

Bachelors & Chinadolls
Velma Demerson
June 05, 2012
Questions by Elise Chenier

Velma (00:00:00 - 00:01:07)

... that the numbers of women, who ... as you may have seen it, in a Constance [Veccio]'s book, she mentions Presbyterian women being sympathetic to these hundreds of women who were married to Chinese. Did you see that? <mhmmm> Yeah and um... so you've got all these women you've got these women of childbearing age, which is what I was arrested under Female Refugees Act. <mhmmm> [Noise] And... these were all young women, married with Chinese and there is a report there from somebody who says there are so many Chinese in the city right now. But I am sure I am underestimating, but still, what became with the children? Because the women were arrested and ... <yeah> ... you know,<yeah>, they would let man to have children, they would let my husband to have this child. So, where did all these mixed-race children go? Especially when you hear about the native kids. What happened to them?

Elise

Well, this is a really interesting question, because... um... ah... I've asked about ah... let's see ... I asked about... just starting recording now... Is it okay Velma? <Yes> Ok, great. I am just gonna say, it is June 5th 2012, and this is Velma Demerson [laughter]. Just in case people at work. ... Recording... I have asked you look at Children's Aids Society's records. Some, but they are closed. They're private records. They're closed. So where as I can apply, to look at the mercer records, because they're government records. I can never apply to look at the Children's Aids Society records, because they're private records.

Velma (00:01:57 – 00:02:22)

Well, it just still happens; that, I was in Vancouver, and I looked at some records, and in Victoria, and also the University of B.C. And I did find one record of child that was unadoptable, because he was mixed-race Chinese. <Mhmmm> And they sent him to ... to Toronto.

Elise

Dear... Where did you find that record?

Velma (00:02:27 – 00:02:28)

That's just did. I am not sure,

Elise

You don't remember.

Velma (00:02:29 – 00:02:32)

I am not so sure whether which, whether was in the university archives.

Elise

Mhmmm, right. Yeah. It is interesting, because what I found, like I did interview one person. Actually, he came to that event, at the University's settlement house last fall. He was the child of a woman, probably your age, from Vancouver, and a Chinese man. And he was adopted by a Chinese couple. So I have located a few people, who were adopted by Chinese families. But I've also heard some of these children were adopted by white families as well. So, it will be very interesting to be able to find out more about those adoption, um... cases like your case, um... but the paperwork is, you know, it's private, and you. It's private information, and which in a way is good, because people should, their past should be protected if they wanted. Some people don't want their past known, <that's right>, and that's their right,<yeah>, you know. But it's frustrating for historians who want to understand, you know, which is why your book is really great, and I think I mentioned this to you, but I teach this book to my students. Just it is one of the best books to teach, because it is such an eye-opener for them. But, it's ..., you know, they never heard of it, the story that you tell; and it is really great way to teach it to them, because they connect with human being. You know, you're So, thank you for writing that book. Well, it's a huge contribution.

Velma (00:04:06 – 00:04:23)

I was really scanned when I wrote it. Because I thought they are gonna say she's a slut.<yeah>. Nobody did.

Elise

Yeah, well [laughter]. Well it's hard to change. Then in earlier time, they would've said that, I think <Yeah> Yeah. But I did want to ask you, because you, you, in the book, you talk about yourself as the kind of person who stays quiet. You don't come forward, you don't put yourself, you know, you don't announce your private business. And you just kept yourselves. So what did lead you to decide to write this book? Could tell, tell your story?

Velma (00:04:51 – 00:06:16)

Well, the thing is that I was affected seriously by what happened in that book. Om, like, I didn't come forward and saying that I've been abused or something, like that. Um, you know, I think the reason for that was this. You know how the doctor treated me <yeah>. And I never thought for a one minute she was doing something wrong. Ah, and you know how you idolize people like doctors and lawyers in those days <yeah>. And so I, so I think I find float for a one moment what she really did; and she even, even my Senate to think that I actually told her to circumcise like more or less after what she'd done to me. It's unbelievable that people go around like that, and have such a faith. And, and you know. And... and I can't feeling it, you know, with all our sophistications, <yeah>, that that we are like them. Now, if that had been somebody completely serve almost primitive, that wouldn't be suspicious. You know, so you know how far it come.

Elise

Yeah. So for you, the story you really wanted to get that there was about the medical mistreatment.

Velma (00:06:22 – 00:06:39)

Yeah <yeah>, that's true. I didn't know how that could happen. <Right>. Then and later on life, you see, and you get the time, when you're not working anymore. Then you start thinking, but that's a horrible part of getting old. Your mind goes bad. Because when you were busy, you don't think about these things

Elise

Ah, so you, you mean, to reflect on the past, <yeah>, yeah. So this was a kind of exercise and ...um...

Velma (00:06:49 – 00:06:50)

Curiosity.

Elise

Yeah. So you did a lot of your own research. It sounds like.

Velma (00:06:55)

I do all of them.

Elise

Really?

Velma (00:06:57 – 00:08:17)

Yeah. When I went to the lawyer with that Female Refugees Act thing, I already had headed down <hmmm>. And you know it's funny about that act eh, you know, even lawyers don't know about these acts today, because they don't learn that. And <ah> and ... but when I got my papers from the archive, I was, I was arrested under the FRA and I found out I {...} to a librarian, librarian booked it up. And she said, "Oh there's hardly anybody arrested under the act," she said, "couldn't be many." And I knew that wasn't true. So, I pursued anyway. I pursued it further. It took me a while to get records, you know <yeah?>. And they couldn't find them, you know. And naturally it's amazing that they did find all my records [weep] <hmmm>, medical records and everything. Of course, you know. [Pause] So that's the other part that hasn't, doesn't have to which I'm in this situation, you know. Because, I am, right now, really interested in that eugenics movement, which was so strong and nobody knows how strong it was.

Elise

Have you ... ah... seen the movie called "the something of Leilani Muir," "The Sterilization of Leilani Muir"?

Velma (00:08:28 – 00:08:29)

Yes I did. I saw that.

Elise

Yeah. I mean, she's a lot, you remind me at her. You know, she is someone who, just like you, was came from difficult parents, and was institutionalized at a much younger age than you, and suffered as a result of these kinds of state policies. <Mhmmm> Just like you. And also like you, quiet person, not, you know, <but you know>, but she came out publicly with it and sought restitution. Just like you, <yes>, and, it took a lot of courage for her to come forward with the story, because like you, a lot stigma associated with that. <That's true>. And you should meet each other... [Laughter] because you're kind of, cut from the same cloth, in many ways.

Velma (00:09:16 – 00:09:30)

But you know this thing about sterilization. <Yeah>. I don't know if you know it or not, but there are more sterilizations took place in Ontario than in British Columbia, and I think it was in Alberta. You knew that.

Elise

Well, what I know right now is Alberta had the most, because they did right up to '72.

Velma (00:09:38 – 00:09:59)

Yes, but, but this report came out in 2002, <yeah> from a psychiatrist who was, was in the [...] hospital school. <yeah>. So, and he said more than in Alberta, but, <really?> we didn't have a law here. The result is that none of these women will get compensation. I met one of these women.

Elise

Did you?

Velma (00:10:00 – 00:11:08)

Yeah, <yeah>, from, she was from, oh no, she was in {Colbert, Colbert} Common. Then, she's in {Gult}. So, she told me that when she came out of the {gult}, that her aunt took her to the hospital, told her that she need appendix to meet. And, and I, I have been looking at this and, like some schools like, Alexander School, with the head long, been a long time ago ... and you know, maybe 113 inmates, that had 8 sterile, 8 {appendix mouse} , so you know, you know what they're doing, <hmmm> , because she said, I think I told you, they told her she was gonna have had to {...}. But then, if you looked at the Department of the Welfare Report, you'll find they, more or less, favoured girls coming out of Colbert, if they're sterilized. Like boys. <Mhmmm> [pause]. But you know those sort of things. If we like, <you know>, they didn't come right out say it, but they have certain agreement, tend to be an agreement.

Elise

Hmmm. Well, if you, that report you mentioned from 2002, I would be interested in looking at up. <Oh, {...} information>, I will write down the ... <yeah> ... I will see your files [laughter]. This is, this is impressive. You are <Oh yeah> active researcher.

Velma (00:11:23 – 00:11:38)

Well, yeah, little bit. You know, I, I left Toronto and went to Vancouver. And I decided I don't need all these files, and I disposed quite a few <Mhmmm>. But ...

Elise

Well, if we can go back and talk about what you observed, and what you experienced when you were, when you were in Chinatown. You may ah... Why don't we start by, I mean I know you talked about it in your book, but if you can just tell me in your own words again, the circumstances under which you met Harry, and ah... how that all unfolded it for you.

Velma (00:12:04 – 00:12:25)

Well, ah... I met Harry in the cafe on... on Yonge Street. And I was with my mother and two other women. And, he was there, I dropped my, my cutlery twice, and he picked it up. And after, he said "how about a date?" I said "Ok"

Elise

But, that must've been very bold for him, to ask you, ah, {...} ah, my impression is that it's quite a taboo for white women to date Chinese men. And so for him to ask you, very boldly in front of two other women, that seems, that surprises me, but should I be surprised? Or it is my perception?

