

ALAN, INTERVIEWED BY KEN

Ken

And we're recording now. So today is, is it November

Alan 0:00:38.7

18.

Ken

November 18th, and I'm interviewing [Alan Joe] who has graciously invited me inside his home. Umm, it's, it's so funny because I know that you're a dentist and I have this compulsion to call you Dr. Joe. But I'll call you Alan throughout the interview if that's fine.

Alan 0:00:22.9

That's fine.

Ken

[Laughter] Since this is the first interview, and, and I don't know, as I said, if there's going to be a second interview, but we'll try to get this done in about an hour or so. Umm, tell me a little bit about yourself before we start speaking about the specific questions. Like, who are you? How did you come to Canada? Why did you come to Canada? And did you come to Toronto first specifically? Just a bit about your family, your background. That's a large question, but you know, those little mini biographies, sort of thing.

Alan 0:00:52.9

I was born in China, in [Guangzhou], in 1937, just when Japan start to invade China. My father was an immigrant to Canada in, I believe, uh, 1910. He was one of those that paid the \$500

Ken

So your father paid the head tax?

Alan 0:01:23.0

... head tax.

Ken

I didn't know that.

Alan 0:01:25.1

Uh, he came because the economic situation in China was very, uh, poor and he find that the opportunity for a decent job and a, a decent life is probably better in Canada. And he heard from returning Chinese from Canada to the neighbouring village that in Canada, there are opportunities around 1905, 1910, for people to, uh, open laundries, coffee shops and maybe little stores in Chinatown, whether in Vancouver, Toronto, or Montreal. So he borrow from his sister and other friends the money for the \$500 head tax and passage to come directly to Toronto, because he also has a friend, about his age, whose father was working in Toronto who owns a laundry. So when my father and his friend came, they have, his friend's father was already here to help them too. He first, I think, worked in Chinatown, some grocery store, a small store, and then later, upon the recommendation of

his friend's father, he bought a laundry, I believe at Logan Avenue near Kingston Road, that area. When my father came, he was already married and, he does not like, or he did not – he's passed away in 1952 – he did not like the bachelor's life, and therefore he saved money, and actually he brought his first wife to Canada in 1920. She, too, I believe, paid \$500 head tax. My own mother is the second wife.

Ken

Oh, so your father had two wives.

Alan 0:03:59.4

Two wives. Has a wife here in Canada, and has a wife in China. My father

Ken

So your mother was the wife in China.

Alan 0:04:07.4

Yeah. My own mother was the wife that lived in China. My father married my own mother probably 1929, 1930, around that time. The reason that he married my mother is for practical reasons. Not romance, or affair, or anything like that in those days. He married another woman, my mother, because, for several reasons, one, he needs someone to look after, to take care, care giver to his own mother, kind of my grandmother [at his?] age. He wants someone to look after his properties in [Guangzhou] because he had always envisioned saving money. He built a house, a, a modern house in the city of [Guangzhou], so he needs someone to look after his property. Also, he wanted more children. His first wife, whom I call [Dai Ma], had two children but can, but could not have any more children, and he wants more children, so he married my mother, and my mother had me.

Ken

Did your mother know of the other wife?

Alan 0:05:41.8

Oh yeah. This all arranged, this arranged marriage [all consideration]

Ken

It was all practical.

Alan 0:05:48.0

Actually, in those days, polygamy, having two or three or four wives is common, common thing, and to some extent, might even be a status symbol to some men. That's the era of multi wives.

Ken

That you can keep more than one wife.

Alan 0:06:08.2

Yeah, that's right. So I was born in 1937. Live under Japanese occupation.

Ken

In [Guangzhou].

Alan 0:06:17.6

In, uh, In. Only a short time in [Guangzhou] because of the bombing of the city. Actually, from [Guangzhou], we moved to Hong Kong, Hong Kong to Macau, to escape the Japanese bombing, because for several years, the Japanese was, were bombing the city, but they wouldn't bomb Hong Kong, because Hong Kong was British Crown Colony until 1941, when they decided that they want to capture Hong Kong and south-east Asia. Uh. So during about three and a half year, I was actually back in our ancestor village in [Chinese], that's were our forefather came from. It's about another hundred miles or so inland from the city. After the war, 1945, my mother and I returned to the city of [Guangzhou], and I saw the school, the school I went to, [Chinese], it's one of the, supposed to be one of the best school in the city. Was associated with the Baptist missionaries. 1949, the Communist started taking over all of China, so in 1949, October, we left our city of [Guangzhou] to Hong Kong, about ten, ten days or so before the Communist capture our city, and from Hong Kong, we have applied for visa to come to Canada. Now because my mother

Ken

Your entire; this is you and your mother, or?

