes what he knows about the circumstances of his birth."

00:26:22-00:26:31

Bradley: So - so Frank came over just before the Exclusion Act was passed. [That's right] and he was actually, at the time living in, probably into his teens, as you said nineteen or twenty in-

00:26:32-00:26:50

Ed: In China, yeah. [In Canton?] Yes. [Okay.] In (Chinese town name.) [Okay.] Yeah, and, um... uh, I guess my father brought him over for the same reason I guess that his father brought him over. And that is to help wor- work off the debts and so on that they had acquired and run the businesses.

00:26:51-00:27:03

Bradley: Right. Uh, and - and the - the 1923 Exclusion Act. When this was all being done and accomplished, uh, with, uh, with Wong Pond bringing over his son Frank. [Mmhmm.] This is still ten years before you're even on the scene, that you were born.

00:27:04-00:29:37

Ed: That's right, but, uh, but (stuttering) at the time, apparently, if you were a merchant in Canada you didn't have to pay the head tax. [Mmhmm.] And so he was, uh, and I-I mentioned earlier that, um, Frank's mother died. Frank was born in 1903, and his mother died in that period shortly after he came to Canada. [Mmhmm.] And, so my father went back to Ca- to China and married my mother, and they landed in, uh, in Victoria in - in, uh, 1913. [Mmhmm.] And, because, again, because he was a merchant, owned a business, you know, hired people [Right] that he was able to come in and bring her in, and he brought Frank in. And as far as we know, uh... well I know she didn't pay the head tax, but as far as my - the family knows, Frank never paid the head tax either. [Mmhmm.] 'Cause he was coming in basically to help run the business. [Right, right.] So, getting on to this, uh - well, 1925, through some arrangement and I guess because of people my father knew in, uh, in Victoria that they found out about Irene, [Mmhmm] and, uh, and so they arranged to have Frank marry Irene and, uh, Irene of course - Victoria was a big place compared to little town of Olds. I 'm not sure what the population of Olds was back in 1925, but I'm sure it wasn't much over a thousand, if that. [Mmhmm, mmhmm.] And, uh, so here [laughs] this city girl from Victoria is now dumped into this little town, out on -

(incoherent) the prairies and, uh, and she wasn't happy [Right.] She still had a Canadian attitudes in that - in those days, you know, that , uh - not the subservient attitudes that my mother had, where, you know, whatever the fathers - whatever the husband said, you did. [Mmhmm.] You know, and be happy about it. Well, Irene wasn't happy [Mmhmm] and so the two women of course clashed and part of that, uh, clashing was the reason why they adopted me, in 1933 or '34 I should say. Because my mother felt, and - and she told me this - my mother actually told me that, uh, that the reason they adopt me was - was - af- this was after the fact - sorry, father told me that, it wasn't my mother. [Mmhmm.] That, uh... that, uh, so that Frank and Irene wouldn't get everything after they died. [Oh.] Which was put- sort of thrust me into a rather awkward situation as a kid [Mmhmm], you know, so. [Mmhmm.]

0:29:38-00:29:44

Bradley: But it also put - y-you know, the age difference between you and Frank as your stepbrother,  
your elder stepbrother, about twenty, twenty-five years.

00:29:45-00:30:24

Ed: Yes, that's right. Yeah, that's right. But, uh, you know in - in sort of looking back on it... neither

Frank or Irene I don't think looked at me as a being, uh, a threat or anything like that. They, I mean, they more or less accepted me as part of the family. And I happened to be in the middle of their five children, age-wise. [Mmhmm.] You know, so, we all sorta grew up together, you know and, uh, [Right, right] and uh, there didn't seem to be any animosity. I mean, Irene used to, uh, after my mother died, Irene took over and taught me Chinese, and, you know, so, you know, it was - along with her kids [Mmhmm] and, uh, 'cause she was actually a Chinese school teacher wh-when they got married in 1925.