Velma (00:12:49 – 00:12:52)

I think, I think it was a circumstance. We were all laughing...

Elise

Right <yeah>. So do you think maybe he was just, if you turned him down, he could pass it off as a joke? <Sure> yeah, and just laugh off at you. So do you think he was surprised when you said yes?

Velma (00:13:08 – 00:13:10)

I... I really couldn't say.

Elise

Yeah, you couldn't say. And when you accepted the date, because you do, you do talk a lot of these stigmatization of those interracial relationships. Were you aware of that at the time that it was a bit of taboo to go out with a Chinese man? When you accepted his offer?

Velma (00:13:30 – 00:14:56)

Not completely. Because we lived on Church Street, and my mother ran a rooming house. We had all nationalities coming there. We had a Japanese fellow, who was just a houseboy, and he's often and um... actually ... he asked my mother if he could take me for the drive in his car. And he bought out all the whisky, and had fun, and she said "All right, my brother is mad about it. How could you {...} adult?" But, so, so that was certainly took the edge of it. And also, there was, she rented a room to an Indian, <hmmm>, and she's gone out with this Indian Wedding {caules}. I... I haven't got words but, she, she was the part of the presentation, where she put {...} she put the cigarette in his mouth out, and had with a whoop [laughter] she was so daring, and my mother was... So she didn't know that there was a stigma. So she didn't think much of the stigma at the time. Matter of a fact, she even really sympathized with black people. <hmmm>. Yeah.

Elise

Eh, so, where their black people in your {room}?

Velma (00:15:00 – 00:15:09)

No. <There were not generally>. No, no. There were no black people there. It's just she told me later that she was taught into a black person, she really felt sorry for them. <hmmm>.

Elise

This, um, performance that your mother did, ah, was that at the casino?

Velma (00:15:16 - 00:15:30)

No it wouldn't. It would have been some outdoor thing, you know. <ah-ha>. Yeah. <Ok>. It wouldn't be this sort of it, something, yeah, that we would go into a place. I would've that, I mean what we would have, you know.

Elise

Right. Um... OK. So, would you say then, there was a kind of relaxed sexual attitude in your mom's house that she had relaxed sexual attitude for her time?

Velma (00:15:44 – 00:16:31)

Uh... it wasn't too, too relaxed, like, eh, you know. We didn't want to be closed down or anything. Eh... That wouldn't take much, eh, if you were reported for anything. Like, for instance, we had a girl on the second floor, and um, my mother knocked on her door and asked for her rent and she said, "I can't give you my rent right now," she said, "Because I am menstruating." <mhmmm, mhmmm> [laughter]. But my mother would not allow any men come in and go {enter a} women's room, because they {...} the door and {...}. She didn't wait for to go to court or anything like that, you know [weep]. You did the wrong thing, you're locked out.

Elise

... and do you think your mother barred women turning tricks in the house... <Oh yes, definitely> . Did she do it because she was afraid the legal problem she heard or was it for moral reasons? Or was both do you think?

Velma (00:16:50 – 00:17:01)

I think it was both. <yeah>. Because, you know, my mother was a teacup reader, and we had a section of the house that she went to teacups, <right>, little tables, things are you know.

Elise

So that was the way of protecting her business interests, was to... <yeah>

Velma (00:17:06 - 00:17:18)

Yeah. oh yeah. She wouldn't take any, any chances with the government, you know, because, this little sign of more morality [mumble], and they {would} prescriptions haven't...

Elise

Hmmm. It is hard to imagine what it was like back in those times. Were there police around a lot? Do you remember would they are on a street a lot?

Velma (00:17:29 – 00:18:58)

No. No the only time police ever came to our house was ah, ah, my mother had a little trailer. And she went away with a {rent}, teacups and small {...}, put up her son {...} sort of thing. She said to me, when I was, I guess 16, "you take the charge of the house as well in a way." So the house next door, the woman was living there she taken it over. There was a noise near, and I looked at the window. There was somebody calling called me in and I went over. This woman was drunk. She was in bed with this man, who was also drunk, and these were all old people. And I said "you better get out," to the ones that they weren't supposed to be there. And I said "or I will call the police now." Of course, they were so drunk, they paid no attention, and I was only a young girl. So I called the police. But if my mother been there, it would, that wouldn't be happened. <Right>. But when the policeman came, he started to take down the names of all the people, and said, he say "isn't anybody in this house working?" [Laughter]. So, yeah, she would've just pick them up, and throw them out, and we wouldn't have police there at all. So it wasn't a good idea, really. I couldn't do anything else. <yes>. Police worked in and we would ending trouble.

Elise

Right. So that, so there was awareness that there was a possibility there could be difficulties, but it's not like the cops were calming and knocking on the door, investigating or anything like that? <No> Ok. All right

Velma (00:19:13 – 00:09:14)

Know it was pretty quiet, actually.

Elise

Yeah. And it sounds like they were both, men and women that roomed in your mom's house. <Correct>. Yeah. <Yeah>. So let's go back to your date than. So you were here, asked out on a date, and you say yes. And so then what? what happened after that?

Velma (00:19:32 – 00:19:34)

Well, I met him at the restaurant.

Elise

Yeah, do you remember the name of the restaurant?

Velma (00:19:37 – 00:19:40)

Yeah, I have it in, in my book. <Ok>. I've got the name of it.

Elise

Ok. That was in the Yonge Street? is that it? <Yeah, eh>. Was it western style restaurant? <No> Or Chinese style restaurant? <Chinese>. Oh, Chinese style food okay. <yep>

Velma (00:19:50 – 00:20:58)

Um... it's not the western people didn't go in; remind you the cost was cheaper than the other restaurants. <yes>. But there were people who wouldn't go into a Chinese restaurant. I know that. <yeah> Um, yeah and so, when we went out, you know, I suggested we would go a show and,... but he just kept on walking and, and so walked in, I went into his room, which I wasn't scared {on} it. Chinese {was never} to be afraid of an Oriental in those days, you know, they would stay miles away from the police [shaken] and, and a ... so I went up to his room and we had a little, what we {would've} call a little... a little Scotch glasses, and he pours in for move into it and we had that, and talked, told me about himself, showed me his paper for coming into Canada, and his picture and, ah, I told him about myself and about my mother, and so on. So we gradually became friends. And a ... Now, what else you want to ask?

Elise

Well, what else do you want to tell? {...} the relationship became sexual

Velma (00:21:03 – 00:23:14)

Yeah. Yeah, it did. <hmmm> Oh yeah. I told him I was going to New Brunswick to visit my grandmother. And he said "oh, your grandmother," you know, and um, yeah. So anyway, when I was in, in, in... did I say Saint John, New Brunswick? <eh-huh>. Yeah. So when I was in Saint John, I got my mail. We could get the mail then. We didn't have show any identification or anything. And he sent me his picture and I, I used the name Mary Leroy to collect the mail. And a... Anyway, I guess I put his picture under my, my mattress on my bed you know, I was staying with my grandmother. So um, when I, I don't think she told my father. Know she didn't tell my father. She was afraid to tell my father, because she, she had an outing with my mother off their divorce. And a ... she was, she would never say anything. But, um ... so when I got back to, to Toronto, um, we were going to get married, and, and he gambled his money, we had no money. So he said he had a good paying job at Hamilton, so we went to Hamilton <hmmm> So when we {...} we went to a laundry, and Chinese laundry in Hamilton, and it was a Native girl, {...} there, living with these Chinese man. And a... anyway, my mother tracked us down, went into the restaurant, and started screaming at him. I guess, she, he wouldn't asked where I was. So, anyway, called such a problem, we had to come back to, to Toronto. So when I got back Toronto, the next thing, you know, my father, there was a big knock on the door, bang bang, and police came in, and, that's when I was taken away.

Elise

Hmmm. I just was wanna go back to {...} New Brunswick, you said you used the name Mary Leroy, why was that? Why did you use false name at the post office? <at the post office>

Velma (00:23:27 – 00:23:45)

Ah...um... I guess it's because of my father. Maybe I was just afraid to say my father's name down there, at the post office. My father was a businessman, you know.

Elise

Mhmmm. But were you afraid he will get your mail? Like were you having mail sent to in a different name? I'm just trying to understand the significance of the story that you mentioned. But you are having a mail was Harry sending you under name Mary Leroy? <yeah> Yeah, so you didn't want your father to collect it.

Velma (00:24:06 – 00:24:15)

Well, no he was, <{...}>, he wouldn't collect it, because he would've not known, wouldn't known anything about it. And it was just one of those things that I did <right>. It was... yeah.

Elise

But something in you told you you should hide this <Yes>. And why did you feel you needed to hide {...}?

Velma (00:24:21– 00:24:30)

Well, I had to hide it from my father for one thing. He didn't need to know that I had a boyfriend. My mother wouldn't tell him.

Elise

So your father would've disapproved of any kind of boyfriend? Or is it particular, because Harry was Chinese?

Velma (00:24:39 – 00:24:40)
Particular, because he was Chinese <mhmmm>

Elise

So, when you, when you told the story about the photograph under your mattress, so {I'd} take your grandmother found this photograph? Is that what you were?