Alan 0:08:15.7

Just me.

Ken

Just you.

Alan 0:08:16.9

Actually, at that time

Ken

Why was it only you?

Alan 0:08:21.3

Because Canadian government do not recognize polygamy or two wives, so my father could not apply for me and my own mother to come to Canada. Actually, I had to use a false paper. You know, at that time, they called it paper son and paper daughter. So actually, my uncle Number Three, which is younger brother to my father, claimed me as his son, so I came as a son to my Third Uncle, and I arrive, uh, to Toronto in, in the winter of 1950. Around, uh, somewhere like January 31st or February the first, somewhere around that time. I was 12 years old so I start public, public school in Toronto. We lived in the west part of Toronto, near [Roncesvalles?] and [inaudible] street.

Ken

So you were living with your uncle at the time.

Alan 0:09:33.1

No, I came, my father was still living, though he was ill with cancer, and he, I live with my [Dai Ma], my father's first wife,

Ken

Your father's first wife.

Alan 0:09:45.7

My, my stepmother, I called [Dai Ma?], the first wife, and my half-sibling, older sibling. And I started grade 2, stay in public. I did not know any English, so they put me in grade 2, even though I was in grade 5 when I was in China.

Ken

Wow.

Alan 0:10:04.1

So, it

Ken

What was that like?

Alan 0:10:06.3

Well, it was kind of funny, because I was sitting with these little kids that probably, uh, can't even wipe their nose, and the desk is so small. The desk and chair is combination, and you have to squeeze in. [Cough] Excuse me. I stay there for a couple months. I stay a half a year in grade, grade 3, half a year in grade 5.

Ken

So this is in 19...

Alan 0:10:43.5

1950 I started school,

Ken 1950

Alan 0:10:47.6

1950, around April 1950.

Ken

In [Roncesvalles?]

Alan 0:10:51.9

Yeah, [inaudible] Fern Avenue Pubic School.

Ken

Oh, I've been there.

Alan 0:10:56.8

You been there?

Ken

Yeah.

Alan 0:10:57.6

Fern Avenue, Fern Avenue Pubic School. Anyway, I jumped up from one grade to another. I finished in about two years. By the time I was 14 in 1952, I went to Parkdale Collegiate, stayed there for five years, then enter a pre-dental general science program, and entered dentistry in 1957. Uh, graduated in 1962, and, and did post-graduate work from 1966 to 1968. Specialized in orthodontics, in children dentistry. And practiced in Toronto, though last number of years until about 2004, that's when I retired from practice and teaching at the University of Toronto Faculty of Dentistry.

Ken
That's a pretty
Alan 0:11:58.9
That's basically

Ken
A very quick and neat summary of your life, in some ways.
Alan 0:12:04.5
Yup.

Ken
It's pretty impressive that you can recall that many details. Uh, [inaudible].
Alan 0:12:09.7
My interest, uh. I'm retired now. My interest is in studying, learning more about, uh, life, about philosophy, so I've been taking evening classes at U of T in creative writing, in philosophy, in comparative religion, that kind of enlightening, uh, humanities stuff, that I did not have time to, uh, study or pursue when I was in practice because of, uh, the pressure of academics and professional. You have to keep up with things.

Ken
Yeah, I can definitely see that. I'm under some pressure myself right now. Um, when you were living out in [Roncesvalles??] – I'm going to be a little more specific about the questions.
Alan 0:13:02.1
Yeah, Beatty Avenue

Ken
Was it, was it a home?
Alan 0:13:05.6
It, it was a three-storey

Ken
So, you didn't live in Chinatown.
Alan 0:13:10.3
No. As I mentioned on the telephone for you, I worked in Chinatown

Ken
You worked in Chinatown.
Alan 0:13:15.4
from probably, not, maybe around '54 to '59 or '60. I worked there five or six years, every summer and every Friday. No, every Saturday-Sunday, you know, Chinese restaurant has a waiter. Every weekend and every summer, that's why basically

Ken

Yeah, I will definitely get to that. I think that'll be an interesting part of the interview. But you lived in Beatty Avenue in a three-floor house?