00:30:25-00:30:46

Bradley: Right, which - which - even - even at that time, uh, a woman as a Chinese school

teacher in Canada may not have been see- seen to - seen to break the, uh, the social norm. But, uh, within the Chinese culture it's probably not, I mean, not all that normal to have a woman as a teacher, it probably would have been a man, in China.

00:30:47-00:31:06

Ed: Yeah, probably. But I-Irene was a well-educated person. Her - her, uh, master of Chinese was

impeccable, her writing was beautiful. You know, and her printing of Chinese characters was, uh, was really, really good. [Right.] And she did it fast. She used to write letters I couldn't - just amazing [Right] you know, when you looked at it, it was just beautiful writing.

00:31:07-00:31:13

Bradley: And - and her - her, uh, she was conversant in English as well, right? [Oh yeah.] Was she able to teach English?

00:31:13-00:31:16

Ed: I - no, I don't think so. I don't think she-

00:31:17-00:31:25

Bradley: In any case, when she got to Olds, I mean, she was, uh - uh, became Mrs. Frank Wong and, um, did she continue her career, or [No] was she just Mrs. Frank Wong?

00:31:26-00:31:42

Ed: No, she was Mrs. Frank. She... uh... well she had Stuart in 1927, so obviously you know within a year or so [Mhmm], uh, she was pregnant and had, uh, had her first child of five. [Mhmm.] You know, so, uh she was busy [Yeah], you know, running a s- a family.

00:31:42-00:31:46

Bradley: Right. A-and over several years she had Stuart, then... Stan-?

00:31:46-00:31:59

Ed: Stewart, and then Stan, and the May, and then, uh... uh... Francis, and then Jimmy. [Mhmm.] Jimmy was a later - h-he was a late comer. There was quite a difference in [Mhmm] ages between Francis and Jimmy. [Okay.]

00:32:02-00:32:05

Bradley: Um... so originally the question was - is, how did you find out you were adopted?

00:32:06-00:32:29

Ed: Oh, then when I, uh, well see (laughs), it seemed like everybody in Olds - you know what the little towns are like [Yeah], everybody knows everybody else's business [Yeah] in a little town. And it seemed like everybody knew I was adopted except me (laughs.) And, so, I don't why - why the top-subject came up, but when I was about twelve years old [Mhmm] and, uh, one of my friends, just out of the blue said, "Oh but your adopted", you know, type of thing.

00:32:30-00:32:33

Bradley: This would have been during the war, then, probably, that you learned this.

00:32:33-00:33:39

Ed: No, this would have been right after the war. Just immediately after the war. [But right a- okay, okay, right.] Yeah. And I was about twelve. [Uh huh.] That would be, uh... '46 [Mmhmm], somewhere around there. [Mmhmm.] And, uh, so, uh... you know, I was flabbergasted, eh? I can remember that much, and then I went and talked to my dad, and, uh, cause my mother had died I think by that time. [Uh huh.] And, uh, and tried to ask him about it and just got nothing out of him. [Mmhmm.] So... and, uh... but somehow or another, I, and I don't know - when I review it back now, I don't know how he got the birth certificate. [Mmhmm.] Uh, uh, I had been living with a birth certificate, it was an Alberta birth certificate, and I was supposed to have been born in - there was an address actually on the birth certificate, I don't remember exactly what it was now, but it was right near Chinatown. Some house near Chinatown [In Calgary.] Yeah, in Calgary, and I was supposed to have been born in that house. And, of course, that wasn't unusual back in those days, you know, people were, you know, had - gave birth in houses.

00:33:40-00:33:47

Bradley: W- well, the other, thing it wasn't unusual probably to have that birth certificate because at that time there were all kinds of false papers floating around.