Velma (00:24:50 – 00:24:53)
Well, I was afraid she would've, whether she did it or not. I don't know.

Elise

Oh, you don't know she found it. <No I don't> Okay. So you also {...} you were keeping it. <Yeah> Right, {...}. When you came home and when you went to New Brunswick, have you and Harry already become sexually intimate with each other? <Yes> Yeah. Okay. And how was that for you? Because of course as a young woman at that time, even when I was growing up in the 70s, you know there is a lot of stigma attached to having sex before marriage. And a... so, how was that for you to begin being physically intimate before you're married?

Velma (00:25:30 – 00:26:40)

Well, you know, actually in New Brunswick, I was raped. And of course, when I was in the car with somebody who was one of the waitresses of my father's restaurant said he was okay, so I went with in a car with him. Of course I've got raped. <Hmmm>. And a, after that I, I guess, I went out on the, went out again, and another. After that, I just realized that I couldn't {...}. He was Catholic <hmmm> So, a... I went out at night, I guess I drank too much, and I was sort of, I felt that I was, I thought I was {...} away, and I shouldn't that I had to contain my virginity, <hmmm>, that I'd lost and all of is lost. So when I went out again, I, I drank too much [shaken], too much that I, I had a relationship with {...}, and when I came home, two, three o'clock in the morning, and the next day my father sent me back to my mother.

Elise

So this, this second one was a, was a consensual relationship? <yeah> Why do you think, I mean I know this question might be obvious, but I just want, I don't wanna guess. Why do you think you, you started drinking after? Was it to, to detonate like the feelings of pain from the sexual assault? Do you think? <Yeah, I think it was> Yeah, and did you experience depression after?

Velma (00:27:09 – 00:27:23)

No. <No?>. No. No. When I got to my mother's, I was okay, because she, you know, she had a boyfriend herself, you know <Mhmmm> And even during the divorce, she had a {...}boyfriend, steady boyfriend.

Elise

Right. So after this had happened to you, um, are you saying that, you didn't feel it was a big bridge to cross, having sex with Harry, because this are already happened to you? <Yeah.That's right>. So was kind a behind you, and, <yeah>, not such a <yeah> big deal? <That's right> Hmmm. In the book, you talk about how ten... you talk about he was a tender person. <Yeah> Yeah. And was your intimate relationship that way too? <oh yeah>. Yeah, yeah? <yeah>. Can you talk about, are you comparable, and are you willing to talk any more about that? Not so much the details about sex, but just I am trying to understand, being young women at that time. How it culturally so inhibited, it's not like something people talk about, or, you know.

Velma (00:28:16 – 00:28:40)

Yeah. {...} I guess maybe I shouldn't mention, and it was generally thought at that that time {too}. I think that these Chinese men were not great lovers, you know, [noise], and I can't say my husband was either, you know, um... we didn't spend that much time in sex. <No?> no.

Elise

Because, was there any particular reason why?

Velma (00:28:48 – 00:28:54)

Well, eh, it was just. I guess was part of his culture.

Elise

Yeah. In the way would you ... did you notice a culture difference between your own expectations and his?

Velma (00:29:03 – 00:29:13)

Well, [shaken], I, I guess maybe there wasn't too, there wasn't any foreplay, So to speak.
<oh, really?> Yeah. <yeah> yeah.

Elise

Anything? Any other differences that you noticed?

Velma (00:29:19 – 00:29:21)

Um... no I don't think so.

Elise

Yeah. Ok. So then you [sigh] {...}. When you came back, and you discovered that he had gambled. Was that the first you learned about the gambling in that community?

Velma (00:29:34 – 00:29:55)

Eh... no. He used to buy a little, by a 25-cent tickets they used to sell. And he bring those home. <Yeah>. That was before, er, you shouldn't say home, because I was living with my mother. But I used to, he used to show them to me, and that was the only gambling I ever knew that he did.

Elise

And when you came back and had discovered that he didn't have the money that you needed. How would that affect, what you think at the time?

Velma (00:30:06 – 00:30:12)

Well, you know, I was pretty young. And I suppose I just accepted it. <yeah>, Yeah.

Elise

So then you decided to continue to pursue, <oh, sure>, the relationship with him. How come?

Velma (00:30:18 – 00:30:24)

Oh well, I was in love with him. <yeah> [pause] yeah.

Elise

And do you think he was in love with you too? <oh yes> Yeah. Did he ever talk about going to China to be married, as so many men did?

Velma (00:30:35 - 00:31:30)

No. Actually, what did happen, at one point, um, I knew this girl. she was living with Chinese {...}. And a, oh, this came later, I guess, but I did say I {...} saying to him, but, marriage, as "you ever get married?" "I never went back to China," he said, and I {couldn't} believe that. And there are really, you know, {...} gets me what people think, 'oh, these Chinese all had wives in China.' And, and I don't believe that. They were poor. They never went back to china. <hmmm> all those waiters, and I don't know about the follows of the laundries, because they live in the laundries, and they saved their money. Some of them might managed it, but, but I think it was the men who were in business that managed to have enough money to go back.

Elise

Hmmm. Hmmm. So what did they do then, the other, other men that married?

Velma (00:31:37 – 00:33:00)

{...} just like, we, you know, they didn't get married, because I guess, I guess, {...} I don't know. Some of them got married. <mhmmm> I mean, I'm, I really didn't know it, yeah. Like for instance, after my son came out from the institution, <mhmmm>, he was sent away from ... he was three months old when he left me and they took him away from me, and sent me to the hospital. And incidentally, the doctor, sent him there, wasn't from Mercer Reformatory,

they'd brought this doctor in from 999 Queen St. And a...he diagnosed him as {...} from what I could see, he had a rash, and he had a fever, and he had infected ears when they sent him out. Ah... so, he didn't, the doctor didn't give his name to the, to the hospital. They, they wrote to the Mercer Reformatory, {...} ones the doctor supposed to {...} when they admit patients, they're supposed to give the name. But obviously, I mean, it was so clear to me, that, now today, to know that what the doctor was doing.

Elise

Would, I was curious about that. Why, why do you think that the he didn't leave his name as an attending physician?

Velma (00:33:07 – 00:33:25)

Well, she was giving me all these injections, and why she {...} take the responsibility for it? <oh, oh. So you know> {...}these poor health, and this condition. And, and you know, he wasn't the only baby <I see> would've been there during those days, when they were testing, yeah, the drug.

Elise

Right. So he wanted keep his name off of, not be associated with as her, and what she was doing.

Velma (00:33:34)

I would think so.

Elise

Yeah. Ok. That makes sense. Yeah. Hmmm. These, other, you mentioned that you thought, um, that you noticed what there was, you know, a lot of women like yourself, white women dating, ah, man, there. Did you get to know, {fairly}many of them over the years?

Velma (00:33:57 – 00:35:30)

Ah... I met one woman. <yeah>. Um, I think, you know that, like I mentioned this Japanese fellow took me out for a drive, and he took me to visit to some of his friends. He thought he might even marry me. That was out of the question for me. Ah, anyway he did take me to see a couple, a Chinese man married to a white woman with a couple of {...} and pretty hat {...} then he took me somewhere else to see. Another, white woman living with a Chinese man, and they had friends in there. They had visitors. And there was a one girl, and there was a man, a young man. And, I met her on the street one day. And she told me that this man, who had, had driven her, he had a car, and driven her outside the city to a farm, and to make money, for her to be a prostitute. And that, she had to give him half of the money that she got. But, but, she said, she only slept with one man. And she said, "He was the boss out there, on this farm, the huge farm" she said. And ah, and ah, she said she would never go again. And she was quite upset actually. She's just wasn't cut out for that sort of thing.

Elise

Do you think she was telling you as a warning to not get involved with those people?

Velma (00:35:38 – 00:35:42)

Well, I would've known anybody. I, I didn't trust and young man.

Elise

No? [laughter] <No> [laughter]. Why not?

Velma (00:35:45 – 00:35:48)

Well, probably after my first experience ...

Elise

Hmmm. Yeah. Yeah. Well, that does make sense. Yeah. So, this, but you made a comment that you, this Japanese man was hoping to marry you, but you wouldn't even consider it. But that's interesting, because then you end up marrying Chinese man. So <Oh Yeah, but>, what's the?

Velma (00:36:07 – 00:36:25)

Well, you know, I mean, he wasn't just the type. I mean, he was..., what should I say? Sort of a, a funny thing, you know, of a person, uh, his presentations, so I knew he wasn't my type at all.

Elise

Right. But and you say he brought you around to see visit all these other people. Do you think it was because he was trying to show you “Look at white women and Asian men can make it work.” <probably>. He was trying to sell you one.

Velma (00:36:38 – 00:36:39)

Yeah, I’m sure that’s what it was.

Elise

Yeah. That’s very interesting. And do you remember whether they were, ah, the men were Japanese? Or were they Chinese? Or...

Velma (00:36:46)

Japanese

Elise

They were Japanese. They were, Ok. It’s interesting to...