Alan 0:13:53.5

In a three-storey, three-storey semi-detached house, a real big house. We lived on the main floor.

Ken

In a rooming house, oh, OK.

Alan 0:13:57.2

We, we owned the build, we owned the building.

Ken

You owned the building, OK.

Alan 0:014:02.6

My father did.

Ken

Your father owned the building.

Alan 0:14:04.9

We live on the main floor with three bedroom and the rooms upstairs were rented out, because post-war housing were very tight, so lots and lots of people need housing. So they rent. Very few people can afford to buy.

Ken

Who did you rent, who did you rent the house to?

Alan 0:14:23.8

Oh, whoever. Rooming house is not rent, renting apartment, means you rent rooms. So lots of time, is the bachelor men and women, couples. We had, actually, we had seven rooms upstairs on the second and third floor.

Ken

Seven.

Alan 0:14:43.0

Seven rooms.

Ken

That's a lot of rooms.

Alan 0:14:44.4

Yeah, well, you know, they're not big one, you know. You don't have cooking facilities, or, or maybe there's a little hot plate where you can boil water to make coffee or tea. That's, that's the extent of it.

Ken

Were all the tenants Chinese?

Alan 0:1`5:00.8

Oh no. Very few Chinese because we, our home in west Toronto is maybe, by streetcar, half an hour or 35 minute from downtown, Chinatown at Dundas and Elizabeth street. So it is mostly Caucasian, white people.

Ken

But poor Caucasians and white people. But poor, specifically poor. Like [Chinese].

Alan 0:15:26.4

No, no, this is men, all of them have work to do, because housing is so tight. I mean, very few people can afford to, to own their house, own their apartment, so they rent. And if they are single, they rent one room, or even if they're a couple without no children, all they need is a room to, you know, to sleep, and as I say, maybe a little hot plate, uh, electric plate, boil water, make tea or something.

Ken

Was it ever weird in, in, in, in like just being a Chinese person who rented out a home to white people, or?

Alan 0:16:08.5

No, it was, it was, um, fairly common. My father

Ken

For a Chinese to rent out space for

Alan 0:16:16.6

No, because we are away from Chinatown. Actually, it was, quite a number of my father's Chinese friends, by the time they reach around retirement age, they don't want to work so hard in the laundry or in the restaurant, so they buy a house, they live in part of the house and they rent, the rest of the house would be rented out to supplement their income, help to pay the mortgage, [bell rings, or fork on plate] so they can retire, have their own home, have some income from renting out rooms. So I had mentioned previously, we had seven rooms upstairs, four rooms on the second floor, and three smaller room on the third floor. And every Friday evening after school, uh, when I first come to Canada, I helped [Dai Ma], my stepmother, to house clean. That mean that every Friday evening, vacuum the whole house including the tenants' room, change the bed sheets, wash the towels, and

Ken

That's, I mean, I

Alan 0:17:31.7

the linens, and, and things like that. And later on

Ken

So you basically ran a motel in some ways, like that.

Alan 0:17:37.1

Except that a room is minimum one

Ken

One month,

Alan 17:42.3
Week

Ken
One week, oh, OK.
Alan 0:17:44.0

Minimum one week, and you got to have a working address. In other words you're employed and you have a working address. And we want a reference. So it's not, it's not a motel or hotel. Hotel, motel, you can rent for a night, for a day, but we have a minimum

Ken
You wanted a certain type of person.
Alan 0:18:07.0

one week. That's right. Minimum one week. We make sure that they have a job and that they have a known address of employment.

Ken
Hmm. I mean, this is fascinating for me, because I haven't heard this part of the history, right? The fact that this was, and this was common for, for
Alan 0:18:23.2
Quite a lot of my father's Chinese friends

Ken
older Chinese to have boarding houses, and they would rent to anyone, just not, not, all over the city.
Alan 0:18:32.3
Uh-huh. [eating, noise of fork on plate]

Ken
And you don't remember any stories of them having any problems doing this. Like, there was no backlash for them being Chinese and being property owners?
Alan 0:18:51.8
No.