00:33:48-00:34:20

Ed: Well, umm, in order to get that, my father obviously had to pay some doctor (laughs) [Yeah] to - to falsify some - some papers. [Mmhmm.] It might have been a Chinese doctor for all I know. I mean, I - I have no idea who it was. But, uh, I lived with this thing for... for... well, right through until I finally got my - my own birth certificate, the real one that is, when I found out about the adoption, uh, reunion registry in ni- in 1995. [Mmhmm.] Where I got - actually applied in, uh, Vancouver.

00:34:20-00:34:25

Bradley: Well, so then most of your life then, up to 1995 you were living on this basically...

00:34:25-00:34:29

Ed: This false birth certificate, that's right. [Right, right.] Yep. I still have it somewhere, I just have to find it. [Yeah.] I think it's at the bank.

00:34:30-00:34:51

Bradley: Oh, okay. Okay. So, umm... getting back to when this friend of yours told you about... you were

adopted and you were flabbergasted, um... what else did you learn at that time? I mean, um, Wong Pond, your father, would not speak to you about it. [He w-] How - how else did you learn about it? I mean, you must have been really curious at that time.

00:34:52-00:35:20

Ed: Well, I mean I knew I was adopted at that point then and, uh, and I asked Frank. And he didn't -

he didn't know. Uh, I mean, he might have told me, but he didn't know, and, um... and then, later years I talked to Irene about it and, um... she didn't know much about it either. They - 'cause, you know, they didn't converse, they - you know, they - they didn't get along with each other, basically, so they didn't want to tell anybody anything, you know. <They didn't get along with-?> Well, you know, like, there - there's this thing about putting me in - in-between.

00:35:20-00:35:24

Bradley: Oh, yeah, yeah. So, basically, Frank and Irene didn't get along with Wong Pond and Mary?

00:35:25-00:36:29

Ed: Yeah, that's right. I mean they - so they obviously weren't going to tell them their motives [Oh

right] or anything like that (laughs.) So... [Yeah.] So they, uh - there was very little said. I - I knew, and I can't remember whether - I think Frank actually told me this and I think he knew a little bit - and he told that, uh, my mother and dad had gone to Vancouver and gone to Children's Aid with... one of their friends, whom I met, um, many years later. Karlene and I actually visited Vancouver one time and we met this lady. Um, and - and she was the daughter of the woman that my mother knew. But she was already old, she was in her eighties when I - when we talked to her [Mmhmm, mmhmm.] And she can remember that her mother and my mother had gone to, uh, Children's Aid to get me [Mmhmm] in Vancouver. Or apply for me, or whatever. [Mmhmm.] You know, that - that's all I knew. And I didn't find that out until... I don't know, that would be twenty years ago.

00:36:30-00:36:38

Bradley: That - that actually seems rather fast, that whole transaction. These days, you - you'll wait years

before, if you want to adopt a child, you'll wait years for it to happen. It seems like-

00:36:38-00:36:49

Ed: I-it would happen today. They were both in their fifties [Yeah] when they adopted - they

wouldn't let ya [Yeah] today. You're too old [Mmhmm], you know. Fifty - I think they were fifty-one. Fifty-one, I'm trying to think-

00:36:50-00:37:03

Bradley: I- I wonder - I wonder if they're in their fifties if they were also thinking about, um, not only

about the inheritance issue, whether or not they just weren't sure that, you know, that maybe Frank and Irene would take of them in their old age and they wanted somebody young that would?

00:37:05-00:38:02

Ed: Oh, I don't know about that. Well, I don't think they would [It's just a theory] - there - it wasn't

that serious of a - of a problem [Oh, okay.] And I think that it eventually disappeared. It - it was the initial reason why they adopted me. [Right.] But I think that - that issue sorta disappeared in time. You know, as - as my mother started to adapt to the Canadian life [Mmhmm] - you have to remember, she wasn't in Canada very long, when - when, uh, Irene was born. She was in Canada for twelve years [Mmhmm]. You know. So she was still - had the old Chinese attitude [Mmhmm], you know, and, uh, 'cause she was born in 1882 and so she would have been, uh... fifty-one I guess when she adopted me [Mmhmm], and he was fifty-three. [Mmhmm.] He was born in 1880 [Mmhmm], so... or fifty-four, I guess. So, that you - you - nobody would let you adopt a child, you know, a one year old [Mmhmm] at that - at that age now. I mean, you'd- (laughs.)