Velma (00:36:50 – 00:37:17)

But you know, when you {...} but Japanese and Chinese, because I did meet a man in a, a Japanese man in Vancouver: the Carnegie Centre. And, ah, he was one of those who had been, been sent away during the, you know. And he came, he told me, he was in Chinatown, used to help them, the men in Chinatown with their paper working, things like that <ah-ha>. So he sort of integrated himself there.

Elise

Hmmm. Yeah, that is interesting. <yeah> yeah. It’s quite different in Vancouver, isn’t it? It’s very different place from Toronto?

Velma (00:37:25 – 00:37:26)

Well, at that time.

Elise

Mhmmm, but I think still it is in many ways. Culturally, just very <yeah>, I found it to be, to be quite different. <Mhmmm>. The women that, one of the things I am interested in understanding better is “who are these women”? Who were meeting and dating and sometimes marrying Chinese men? What was their background and... Do you know anything about that? {...} a sense of that?

Velma (00:37:51 – 00:39:18)

Well, well, you know, it was taken for granted that lot were prostitutes. <Mhmmm>. And a, I weren’t, you know, some were prostitutes, some weren’t. But even a prostitute, eh, would, would settle for one guy eventually, and know it he was a good guy, you know. Ah, women knew who was treating them well. <Hmmm>. And they would fall in love with them, actually gives, I did meet, I knew that this was later, uh, I think after the 1947 act came in, when Chinese could bring their wives over. And I knew this girl, and I can’t tell you why I know her or met her. But she was living with a Chinese man, and I went to visit her, in her flat, and his, his arm was in sling, you know. And, you know, he said, he told me he had an accident. So when he left the room, she told me that she found some papers that he was bringing his wife over to Canada. And I, I guess, she stabbed him. [Laughter] <Oh, Wow>. I’m pretty sure she did. I mean, she, sort of, implicated [mumble], suggested <yeah> that she had.

Elise

All right. I, I have heard that. Some women knew that their husbands had Chinese wives, but some women didn’t know.

Velma (00:39:30 – 00:39:33)

Oh, she didn’t, <yeah>. Well, I don’t know what she {...}

Elise

Yeah, but it sounds like, <yeah>, she didn't know, and when she was...

Velma (00:39:36 – 00:36:41)

Well, she, she, even if she didn't know, she wouldn't expect him to bring his wife over to Canada. So, <yeah>, you know, I don't know.

Elise

Do you know what happened to them after that?

Velma (00:39:43 – 00:39:44)

No, I don't.

Elise

Yeah, hmmm. So, ah, you're right. I've heard the same thing too, that some were prostitutes and, bought some weren't. And I'm wondering do you, do you recall it that there was a kind of nickname or a name for women who were not really prostitutes, but, had, I don't know, a relationship of convenience? You know, they weren't romantic relationships looking to get married, but there are sort of in-between. Do you know what I mean? Kind of in-between of prostitute and, and a girlfriend?

Velma (00:40:16 – 00:40:46)

I don't know.

Elise

No. You weren't. Hmmm. Do you know of a lot of these women were immigrant women, or were they Canadian-born women?

Velma (00:40:27 – 00:40:50)

Ahh, like, eh, my husband I were living when my son came back from hospital temporarily, and then he went back again. But anyway, this Chinese man had a house, and we were on the second floor. And he was married to a, a white woman, <mhhmm>, she was French Canadian.

Elise

Do you know what their names were? Do you remember?

Velma (00:40:53 – 00:41:02)

No. <No>. So, she is the one, and I think I mentioned in my book that she was complaining about the electricity I used.

Elise

Oh, right. Yeah [laughter] I do remember that. Yeah. And so you left.

Velma (00:41:10 – 00:42:35)

Yeah. <Yeah>. But my, my best girlfriend, you know, like when we went into the restaurant, there were two women with my mother, with me. <Hmmm>, and one of them became good friend of mine. <Mhhmm>. And ah, she had a Chinese boyfriend, who worked in the laundry. She also had another boyfriend. But her boyfriend was black, and he worked on the railroad. <Uh~> So when her, eh..., black fellow was in town, she was with him. And when he left, she goes over with her Chinese boyfriend. <Hmmm>. So, so on one occasion, she took me to visit {her} Chinese boyfriend. Matter of fact, she took me to visit the other one too. <Yeah>. Uh..., so, uh, when she took me over to the visit her, with this black boyfriend, he had some friends there. And she told me that one of, one of the folks said he would like to take me out, and I said "I am mixed up enough", which was sort of an insulting to her. Eh, but, at the, yeah, the Chinese boyfriend just worshiped her. <mmm>. He was so happy when, eh, she brought her friend over, you know, because that's all he had.

Elise

Yeah. Did they seem very lonely? These men like Harry and all the other, there were men around, were they {...} very isolated? I am trying to understand <Oh yeah> because...

Velma (00:42:47 – 00:42:50)

Yes, yes. They were isolated. <yeah?> Yeah. Oh yeah. Sure, they were isolated.

Elise

Because on the one hand, they were all together, <{...}> in the community. But they were all working really long hours, so I'm trying to understand...

Velma (00:43:00 – 00:43:03)

Yeah. But, but they had no parents, I mean, no, <yeah>, no siblings, know nothing.

Elise

Yeah [pause]. So, how, when you think about some of those people, how would you characterize their <oh> daily life? [Pause]

Velma (00:43:16 – 00:43:28)

Well, [pause] they worked long hours, <mhmmm>, [pause] and they just, they gambled. And that was about all they had.

Elise.

Yeah. And their girlfriends? For those who had {them}?

Velma (00:43:33- 00:44:16)

Well, they, they, you know, that, I actually, like, that some of them couldn't afford a girlfriend. Right? Like my husband, really couldn't afford to {...} and that's for sure. <yeah>. You know, what you gonna do on \$9/week he had, and worked every day, no days off? So, eh, eh, and then I had to get this expensive milk I was told to get, and which we couldn't afford it. So, eh, most {...} girls would, eh, if, if men had a, a business, you can be sure he had a permanent girlfriend.<I see>. Yeah, she wouldn't be stepping out on him.

Elise

Right. Eh, there's an old expression "stepping out". [Laughter] Yeah. Yeah. So was it important to be able to have some finances to sustain those relationships?

Velma(00:44:30 – 00:44:31)

Yes. Correct.

Elise

Yeah. A lot of people say, I know you, you had very tender feelings toward Harry. But a lot of people say that most Chinese and white man and white women, say that Chinese men treated white women better than white man treated women, <mhmmm>. I'm wondering how much of that is true, and how much of that it's a bit of a stereotype? What do you think?

Velma (00:44:58 - 00:45:12)

[Whispers] Oh, it's true. <uh-ha?>. Oh yeah. I mean, they didn't condemn a woman, if she, you know, if they knew their woman is a prostitute, as she is gonna stay with him, and not cheat on him, I mean, that's all he wanted in life.

Elise

Mhmmm. So... that was one big difference is the lack of moral judgment, <that's right> about women's sexuality. <Yeah> And that is a huge difference. <Yup> Did you feel in white society? Did you feel judged as someone who <oh, Yeah> {...}, rape and ...Yeah.

Velma (00:45:33 – 00:45:54)

Yeah. When I went to work, ah, and, you know the, when you carry a baby, the, the girls I've been working with, would be sitting around it. At noon, we were having lunches, so, I would sit by myself. I, I, I mean, I didn't live in their world. And I dared, didn't dare say anything to [mumble] to indicate that anything about my world.

Elise

Hmmm. So why did you sit by yourself then? Like why? {...} they did know anything about you.

Velma (00:46:02 – 00:46:54)

Because I had, I couldn't contribute to the conversation. And I felt alienated. <Really?> Well, I felt alienated about, from their lives, where they're gone, what they've done, <mhmmm>, like the music. I, I'd be alone, like, um, before Harry went over overseas, and I'd be in the room up there at night, and I'd be listening to music, {like} the big band music. And I, still don't care about the big band music, because I'm, I'm not part of that. I never was part of that. I never went dancing, in, in [mumbling] these places where they had big bands or anything because ... oh, how could I be? Who would I go with? Who would I associate with; that would, would look down on me?

Elise

Hmmm. [Pause]. Was, was it the time then that you felt you couldn't hide your past? Not, just not tell anybody about your... .

Velma (00:47:09 - 00:47:20)

That wasn't, that wasn't good enough because, because how could I be friends with someone that, that I have to be careful with?

Elise

Right. So you could never get close to someone because you couldn't reveal the truth about who you are?

Velma (00:47:26 – 00:47:27)

You couldn't talk about anything.

Elise

Right, Right. [Pause] mhmmm. That must've been hard. <Yeah> Mhmmm. I get the feeling that that was the case for a lot of these, a lot of the women who lived with Chinese men. They were really, what I've heard was that they weren't accepted by the Chinese community, and they were much like how your father was with you, just kind of abandoned by their own families as well.