Ken
Wow.
Alan 0:18:58.4
No, I think by the time of post-Second World War era came, the people are more enlightened. And because during the war, uh, many Japanese, no, many Chinese have gone, have enlisted in the military, have gone to war. They come back as veterans, in other words, they have contributed to the war effort of Canada. Therefore, I think, they become much more accepted. They were not looked down as much as the older time, during the time that my father came in 1910, or when my, uh, stepmother came in 1920. So, in other words, there were other immigrant that came to Canada, the Jewish people, the Europeans, they call us D.P.'s. Of course, there was a bit of discrimination.

Ken

What's a, what's a D.P.?

Alan 0:20:08.1

D.P. is a derogatory term, displaced person. So the local people called the new immigrants and the Oriental immigrants like the Chinese, D.P.'s. And we, at school we may be laughed at, and snowball throw at us, and they called us D.P.'s, "Chinky, Chinky, China boy", or such things. So there was some discrimination, although I personally haven't found it to be that bad.

Ken

What was the discrimination that you endured, or maybe even the stories that your father had?

Alan 0:20:56.5

Well, besides, Toronto is not as bad as Vancouver. Because Vancouver's really bad because of the local white people, I'm talking the local, uh, white people were very envious and jealous of the Chinese immigrants. And they say, you know, "They take our job, they open, uh, laundry, they open grocery store, they open restaurants, they take away some of our business and, and, and, uh, cause more employment [sic] among us, so I think the discrimination factor was much more prominent in B.C., far less so in Montreal and, and Toronto. Chinese "tea" liquor in restaurants;

Ken

So you don't think you experienced much discrimination in Toronto?

Alan 0:21:46.1

Well, you know, maybe it's a childhood thing. We got into fights because, uh, the white boys call, call us, uh, well, that's only, in my school, public school [inaudible], there's one other boy and me actually came from China. There were a few other Chinese, but they were Canadian born, they were born here, uh, so we were fresh off the boat, and we were kind of, uh the low man on the totem pole, uh, the low boy on the total pole. So, some of the other kids maybe, uh, tried to laugh at us and tried to bully us a bit, but, uh, nothing that drastic that I have personal experience. There were probably a fair amount of, uh,

Ken

Fighting is fairly drastic though, isn't it?

Alan 0:22:38.2

Uh, well,

Ken

I mean, like I know

Alan 0:22:41.0

For boys, a scuffle, is, I don't, it's not like these day that we hear so much about the bullying, you know, and they have knives and weapons.

Ken

When did you stop fighting? I mean, In understand there is a difference when boys decide to scuffle, and

Alan 0:22:55.8

And somebody call you a name and somebody throw balls, snowballs at you, you know, [laughing] you jump on them,

Ken

You fight back.

Alan 0:23:01.9

You know, you just grapple and roll on the snow. I, I never got hurt or [laughing] hurt any, hurt anybody, you know. Though we did have a few fights, uh, but, you know, nothing serious that you really cause blood or serious injury, or anything like that.

Ken

When did you stop fighting? I mean, it seems that the way that you're talking about it

Alan 0:23:25.9

Mostly in public school. Once you get at high school. In high school

Ken

And you went to Parkdale.

Alan 0:23:31.1

Yeah. Parkdale Collegiate. At that time, Parkdale Collegiate has good reputation. Most of, most of the boys and girls are also immigrants from Europe, you know, Ukrainian, Polish, uh, Russian, you know, and some Jews, you know. A lot of us students were immigrants, so therefore we get along very well. And also, most of us graduate and go on to university. As a matter of fact, I think from my class [inaudible], I think we have about 20 kids, I think, maybe 17 or 18 of us go on to university and have, uh, obtain all kind of degrees. So, perhaps better than average grade 9 class, that you know, 80-90% of us graduate to university.

Ken

Yeah, I think that was one of those strange realizations from my first year of university. In my group of friends, I think there were five of us, and three of us are now doing our PhD's. So it was, I love those little realizations. You're like, oh, that's sort of funny.

Alan 0: 24:50.5

Yeah, I mean, going to university nowadays is a common thing, and uh, but

Ken

Back then it wasn't, yeah.