00:38:03-00:38:04

Bradley: So it was - it was done through a, uh, children's aid society?

00:38:05-00:38:21

Ed: Apparently. [Right.] Apparently. [Okay... so-] Again, I mean, you know, in tho- my old man wasn't

above paying people off (laughs) to get things done. (Laughing.) You know what I mean? He had the means, you know, he had money and he, you know - they, they had...

00:38:21-00:38:40

Bradley: I mean, by all - probably by many measurements he was very successful. [Yup.] I mean, he ran

the public lunch in Olds. [Yep.] Ummm- [In short period of time, you know, they-] Yeah. [Yeah, they...] But not only was - did he have the public lunch in Olds, he had - he had the hotel in, uh, Didsbury? [Yeah.] The Rosewood Hotel? [Yeah, that's right.] Did you have any other businesses?

00:38:41-00:40:07

Ed: Well, he had a lot of property too, you know. [Yeah.] But, you know, he had a house that Frank

lived in [Mmhmm], with a lot beside it [Mmhmm.] There's two properties in Olds, just - just for the house. And he had, um, he had the old property that the old original restaurant was in. 'Cause he used to garden in that one. And then the one right next to the public lunch was another lot. And then he ended up owning the - the lot next to that. So there was the public lunch, the empty lot, the pool hall that he owned. [Mmhmm, mmhmm.] The theatre beside it it, [Mmhmm] then there was a Ford garage which he didn't own, and then there was this empty lot that used to be the - where the, uh [Mmhmm]... the original restaurant was. So he had a lot of property one that one block in Olds- [Well, the main street.] The main - main street, yeah. [Wow, wow.] So, I mean, he obviously made a lot of money [Mmhmm] and he was able to afford to, uh... to, uh... unite (?) - It was right after the war, um... when the communist started to take over [Mmhmm], you kno, and he was a real nationalist, eh? And he sold (laughs) - and he sold the, um, the... uh, theatre for sixty-thousand dollars, apparently, and forty-thousand for the pool hall and that hundred thousand dollars went into Chinese war bonds. Remember that guy, that shyster from the back in China that was running around North America, selling war bonds to all the Chinese and all the patriotic guys in, uh, in North America. And then when he - then when he got all the money he buggered off to Brazil? (Laughing.)

00:40:08-00:40:18

Bradley: That's probably something worth looking up, just for historical- his- [Yeah.] For the sake of a  
historian [Yeah, that's right (laughs.)] Yeah. Wow.

00:40:18-00:40:31

Ed: Oh, he took a lot of Chinese (?), for a lot of money. [Yeah.] See, the one thing about Chinese, the  
Chinese people, they worked hard and they saved. [Mmhmm.] They didn't squander their money, you know, like a lot of immigrants do, [Mmhmm], you know, when they come-

00:40:31-00:40:35

Bradley: Well, except for the odd Chinese bachelor that might have spent some on the prostitutes down  
in Chinatown.

00:40:35-00:40:53

Ed: Yeah, that's right (laughs.) Or while - what a lot - what used to happen later in life was that, uh,  
you know, in later years here that, well, the Chinese would send their kids over here. And then they would spend - they'd send money over from - from Hong Kong and the kids would gamble it away. [Mmhmm, mmhmm.] They - they'd hang out in the gambling joints [Yeah, yeah.], you know. [Yeah.]

00:40:55-00:41:14

Bradley: So, your, um – okay, you – you - you've found out that you're adopted. You... you try, I guess, as

many avenues as can to figure out what's going on with that. But you - you kinda come up short. [Yeah.] When did you become interested again in - in finding out more about that history?