Velma (00:47:58 – 00:51:03)

Yeah. Well, um, ah, like, before I went overseas, and I went to Vancouver first, and I waited to catch a, get a boat. <Mhmmm> Um, and my son was already over there {...}. <Mhmmm> And I, I took a room in Chinese, eh, what should I really {...}house. Well, a place that rents rooms anyway <mhmmm> that I wouldn't go to a ... I, I didn't feel that I was part, part of the Anglo, eh, people. I felt, {...} was alienated. And even when I came back from, from Hong Kong, I would really love to stayed, you know, <Hmmm> even after I got the job, in, in the Powell River. Uh, and I lost my son, more or less gave him up {...}, you might say. Um... because I didn't know his father, I had no contact with Chinese except through my husband. And, so I, I did the one thing that I didn't want to do, and that was, I didn't want him to grow up in, eh, white, white people. But this woman, like she {...} in to help me. Eh, she, she'd been a foster mother, and she'd, and she cared for him, and then I figured she saved his life for something. And, eh, so, I, eh, that was the one thing I didn't want to happen to him, and it turned out I was right <hmmm> because he was resentful when he grew up. And he was sorry that he'd, he left, he treated his father so badly, in and during the court, court proceedings <mhmmm> because he wanted to be with, with her. Actually, you know, what, what {he} did it to me, where he was concerned, was the newspaper article. That's what killed me. And that's why I attempted suicide. It was, it's sort of, it's like, he came back from Hong Kong, to, and, and, he didn't want to stay with his father. And, and apparently, {...}why should he'd live with his father, in, in such circumstances that bachelor-type life, when he could go and stay with this foster mother in proper home? <Right> And she was willing to take him. So, of course, when court case came up, and he stole a letter. I sent a letter to, to my husband to him, thinking that he was there <all right>, but he stole it, took the letter, and never even told, my, his father that he got a letter from me. My father, he thought I was in, my husband thought I was in Hong Kong, when the court case came up. <Mhmmm> But even after the court, after that happened, you know, even during that period, I thought I'd go to Mexico, and get married to a Mexican, and ask my son to come back. And I, I did tried to Mexico [Laughter].

Elise

I guess it was a strategy for him to fit in? Harry Jr. to fit in? <Yeah, Yeah> {...} Because you write about trying to pass him out as French-Canadian. And...

Velma (00:51:16 – 00:51:51)

Yeah. <Yeah> Yeah. That, that, that might've worked out except that, you know, I am, I guess I am like my mother of someone's unfaithful {...} will be. You know, even, look, 1928, she got her divorce. <Yeah> I mean in what circumstances? And you know, New Brunswick was the only one place would give you, eh, divorce for infidel, for unfaithfulness <yes> at that time <yeah, yeah>. So she was lucky. <Yeah> But still, she stepped out of her home. <mmmm> And into a, you know, situation then in 30s [pause]

Elise

Tough, for a women <yeah> {...} its own way. <yeah> Pay own bills <yeah>, running a boarding house, {...} out society ...

Velma (00:52:01 – 00:52:15)

But, but, when I went down to Mexico, it just happened to coincident at the time that my mother was driving some horses down to {...} Mexico. [Laughter]. My mother was going around for then {...} horses in Vancouver. And, and...

Elise

In Vancouver? <yeah> Did she follow you up to Vancouver? <yeah> Oh!

Velma (00:52:19 – 00:52:47)

She did. <yeah> [pause]. So, um, so, so, I met up with her in Tijuana. And then I began to realize that I got sick. I got a stomach aches or something, and something. And I, I started to give up on the idea that. {It was nice to} realize that, as you know, getting married to a Mexican won't be that easy.

Elise

That's really... interesting. [Laughter] Had probably a good choice, um, decision that you made there, but ...

Velma (00:52:53 – 00:53:33)

I don't know if it was a good. It would've been a good decision if I could've brought my son down brought him up there. <Yeah> And for some reason, I must been thought that I couldn't bring him up in Canada, at least not without, without a Chinese husband, for sure. You know, no, no, no support from Chinese. <Yeah>. I do. And I found my husband {...}. When, you know, when I wrote that letter in, I thought he read it and get the answer from Mrs. Stanley, {...} that he was there. I thought he was there all the time. I thought my husband let me down, <Right> because {...} show I didn't trust my husband.

Elise

Yeah. By that point. <yeah> And just because of the history ...

Velma (00:53:40 – 00:53:43)

Ah ... Yeah, I, I guess, gambling

Elise

And also he, he handed over him. He handed Harry Jr. over to Mrs. Stanley <no he...> couple of times

Velma (00:53:52 – 00:00:52)

No, he never handed over...is is

Elise

Earlier on? Didn't he? Did he...

Velma (00:53:54 – 00:53:55)

Oh yeah. But, {<he came back, he said ...>} but he was sick. Yeah.

Elise

He couldn't manage it.

Velma (00:53:56 – 00:54:02) is a)

He couldn't manage it then. <Hmmm> Well, how could he it? <Yeah> With his long hours?

Elise

Yeah, it's, yeah, yeah. Back in the days before the day care; even for women, it's hard to manage <yeah> stuff like that. Yeah <yeah> yeah <yeah>. Right. But by that point, you, you felt that you {were trust ...}

Velma (00:54:21 – 00:55:18)

Yeah, I, I mean, I am both. I didn't know what to think. <Yeah> But my, huh, you see, my son must taken that letter, and not let my husband to know anything about it; because when he went to court, he said this, they asked where his wife was. And, and, she, he always called me Velma. But, they had this, this name on birth certificate at the Mary Demerson. They never mentioned me as Mrs. Yip, Mrs. Yip, in, in the court. It was as if, you know, eh, we weren't, we were two separate entities. And, and he said "she is in Hong Kong" when they asked. <hmmm> And Mrs. Stanley and my, my, my son knew very well that I was in BC.

Elise

Hmmm. They decided to remain silent. Hmmm. You must be felt betrayed by both of them when that happened

Velma (00:55:34 – 00:55:34)

What do you mean?

Elise

When they didn't say that you were in BC.

Velma (00:55:38 – 00:55:40)

Well, I didn't know anything about it <all right> until late in life, I started looking at...

Elise

Too much later.

Velma (00:55:42 – 00:55:48)

Yeah. <yeah> Started [mumbles] ... So I got those that information from, what, Children's Aid, Yeah.

Elise

Yeah. Right. Speaking of being Mrs. Yip, I wanted to ask you about that day that you got married. You can tell me what, described it to me what happened that day, how it went, and...

Velma (00:56:02 – 00:56:16)

Eh, yeah. We, we ... he took time off work. Ah, actually, his schedule was the {...} 11 to two, and he get off from 2 to 5, and go back to work till 1.

Elise

Right. And was the still in the restaurant business <yeah> at this point?

Velma (00:56:21 – 00: 56:34)

Yeah. So he got time off, and he got a friend to go with him. And I've got a girlfriend to go with me. And we went to, and we went to the minister's house, and we got married.

Elise

Hmmm. And how ...

Velma (00:56:34 – 00:56:37)

And then he went back to work.

Elise

How did you find the minister?

Velma (00:56:41)
He was okay.

Elise
Did you know him before the, the wedding? <No> You just knocked his door on that day...?

Velma (00:56:46 – 00:56:50)
I, I've, I think it must've been arranged, maybe his friend arranged it.

Elise
Ah, Okay. And was he white? Chinese? Do you remember?

Velma (00:57:00 – 00:57:02)
I don't remember. I think he was Chinese.

Elise
Yeah. Do you remember where it was, or what church ...

Velma (00:57:07 – 00:57:09)
No. it was a protestant church.

Elise
Yeah, yeah. There was a, a Reverend Mah, but I think he would've been dead by then. I don't think he was still living by the time, because... what year was it that you have got married and ...?

Velma (00:57:21 – 00:57:27)
Eh, in a, let's see. 1940.

Elise
Right. Yeah, I don't think Reverend would've been still... But there's certainly would've been other, a few other Chinese ministers around. And, and, how did that feel for you getting married? Did you dress up? Was it a special day? Or was it just sort of 'paperwork we need to get this done' ?

Velma (00:57:49 – 00:58:07)
Well, I guess I didn't have that many clothes. So, you know, I, I always dressed reasonably well. <Mhmmm>. I don't remember that it was, no, I didn't have any corsage or anything.

Elise
Hmmm. Did you... were you able to celebrate afterwards? Or did he have to go back to work?

Velma (00:58:15 – 00:58:18)
Ah, No. We didn't celebrate.

Elise
No. Was it a painful moment? Or joyous moment? Or...Just a moment?

Velma (00:58:27 – 00:58:31)
It was just a moment. It was something that had to be done.

Elise
Right. You did, it sounds like it wasn't particularly great, celebratory...

Velma (00:58:41 – 00:59:31)
No. <no?> No. Because it wasn't. I, I guess maybe we just didn't consider marriage as being all that important. <mmmm>. You know, because we've been together before, and eh, we, we were sort of, we weren't into celebrations really. <no?> no. There was {...} I mean, {we, we,} celebrate {...}. [Pause]. I don't, I don't remember he's even talking about his birthday. I never talked about his family except he told me that he had a sister. Ah, he

didn't send any money home, I don't know what he knew about his home, <mhmmm>, because he left, he left when he was 14, <mhmmm>, and then lost touch I guess. is

Elise

Mhmmm. Usually, ah, often times people were pretty well-connected to home through other people that they worked with, lived nearby, were from their village. Did he have that?

Velma (00:59:45)

[Whisper] no.

Elise

You didn't?