00:41:15-00:43:36

Ed: Well, my daughter was the one, you know. She was interested in where I came from and, um,

and so, umm, in... I was going out to a hockey tournament in California and I-I was - after the hockey tournament I was going to drive up to Victoria, and Vancouver, and come back to Calgary and then drive back to - to Toronto. And knowing that, she said, uh, she said, "Well, you're going out there why don't you, uh - let's see whether you find out anything about your - you know, original parents." And so it just happened - this was 1995 [Mmhmm] and it just happened to be - she may have heard about it here, I don't know [Mmhmm] - that they had this adoption reunion registry in, uh, they're- they're starting to - this was the Freedom of Information Act [Mmhmm], I think it was, yeah. Anyways, uh, she found out by a few phone calls I guess that I could go to this address in Vancouver at that time - not Victoria - [Mmhmm.] -and go to the Adoption Reunion Agency and, um, pay twenty-five dollars and end up on their computer. That, and, that your wanting to find your parents. And then so I went there and I paid the twenty-five dollars. I came back here, about a month after I got back, um, I get this phone call from the Adoption Reunion Registry saying, uh, "We found your mother" (laughs.) That was sort of a... a shocker. [Wow.] You know, and, uh, that was the good news. The bad news was she didn't want to meet me (laughs.) So (laughs), and, uh, so I asked the - the lady there, I said, "Well, would she accept a letter from me?" And so, um, she - I guess she went - she had to give a (incoherent) answer. She went back to my mother (incoherent) and asked her whether she'd accept a letter from me and - and she came back and said, "Yeah she would." And so I wrote a twelve page letter (laughs) [Oh!] and it - it basically ran the gauntlet of I- you know, where I came from and [Mmhmm], you know, all that stuff. Where I spent life, [Uh huh] and so on. And sent her a whole batch of pictures and, uh, and I guess maybe a month later, uh, I got a letter back from her... with that one picture I showed you here, [Mmhmm] you know, and, uh... she explained quite a few things, um, that without really identifying herself. And, um, sort of apologized that she didn't want to meet me, but I sorta understood. You know what I mean...

00:43:36-00:43:40

Bradley: Wh—wh-what were some of the things that she explained to you in the letter?

00:43:41-00:44:44

Ed: Uhh... well she, uh, I gue- (laughs) I guess the way - she told me a bit about her life [Mmhmm]

and that sort of it tells you what - what happened. I mean... keep in mind, she was pregnant when she was fifteen. My father, my real father, was fifty [Fifty.] Fifty. Okay, this is 1933 [Mmhmm], okay? In... British Columbia, which is all British,



Chinese were not looked upon favourably at a time- at the time. And here's, uh, an English woman, a young girl, actually, you know, uh , having sex with a - a fifty year old Chinese man. I mean, that's an absolute no-no back in those days. [Mmhmm.] You - you can imagine what that would have been like. [Right, right.] You know, and so... it's pretty obvious that she wouldn't want, having had me, she wouldn't, um, want her family, which she's had, since then, uh, to know that - that she done this.

00:44:45-00:44:46

Bradley: This - she wrote this in her letter?

00:44:47-00:46:18

Ed: Well, no, I'm reading that in-in-in between. What she's telling me is that, uh, she did get

married. Uh, she married an engineer, [Mmhmm] he died and she remarried another engineer and then [Mmhmm] he died. And they had children and so on in between. You know, so there's two families involved [Right] on that side you know? [Yeah.] And so, you know, putting - putting yourself in her position, I mean, would you really want your - all these peop- these siblings that came after that - you want them to know about this? You know, I mean, I can understand her not knowing - not wanting to tell anybody [Yeah, yeah.], so... Just let it die, you know? [Right.] Yeah. So, anyways, so I didn't - I didn't - um, I don't resent her for - for telling that. I mean, she - she told me quite a few thing. I know she worked for BC Hydro [Mmhmm], she mentioned that [Mmhmm.] And, uh, and I asked her what my first name was that she - my first given name. And she said it was, um, Gerald. [Mmhmm.] You know, so... And, um, and it was through the - in 1995 though, I- I paid two-hundred dollars to the Adoption Reunion Registry to get the contents of my file. [Mmhmm.] And that, because she didn't want to meet me, they - they whited out all the, uh, names and places. [Right.] A big of paper you know? And, uh [Mmhmm.] So from that you - uh, they - she kept me for... I can't remember, now seven months or something like that. [Mmhmm.] She actually kept me for that long [Mmhmm], and then put me up for adoption, and then I went to, uh... uh a foster home. You know, for-

00:46:19-00:46:24

Bradley: That must a been really tough for her at the age of fifteen to hold on to a seven month - you know - you know, for a-an infant.

00:46:25-00:46:58

Ed: That's right. Well, that's what - that's why, uh... um... that she went to, uh... That was in the

adoption stuff, that - that, uh, she was actually identified in the adoption papers and you could see that was whited out. When it got down to the father, it was a Chinese man, no name. Nothing was whited out, just said "Chinese man" [Mmhmm.] You know. And the only description was, um, he was, uh... a good physical specimen. I think was the terminology used. [(Laughs.)] That was it, nothing else.

00:46:58-00:47:03

Bradley: N-nothing else to say about what the nature of- [Who he was, no name-] the nature of the encounter? Why the [No] - the two of them got together?

00:47:03-00:47:14

Ed: No, no, nothing like that, no. No, it's - they just - who was the mother, who was the father, you know. [Mmhmm.] She, in her case there was a description, and she was a school girl [Right], you know, and, uh-

00:47:15-00:47:25

Bradley: And, sh- uh, she - in her - in her correspondence to you, her letter, never mentioned about why she... basically... hooked up with this Chinese man?

00:47:26-00:50:32

Ed: Well, again, here, again, there was enough information there to know - because I - because I had mentioned my total background from, you know, the time from Wong Yat arrived in 1897 [Right.] You know, that was all in my letter. [Mmhmm.] Uh, she said that her father - her father and mother... uh... her father was in the British army, this was in the first World War, and I guess things were pretty tough in the UK back, you know, after the war. And I guess a lot of Brits migrated at the time, you know [Mmhmm], to - to Canada just to get away from the problems over there. And, uh, so he migrated with, uh, two kids - two girls. My mother and her sister. And they ended up in BC. And it was in the '20s that, uh, he got TB and died. [Mmm.] Leaving the mother and the two sib- you know, siblings, uh, to fend for themselves. Then the Depression hit. [Oh. Yeah.] Okay? So you can see what happened, all right. So, you know, they're scratching to make a living. So she either prostituted herself or she was working somewhere where she was vulnerable [Mmhmm], you know [Yeah], to a - to a - a boss - maybe she worked in a restaurant or something, and, uh, you know and the bosses... you know, say, she's probably working to get money to live and whatever [Mmhmm], whether through prostituting or through working as a waitress or whatever, you know, and, uh, and somebody took advantage of her. [Mmhmm.] So... that's about - I - I, again, you can see all these thing in what I heard from that letter, and from what I read in the adoption [Mmhmm]... papers, so... But with all the prejudice there going on at the time, you know, uh, between the whites and the Chinese and all that. I mean, especially in British Columbia [Mmhmm], you know [Yeah], where there's much - probably more of that then, uh, any other place. Like I - as a kid, see, I don't - living in that little town, and maybe your father was the same, but, you never felt prejudice in a little town. [Mmhmm.] The only time I really felt a little bit was if, um, if I was going to a dance - like this was later, you know, say in high school - uh, and you're asking some girl to go to a dance and then you sorta - sorta got these funny looks from the parents, you know, type of thing. That's about the only, uh.. [Right] thing that I ever felt. You know, other than that, there was - we

were quite accepted in that town. At the time, and maybe the case with your parents as well, or your grandparents even, you know, they living in a little town was, uh - you're living with people in environment where they never had anything either and they didn't have time for all the prejudices. You know, they're all working people, [Yeah], you know, they're working class people. They had no airs about them. [Mmhmm.] Everybody was friendly, you know, and, uh... know everybody by the first name. Even the farmers around our - around our district were, uh, you know they used to all come into our restaurant and-