Velma (00:59: 47 – 00:59:55)

no, no, no. <Hmmm>. No, he told me that he worked on the boats in BC before he came to Toronto.

Elise

Eh, do you know where he was from exactly? What area?

Velma (01:00:02)

Guangdong.

Elise

OK, cause, so was most everybody from <yeah> that province in Toronto. <Right> Yeah. But he didn't appear to have connection with [short pause] How did he get the job in Hamilton? When you guys went to Hamilton?

Velma (01:00:16 – 01:00:37)

Well, eh, I don't, I don't know. But, apparently, apparently he could've gone most any restaurants, {and} got a job. Chinese restaurant. I think the moves around. Waiters moved around I'm sure. At least he did.

Elise

Right. So he didn't stay in Toronto consistently.

Velma (01:00:42 – 01:00:45)

Well, he, he, yeah he was, he, lived, yeah, in Toronto.

Elise

Right. Oh, but he moved around within the city. <yeah> Hmmm. What were your impressions of Chinatown as a neighborhood at that time?

Velma (01:00:56 – 01:01:45)

Well, you know, eh, when they went to Chinatown, we, we go upstairs in one of those, sort of rickety places. And eh, I, I'm not sure many go {fen} with their, {a} little flamboyant people <mhmmm>. Um, and I just remember the white old cloth on the table that was {...} and eh, the we would buy a drink, like it would be put on the little teacups <right> sort of under the table right, <mhmmm>, and eh, it will be late at night because he wouldn't get off until one o'clock in the morning. So, eh, and it was sort of joyous, because you know, the waiter would be happy to see us, man with a woman...

Elise

Oh, really? You got a reaction. <Yeah> huh, <yeah>. So how did people react and interact with you as a couple?

Velma (01:01:55 – 01:01:58)

Very well. < Yeah>, But Chinese did react very well.<yeah> yeah.

Elise

So they made you feel...welcome? <Yeah> and did you ...

Velma (01:02:02)
[Mumble] yeah.

Elise

Can you describe it a little bit? Like... can you remember any particular incidences? How did they make to feel welcome, for example?

Velma (01:02:12 – 01:02:35)

Well, it's like the, like when we went to Hamilton, the man who had a laundry welcomed us. You know, um, I suppose, it was called acceptance... [Pause]... why not? You know what I mean? From their point of view, why not?

Elise

Sure.

Velma (01:02:38 – 01:03:14)

Although I understand slowly here, there were some prejudice of, they say, among some of more stable Chinese. But, but you know, there weren't that many stable Chinese around anyway, you know. They say they have certain, eh, organizations, so I hear. But um, I don't know we were, you know, these were, all working-class people that I met. And even the {fellows} own the restaurants were not stable, but still have a white girlfriend.

Elise

Mhmmm. And did those women usually work or, that they didn't?

Velma (01:03:19 – 01:13:26)

Oh well, women weren't allowed to, white women weren't allowed to work in Chinese restaurants until 1947.

Elise

Mhmmm. But do you know did they have jobs or...?

Velma (01:03:31 – 01:04:44)

Eh, well, I think they would've worked in other restaurants. <Right> Yeah, I, I think, I think that most of these would've been maybe waitresses. Uh, you know, there were women who, who did housework. These were not the women who did housework. Actually, do you know that there were still advertising for house, domestics? Even in those days, when everybody was out of work, because that was just horrendous. When I came out of the Mercer, I stayed my mother's. I felt that 'maybe {...} that I must get a job.' So I, I took a job as, as a domestic. And, eh, we only had, what, I've got Wednesday afternoon after, after lunch that was off. And of course, I had to come back, couldn't come back after 12, that's for sure. So, you know, {...} had to be respectable. But, I had, a, a lot of work to do in that place. It was ridiculous. They had three bathrooms I had to clean every day.

Elise

Every day?

Velma (01:04:44 – 01:04:57)

And vacuum the stairs and everything every day. Yeah. And I didn't get much deed. <Mhmmm>. Remember stealing a bun, yeah.

Elise

Pretty miserable

Velma (00:05:00 – 01:15:19)

Yeah, so there was no wonder that, no wonder they were calling for domestics. Women were {...} be, be prostitutes, and be domestics, because it was a slavery. I mean, take your pick. You wanna be a slave? Or you wanna be ..., you know, especially with the Chinese were willing to take you in, and, and take care of you.

Elise

Mhmmm, Hmmm. yeah I kind get the feeling, um, that Chinatown became, for white women, a kind of refuge, in a way? <Mhmmm hmmm> Is that ... <Yeah> Your feeling about it? It seems like it was a refuge for you, certainly in some way...<Yeah> Yeah. [Pause]

Velma (01:05:43 – 01:06:07)

Yeah. But, but you know, okay, I don't know if you looked at that, there is, um, a tabloid called "Hush". <Uh-huh> And I've got some of them here. Uh, and, you know, the police around {...} look out for any women who are in Chinatown, and, you know, eh, like one women had to say, "I'm married. I'm legally married." She'd say to the policeman, you know, so she wouldn't get arrested.

Elise

So there are just cruising around? The police?

Velma (01:06:11)

Yeah, they, they did.

Elise

Picking them up?

Velma (01: 06:12 – 01:06:23)

When they could, you know, you, you gotta figure out, police of those days could, just arrest women for being a vagrant, <Yeah> and a, on his 'say-so'.

Elise

Yeah, yeah. I wonder if a lot of women didn't marry because you lost your citizenship, if you married <yeah> a Chinese man. I wonder if they just preferred to live common-law? <Ah> For that reason.

Velma (01:06:44 – 01:06:47)

I doubt it, because I don't think they knew. Because I didn't know.

Elise

You didn't know? <no> when you got married, <no> You weren't aware?

Velma (01:06:49 – 01:06:51)

No. I didn't have no idea.

Elise

Ah... So wasn't until later?

Velma (01:06:54 – 01:07:05)

They didn't advertise it. <Right> And even <right>, yeah, you know, they should be apologizing women to taking their citizenship away.

Elise

Yeah

Velma (01:07:06 – 01:07:10)

Incidentally, I'm, I'm a, I'm in a class-action suit on it.

Elise

Really?

Velma (01:07:12 – 01:07:36)

Yeah. Actually I was gonna do go on my own, but I got {...}. But anyway, I didn't. I decided to stay with class-

action suit. But, you know, I went down there in '48. And I didn't {...} they told me that I was Chinese. And a lot changed in '47. <Mhmmm hmmm> So, I was going to take them to the court. But, anyway, I didn't,

Elise

Hmmm. So what's the suit now? <Ah> what's it for exactly?

Velma (01:07:42 – 01:08:00)

Well, it's really for women, who, who were in, the mothers were pregnant of something, and they suffered, moving around, they didn't get citizenship, eh, coming from England or some darn thing like that. I'm not clear on it what it's all about ...

Elise

Right. Hmmm. So...

Velma (01:08:04 – 01:08:06)

It's, it's actually starting in Vancouver.

Elise

Oh, really?

Velma(01:08:07 – 01:08:14)

Yeah. <hmmm> The man with the name of Chapman is really involved, in he is writing a book abode it. <Uh, okay>. Don Chapman

Elise

Okay. Oh, that's really interesting.

Velma (01:08:16)

Yeah

Elise

So it is just looking for an official apology? Or is it looking for restitution? Or both?

Velma (01:08:21 – 01:08:26)

Well, you wouldn't, you have apology first and then <yeah> And I would probably be dead, by the time that all happens.

Elise

Yeah. So when your book came out, and you told this story, what happened after? <[mumble]>

Yeah, how did people respond to the, to your book coming out and telling, telling the story...?

Velma (01:08:43)

Well, ah...

Elise

What was the reaction?

Velma (01:08:44 – 01:08:56)

Oh, I got a call from three women, who said they'd, said they are half Chinese. I got the phone numbers of couple of them.

Elise

Yeah?

Velma (01:08:57 – 01:09:36)

One of them said that, she had an affair, now I don't know whether she was pregnant or not, because I didn't fully

{...}, that she had an affair with this Chinese men in the laundry and when they found out, now, maybe she was pregnant, eh, that he ran away. I told her, {...} was sort of, 'he shouldn't run away'. And they took her, put her in a home. And, so, {...} he would've been arrested, you know. I didn't get arrested because I said I slept with couple of men beforehand.

Elise

Yeah. That was interesting that you knew to do that too. <Yeah> Huh.

Velma (01:09:43 – 01:09:59)

So, uh, anyhow, so, I could give you her phone number, whether she's still there. This was quite a few years ago. And then I got another one from a woman who said that her mother would have nothing to do with her. She was remarried.

Elise

Mhmmm, Mhmmm. What was, what's...

Velma (01:10:03 – 01:10:10)

Remarried to a white man; and she was half Chinese, and her mother wouldn't ...<Abandoned her?> wouldn't recognize her.

Elise

Wow. Yeah. That's amazing

Velma (01:10:13 – 01:10:14)

So, {she} still have it.

Elise

Yeah. Mhmmm. Do you want to show me your, uh papers? You had some put some papers ...

Velma (01:10:25)

Oh, yeah.

Elise

Yeah <Yeah> All right.