00:50:32-00:50:49

Bradley: This, prob- probably re- reflected in the fact that, you know, there you were playing with your friend, uh, at the age of twelve and he says, "Oh, by the way, you're adopted", and, um, I mean, it might hit you kinda hard, but, you know, maybe for your friend and everybody else in the town that knew you were adopted - well, you're adopted, so what?

00:50:50-00:50:56

Ed: Yes, that's right. [You know?] That's exactly right, yeah, that's right. That's why it never came up.  
[Yeah, yeah.] The discussion...

00:50:56-00:51:09

Bradley: It sounds to me that, until you're - until your - your - your own daughter started asking questions. It - I mean, again, possibly because you'd - you'd lived the life that way you'd lived it  
anyway, that it really didn't seem to be such a big deal.

00:51:10-00:51:31

Ed: No, that's right. And maybe my daughter got interested because she did the family tree for, uh,  
my wife's side. [Mmhmm.] You know, and went back I don't know how many centuries, and through, uh, through one of her uncles in, uh, in Hong Kong, who since died, of course, [Right] but he grew up in the village (incoherent) in China and so on. And, like-

00:51:31-00:51:38

Bradley: Y-your wife Karlene was, uh - was it h-her - she and her parents' generation the first ones in  
Jamaica?

00:51:39-00:53:12

Ed: Yes, well, her father. Her father did, not her mother. Her father was a... was, um... let's see, was

he the son? Yeah, I guess he must have been the son - yeah it was his grandfather, actually, that

- that worked in, uh, Panama. [Mmm.] And was brought over - they, um... he was part of the first four hundred. John Chen was his name, and, uh, he was one of the first... at the time, when they brought all the Chinese over from - from China to work in, you know, both on the railway and, uh, and the, um, the canal, [Mmhmm] uh, Panama was just infested with malaria. [Mmhmm.] And so they - they were - they were dropping like flies there. You know, people were dying like you wouldn't believe [Mmhmm] building all that stuff. And, uh, they were indentured for two years, apparently. They - the Americans had hired them from China where they had to work for two years [Mmhmm] and - the - but they had no obligation to take them back to China after their indenture was finished, and so Jamaica was the only place that was m-malaria free back in the 1880s [Mmhmm], and so, when their indenture was over they just took over there and dumped the first four hundred. And they all worked in plantations 'cause the Blacks wouldn't work for plantations. And - and that was funny. So they - they (mumbles) and like most Chinese, they saved every penny. They were extremely frugal, you know, [Mmhmm] and through that, uh, became rich eventually.

00:53:13-00:53:17

Bradley: We-well, just, I'm- I'm curious, what did your wife's family, what did her parents do in Jamaica,  
er, Kingston?

00:53:18-00:53:24

Ed: Oh. They were merchants. They - they ran a haberdashery, you know [Mmhmm], like a - what  
the hell do you call it? - like a general store type of thing.

00:53:25-00:53:37

Bradley: That's actually just - as an aside - that's a fascinating history because all the rich Chinese  
Jamaicans that are up here now - Michael Lee Chen, uh, Raymond Chang, and stuff [Mmhmm] - you know they were all - their - their families are all from grocery - running grocery stores in Jamaica.

00:53:38-00:54:05

Ed: Yep, yep. Well, she - that - that's right. You know Ray - Ray Chang was, uh, is related to the wife,  
actually. [Mm.] Through marriage you know, [Mm.] yeah. I knew Ray quite well in Jamaica. [Oh really?] Yeah. But of course he had nothing then, he was young. [Yeah, yeah.] He was a lot - you know, much younger than I am. [Oh, okay.] But he got in on the right thing, you know [Mmhmm], a good thing at the right time. [Mmhmm, yeah.] That's how you make money, you get - you get the right idea and you make money. Yeah.