Velma (01:10:26 – 01:10:52)

Well, these were actually, you, you know, you seen this stuff before, Um, oh yeah, this thing about Emily Murphy. I mean, I guess, you've heard about Emily Murphy, she was, she had quite a lot to do with bringing in that, uh, uh, Chinese, Chinese exclusion act. <mhmmm hmmm> So somebody had this on the, the, uh, about her {...} her picture being on our stamp,

Elise

Ohhhh, <yeah> , they were reacting ,<yeah> to that.

Velma (01:10:55 – 01:10:57)

And they were, they were objecting to it.

Elise

Right. Oh, that's interesting. [giggle]

Velma (01:10:59 – 01:11:00)

Yeah, on the Internet.

Elise

Yeah,

Velma (01:11:01)
Yeah.

Elise
Stamp of Emily... Hmmm

[Pause]

Velma (01:11:09 – 01:11:19)
And this was 100s of white girls, um, married, Chinese, {...} Presbyterian Church was sympathetic.

[Looking at pictures]

Elise
Huh, do you happen to know the date of this? This doesn't have that.

Velma (01:11:41 – 01:11:46)
Don't have the date? <No> Oh, I, I've got it here.

Elise
OK, all right. Can I write it down?

Velma (01:11:49)
Sure

Elise
Great. Because that's an interesting... 1936... so, uh, I don't really get what they're saying though. They're saying they want to start small hospital units, and then they say there's hundreds of white women married to Chinese, and {who} because of that, they were ostracized. What's the connection between the hospital units?

Velma (01:12:20)
[In a lower voice] I don't know.

Elise
But that's something to look up, ok great. I'm just going to get my note.

Velma (01:12:26 – 01:12:29)
Well, I've got two copies, so you can <oh, thanks> take one.

Elise
Oh, are you sure?

Velma (01:12:30 – 01:12:33)
Just write down the date; <yeah> date on it. Yeah

Elise
[Noise] Oops! [Write dates down] great ... and this one is "Hush"

Velma (01:12:58 – 01:13:05)
Yeah, but I don't know what it is. Ah, frankly something about immigration, I guess. It's about the ... I'm not clear what it is.

Elise
[Flips pages] So... there's also {...} about gambling on Winchester Street that doesn't appear to be have any connection with that... Hmmm. [noise]

Velma (01:13:24 – 01:13:38)

And this is, apparently there were quite a few problems in Saskatoon at the time I came up over several, I guess, uh, incidents on Chinese in Saskatoon.

Elise

Hmmm

Velma (01:13:40 – 01:13:45)

Uh, this, this is just one there, uh...

Elise Oh, Ok. [Scribbling; Flipping pages]

Velma (01:14:17 – 01:14:30)

Eh, you know, I must say all these, these are just, just things that I picked up, you know, nothing that you wouldn't know about, you know, we all known it this was going on <yeah>. And this is another one, so ...

Elise

Ah, this one, I know I have, [Laughter] hard to forget a title like that.

Velma (01:14:38 – 01:14:44)

And uh, I thought this was kind of interesting about the babies dying and a... so you can {...}.

Elise

Ah. <Yeah> [pause] [sigh] [pause] mhmmm [Pause] Hmmm,

Velma (01:15:09 – 01:15:10)

And couple more.

[Scribble]

Elise

When did you move back to Toronto? <ah>, just couple of years ago, you said?

Velma (01:15:50 – 01:15:55)

Yeah, yeah. Um, no, I came back, oh Yeah, a couple of years ago...

Elise

How could came back?

Velma (01:15:58 – 01:16:11)

Um, I just wanted to do more research <Yeah?> Yeah. <Hmmm> that's why I'm ...doing this other stuff, <mhmmm>, but, I, I don't think I am getting right or wrong

Elise

What is it exactly that you're looking for?

Velma (01:16:13 - 01:16:15)

I, I'm interested in eugenics.

Elise

Oh, Ok. [noise] <eh> What kind of a, what kind of material that you are looking for? Anything in particular?

Velma (01:16:23 – 01:16:36)

Well, I started writing about it, you know, but I don't think I'm that good writer, and eh, I just trying to, to find out who's behind it. Uh, it's a long story.

Elise

Yeah, too long to tell? <huh?> [Speaks up] too long to tell?

Velma (01:16:42 – 01:16:53)

Yeah. I think so <ah-huh> Because, some of, some of the information is in Vancouver, though, which really surprised me. <yeah>. You know, I, [scribe] so...

Elise

I think a lot of people who were behind it [scribe][pause]. There's a book on it. Um, by Angus McLaren, <oh yeah> have you read that?

Velma (01:17:03 – 01:17:04)

I've, I've got it here.

Elise

Yeah, you see, you have ...

Velma (01:17:05 – 01:17:06)

Our Own Master Race

Elise

Yeah. <Yeah> Did you find a helpful?

Velma (01:17:09 – 01:17:15)

Yeah, I did. But the other one that's reasonably helpful {...} *The Secret Plague*.

Elise

Oh, that title. Is that about Canada or the US?

Velma (01:17:19)

Canada

Elise

Yeah?

Velma (01:17:19 – 01:17:47)

Yeah [searches]. This is something that maybe I haven't heard anything about it because it's a legal matter. And nobody seems to be deal with it. It's about, as you can see, what they did was, they declared the Chinese establishments were not suitable, and uh, [pause] and they made some legislation again them.

Elise

Eh, Okay. Separate. So you can't sleep in a laundry.

Velma (01:17:52 – 01:18:17)

Yeah, you see, they, the women, were taking in laundry too. So, they, they, [mumble] they thought the competition wasn't right, so, their excuse. So, they decided that. But I think maybe because to white women, walking into a laundry, could've been reason to ... <yeah>, because they were watching white women as a... I don't know if I have that, I might have that here. Eh, I think I might have.

[Writing sound – 30 sec pause]

Elise

I was going to just focus on 50s and 60s, but I find that I'm keep going back further and further {and find}

Velma (01:18:57 – 01:19:05)

Oh, it's my time, that's, that's I'm way out of it, where made this concerned, you know, really, because she's quite younger than me.

Elise

Well, no, but this is, this is what I am saying of, they were vulnerable under...

Velma (01:19:12 – 01:19:13)

Yeah. Oh Yeah.

[flipping papers, writing]

Velma (01:19:26 – 01:19:50)

That's another one of those, and another one of these, and this, this is another one. And a, Ah, what was name of that ... I {need} to try to remember... Cole, Nicole. Ahh, it was, I, I don't know. Have you seen that before?

Elise

Mhmmm

Velma (01:19:55 – 01:19:56)

It was Emily

Elise

Oh? Mhmmm?

Velma (01:19:59 – 01:20:06)

She, she gave me an interview in this popular magazine, ha, I can't remember the name of the magazine.

Elise

Oh, is this from Black Candle? That became a book...

Velma (01:20:08 – 01:20:10)

That's not the Black Candle.

Elise

Oh, OK.

Velma (01:20:12 – 01:20:17)

That's, that was in a magazine <right> that she wrote.

Elise

But she, ok, yeah, Maclean's magazine in 1920. Fighting Drug Mannes

Velma (01:20:22 – 01:20:23)

Oh, you've got it.

Elise

Yeah, it's written on the back of your page. <Oh> ah, she, the, The Black Candle was originally published as a series in a magazine. And then it became a book <oh, I see>.so it's may've been

Velma (01:20:35)

Maybe part of series.

Elise

In the series... Yeah

Velma (01:20:36 – 01:20:37)
Yeah, probably. Maybe it was

Elise
Yeah.

Velma (01:20:38 – 01:20:41)
Maybe it was. She didn't have all those pictures in the book.

Elise
No

Velma (01:20:43 – 01:20:44)
That's the only thing, yeah.

Elise
Yeah.

Velma (01:20:46 – 01:20:49)
So, um, oh, this is something you've seen....

Elise
Yeah, I know that.

Velma (01:20:51 – 01:21:03)
She wrote that ... <hmmmm> Ah, this is, you know that, the, I told you that I, about the, the newspapers, where my son was concerned, really threw me. <Mhmmm>

[pasue]

Elise
Ah, here we go. Also a telegram.... [pause]

Velma (01:21:22 – 01:22:00)
Oh yeah, I don't know if you saw this, < [scribble]> [speaks to herself] I shouldn't give you a copy of that, I don't know, Chinese {...}. < [Scribbling sound] ... [Rips paper]> I think I got two copies that might let you have one.

Elise
Ok. {...} same thing? I don't think it is same thing, because ...

Velma (01:22:07 – 01:22:13)
Oh, this is different; <yeah> this is about complaint to Ottawa, the consul general...

Elise
1915.

Velma (01:22:17 – 01:22:20)
Yes, it's {...} maybe it is ...

Elise
Oh, the treatment of certain Chinese and Suzanne Marine...

Velma (01:22:23)
Yeah.

Elise
Yeah.

Velma (01:22:24 – 01:22:25)
Oh, you know that

Elise
Well, it says, I'm just reading it.

Velma (01:22:26)
OK.

Elise
{...} well, [pause] local police... are harboring women and were supposed, were supposed to be unlawfully using opium. {...} Harboring women...I see, eh, that's interesting. Ok, so here, then the police says that Chinese for complaining that the police unlawfully broke into their homes, when they did that night without a warrant. [Pause] .Wait on a laundry and a café {...} homes. [Noise] hmmm.

[Pause]

Velma (01:23:30 – 01:23:38)
Yeah, they watched them through the windows. I think, they said, they were, the police said there are watching them through the windows or something.

Elise
Is this one {...} an extra copy?

Velma (01:23:39 – 01:23:40)
Yeah. you can have that.

Elise
Ok. Thank you.

Velma (01:23:41 – 01:23:48)
Um, this, this was near my expose delivers. Just know something and ... <mhmmm> this kind of interest and that's some...

Elise
Hmmm. Mmmm

Velma (01:24:03 – 01:24:04)
I don't know if you got this.

Elise
Yeah, I do have that book ...

Velma (01:24:06 – 01:24:08)
Yeah. Yeah, "Do you sound this that pretty?"

Elise
Mhmmm. Yeah, I had that version ...

Velma (01:24:09 – 01:24:10)
You got that version, that's fine,

Elise
Mhmmm.

Velma (01:24:11 – 01:24:17)
Yeah, {there} were something that I've just picked up, probably the stuff that you {heard of}, and ...

Elise
Ah, actually I have that book through Jack Canucks. So, this is great. [Scribbles] Can I hire you as my research assistant Velma?

Velma [laughter]

Elise [laughter]

Velma (01:24:43 – 01:25:28)
[Whisper] you don't {...} Oh yeah, B9. I see. Yeah, well, this is of course the stuff is all over, it because that was the only stuff I was interested in really, because the, you, you know, this eugenics thing started right at the beginning of the century. [Pause] you can have that, if you want.

Elise
Thank you. [Staring] Hmmm, this is great. Hmmm, who were these white girls who lived with Chinese? Some were ex-waitresses, and some were Street walkers? Just what you said. Yeah. [Pause] Hmmm, this is, um, this is an interesting story that you're writing.

Velma (01:26:01 – 01:26:02)
Yeah

Elise
Yeah. It's ... I mean when you start looking at things, you, as you know, when you start looking at things, you realize how big they are. And, it's like it's not even, we don't realize that.

Velma (01:26:19 – 01:26:30)
No <no?> Yeah, you're right. Yeah. But it's something small, and they escalate after awhile.

Elise
Hmmm.
Velma [caught]

Elise
Yeah.

Velma (01:26:36 – 01:26:37)
Yeah, this stuff is only coming out now.

Elise {...}

Velma (01:26:39 – 01:26:50)
[Mumbles] nobody cares about these white women who got strand with their babies or whatever in those days you know, and uh, outcasts, so to speak.

Elise
Yeah.

Velma (01:26:52 – 01:26:59)
[Mumbles] And, and then the government penalizing you, taking your citizenship away, which is pretty bad.

Elise

Yeah. [pause] Do think that's the most, like if you are gonna tell, you know, tell me what part of the story that I need to, what are the parts of the story that I should focus on? Is that <well> most important part?

Velma (01:27:17 – 01:27:29)

I, I think, I think, yeah, I think. Because this Don Chapman phoned me up and, he's trying to keep me as one of, he doesn't want me to bureau up and do my own thing.

Elise

Right.

Velma (01:27:30 – 01:32:10)

And, because he was, anyway, ah, he said he spoke to, ah, someone in the immigration, whoever. And he told him that he wouldn't be satisfied until Velma Demerson got an apology. He tells me. And eh, so he took me back to this, lose, my, my citizenship, you know, and, after he hung up, [pause] I never thought it was possible to go right back in that time, and re-crea, re-create it. But, you see, the newspaper {article} made it impossible for me. {I'd} like my son comes back, and, and Mrs. Stanley tells him about, how they, how horrible I had been to, to send him to Hong Kong. And the newspaper verified it, you know. Would this woman known what she did, sending her son away, and so on. And I mean, I didn't, I had everything against me. I, Ah, the newspapers, and, like Chinese support, and, that's when, when I just, because, I think when it was, when the newspaper article came out, I couldn't take it anymore. And as I told you, I think, ah, some inform, {...} told him to throw me out. So, I was really, really nowhere, you know. Um, did I {...} this so hard... But then, when I come back and look at out it, what's sort of haunts me, is the fact of that, the doctor being able to be in such a powerful position in that institution. And, so I've done some research on, on what she was doing. And there's no doubt about it, you know, that a, this human papilloma virus. Uh, they didn't call it then. Uh, they called it, what they call...um, well, it was, it was considered B, B9, because they didn't know then at the time that, it you have these warts that they, they would might become cancerous or something, {...} ever knew that. So they were consider {...}, that, that, doctors paying no attention to it, but this, this doctor Guest, the skin{...} for various reason, she had a support. She had a lot of support, as she was into research and she, she actually started Cancer research at the women's cottage house, but... And uh, so, I came up across something, she said, they couldn't, that, animals, they couldn't use animals, because the virus couldn't be incubated in animals at the time. So {it} means that they would have to use humans. And I think it, I think it was '56 or something, and, and they found that they could actually, eh, managed to use, to do without the animals in. But, I figured that, the, I was a victim of her research. I'm sure I was, because, eh, {...} they even mentioned that in the, ah, in the, ah, reports for the Department of Health, you know. They were, they were looking into this sort of thing, you know, and that was in the 30s. I think it was '39, '38-'39, 39. Yeah. So, uh, and the fact she did put another girl to, I mean, do I have to think that I was the only one there? <hmmm> We weren't the only ones, come on, <hmmm>, of course. You know it's like that boy that turn around set {...} on, he was at, remember the boy that jumped off the ... uh, then, when he came out and admitted that he'd been sexually abuse, and they did, the, the, judge only gave man, two, two years in jail. And he jumped off the, not a cliff, but something, and he committed suicide. But, ah, um, you know, to be the first come out to say that, but nobody really knows that. Do you know, on the Internet, I found somebody said "what kind of marrow disease did found in my hand?" you know. So, ah, and, and you don't have papilloma viruses, not necessarily.

Elise

No. It isn't.

Velma (01:32:14 – 01:32:25)

See, it isn't. But, um, and why did she choose us girls from the Home? She chose us girls, because she knew we weren't infected <Mhmmm>you know.

Elise

And you are vulnerable. You are not powerful. You don't have powerful parents, who are gonna, you know.

Velma (01:32:31)

Yeah.

Elise

They are not gonna experiment on private school girls right? [laughter] They're gonna <but> find victims who have no voice. And...

Velma (01:32:38 – 01:33:29)

And, then later on she, she said something about, I wouldn't need something, I forget what it was, and I presumably knew at that, uh, and I thought that, when I run away from the hospital, I got a detention, because, you know, I mean it was on the radio. I am sure on the radio. And ah, ah, then, of course the authorities had to be, you know, and then the criminal justice system had to be notified. Ah, the funny thing about it is that a girl who was arrested under Female Refugees Act, they were just taking her back to the place where she came from. You wouldn't put her in a jail. But if you ran away from, from a reformatory, you're supposed to get two years in jail. But then we shouldn't be there in the first place.

Elise

No, no.

Velma (01:33:33 – 01:34:10)

So, Ah, but nevertheless it came to be a, the, the, ah, the superintendents, said that I was being subjected to these, to these painful treatment and, and then, what they knew, I don't know. But, but, then they gave me all my good time and, you know. So, who knows? I'm sure they knew a lot. They're not telling. You know they won't let that stuff come out today, what they, it was called the "Heroic Era of Medicine."

Elise

Mhmmm.

Velma (01:34:12 – 01:35:05)

And, ah, the beauties of it is here, in Toronto, you go down to the medical building, and go down the basement, and everything is there, and you can poke around. You can't do that in Vancouver. You gotta ask for exactly what you want. <Mmmm>. And, uh, so, you, nothing sort of clicks like, "oh, hey, I better look at that," you know. So [pause] and now it is same for the archives. They move archives from downtown way out to the University. I, couldn't { ... }they told me that, the, the, leader, readership is gone way down, <yeah> an account of that <yeah> the old people not have chance, <yeah>, and of course everything's on, on the internet. A, lot of, all these old people here appear to be to use internet.

Elise

Yeah, Yeah. No, I know, that's, that's tragic.

Velma (01:35:09 – 01:35:16)

You know, you get a, you get time when you can do something in here, you cut right out and ... <yeah> [pause] Anyway,

Elise

Yeah, did you, look at your mer, Mercer file? Were you able <yeah> to look at that one? Is it that one?

Velma (01:35:22 – 01:35:24)

I got, <yeah> I got some Mercer files.

Elise

Do you?

Velma (01:35:25 – 01:35:27)

Yeah <Oh> I've, I've got them. I, I

Elise

You have them here?

Velma (01:35:28 – 01:35:34)

Yeah <Oh> But, but I asked for some more, and they refused, said they were not allowed send them. So ...

Elise

Even if it's your ...

Velma (01:35:36 – 01:35:42)

That <oh> me, mine will, for me, personally <ok> I got Mercer {...} for other, other readers.

End of MP3