00:54:05-00:54:23

Bradley: All right. Umm... th-that's great, telling of your, uh, your story, umm... a-and just sorta to sum up a little bit, uh, your - your correspondence with your - your birth mother then, uh, was as recent as two years ago... right?

00:54:24-00:54:29

Ed: No, no. No. This was in 1990... yeah, it was in 1995, yeah, late '95.

00:54:30-00:54:32

Bradley: A-and did you maintain a correspondence with her in any way?

00:54:32-00:54:34

Ed: No, she didn't want any other contact.

00:54:34-00:54:40

Bradley: Oh, okay. So in 1995 you knew that she was still alive, uh, but since then, we - we don't know.

00:54:40-00:55:47

Ed: No, no, she would be, uh... ninety-two now. [Mmhmm.] Ninety-two or ninety-three now. [Yeah.] Now, I did check, uh... uh, two years ago. I went into Victoria and went in to Vital Statistics in Victoria [Mmhmm], and to find out whether she was still alive, and she - they had no record of her dying. Because the way it is now, um... if she dies, two years after her death, I can get the adoption papers with all the addresses, names, and everything in it. [Mmhmm.] Now - and - and that - and they had no record of her - her death at Vital Statistics in Victoria uh, in - two years ago. [Mmm.] So, anyway... [Just gonna have to wait.] Just have to wait, yeah. [Yeah.] Yeah. Anyways, I mean - I mean it's - to me - to be honest with you, I'm not really - I don't really care. Personally. I mean, I'm curious but I'm not - I don't care. [Mmhmm.] But my daughter would like to know. [Right, right.] You know how women are, you know, they like to know the heritage of their parents- (talking at same time.)

00:55:48-00:57:07

Bradley: Y-you know, i-it's interesting because you know, um... in many ways, like, I mean, I - you know... My great-grandfather on my mother's side, I never knew her - er, never knew him. [Mmhmm.] And yet he was - but - but his life is interesting to me, because his life and his decisions in his life and, you know, I mean, you know, if he hadn't been here, my mother would have ne- never met my father, the whole thing, right? [Yeah, right.] But the thing is... and i-its kinda whimsical to think of it that way, but... Ho Lim Senior, my - my Great-Grandfather, um, his decisions to come here are the difference between me growing in Canada or maybe being up to my knees deep in rice paddy. [That's right.] You know, and so- [(Laughs) that's right.]] I mean, we laugh about it and we think it's funny but, you know these - these are things that are - are really important for a person's identity. [Mm, yeah.] And a sense of belonging, you know, whether you're - you're comfortable with who you are,

a-a-and that, and that sort of security of self [Mmm.] and your identity helps you get ahead and do all the things you want to do in your life. I mean, Ed, if I look at you and I think, "Lookit, you've got - you've got a family and everything here, uh, you're in a nice house, uh, you know, you practice your hobby of rebuilding cars and stuff like that." I think - I think I look at that and say, "Yeah, successful."

00:57:08-00:57:20

Ed: Well, yeah, you know, I could have been a hell of a lot worse [Well, yeah] if I wasn't adopted by the Wongs and, you know, [Yeah] in Olds. [Yeah.] You know, I mean, I used - think of what you could be if - if that hadn't've happened.

00:57:20-00:57:41

Bradley: Right, right. And we know that within all of our families for sure, and - and I know the Wong family too. I mean, I didn't know your story as part of it until I started doing this research. But, we know there's all these kind of weird things sometimes in the family and, uh, everybody has a little bit of conflict. I mean, like, uh, I have fights with my brothers and sisters and stuff like that. But in the end you look at it and think, "Well, jeez, it's not too bad."