Alan 0:24:58.0

Uh, my two older siblings, my older brother, he's almost 90, he graduate from Electric Engineer at University of Toronto. And my older sister graduate from finance and commerce from Victoria College, University of Toronto. At the time, in the '40s, just, like at the end of Second World War, for a Chinese young person to aspire to university and graduate from university, was not that common. I mean it was fairly common, but still not that common an aspiration. Most young people take technical training or, or, or go in

restaurant business. A few might take over their parents' business, whether it's a restaurant, grocery store, or even laundry. So to be university graduate in the late '40s and '50s is a rather uncommon aspiration and achievement in some way. Financial aid to student was very, very few and not very much at all. It's not like these days, you can borrow from [inaudible] Government, you can have many scholarships available, but in the '40s and '50s, scholarship, bursaries, and loans were scarce. I work, I worked every summer, every weekend, and I pay my way through all my, well, basically including my graduate studies, uh, eight years of graduate studies after grade 13. We had grade 13 at that time., grade 13 was common.

Ken

I was the second last year of grade 13. Yeah.

Alan 0:27:10.6

Yeah? You were here?

Ken

I

Alan 0:27:12.3

Did you have to write the departmental, you have grade 13, but did you have to write the matriculation exams?

Ken

No, I didn't have to write the matriculation.

Alan 0:27:17.8

That was tough.

Ken

Was it? The matriculation exam?

Alan 0:27:23.6

The matriculation. Everybody write the same exam. Everybody write the same day. And the papers were sent to Queen's Park, marked by other teachers, so your, your own school and your own teachers has very little if anything.

Ken

By the time I, I did

Alan 0:27:40.7

So you could not even, you could not even get from your teacher, well, what would be, what would be your favourite question that they tend to ask. The teacher say: "I don't know. I did not make the exam and I don't mark the exams." So it was very very tough.

Ken

When you, so you had to work your way to support yourself through university. When did you start working?

Alan 0:28:04.1

I started working, ooh, I came in 1950, winter, and in 1952, I started working in a Chinese café on Summer

Ken
19..., 19...
Alan 0:28:19.9
Two years later.

Ken
1952. Wow, that's fast. So you were 14.
Alan 0:28:25.1
Yeah.

Ken
And this was where? At Dundas and
Alan 0:28:28.4
No, no, this not Chinatown. This is. My first job was in Hyde Park at a little Hyde Park grill. [laughing] Hyde Park Grill, [Rozens...?] and College, around that area.

Ken
[inaudible]
Alan 0:28:43.7
So two dollars per day, 10 hours a day.

Ken
Wow. What did you do there?
Alan 0:28:51.2
Waiter, serving mostly, because it's a coffee shop, uh, mostly tea, coffee, donuts, sundaes.

Ken
Was it difficult to get work?
Alan 0:28:59.8
Uh, yes and no. I, I went to at least, well, because my English were very little then, and I was little, uh, timid about going into a

Ken
A white restaurant.
Alan 0:28:13.1
A white establishment so I went to Chinese grocery stores and restaurants, uh, and after about a dozen, uh, attempts, I found this, uh, coffee shop, uh, that, called Hyde Park Grill, where they did give me a summer job,

Ken
They hired you.
Alan 0:29:35.9
Yeah.

Ken

It wasn't difficult. I mean initially, it was difficult to find work, but
Alan 0:29:41.1
Yeah.

Ken
Did people treat you differently because you were Chinese?
Alan 0:29:44.2
Uh, no, I, I didn't, I didn't feel any problem there. I mean, you know, people come in for coffee.

Ken
Do you mean if we can close the, the sun is in my eye.
Alan 0:29:55.9
OK. Yeah. [Closes curtain.] I think sometimes also depend on how, how one, uh, we act, and attitude. Quite often, some people have a chip on their shoulder. If somebody look at them with a little bit of, uh, with eye contact, they might feel, oh, somebody is stare at me or looking down at me. I tend, generally speaking, I tend to, uh, give people benefit of a doubt so I don't get as upset about discrimination. So I don't feel, if they look at me as though they're looking down at me, I ignore them or I just don't, uh, accept their attitude as negative. In other word, I like to look at the good in people rather than the negative in people, so I don't, uh, react, uh, too negatively, and many people told me that there are a lot of fair amount of discrimination, but I myself haven't felt that keenly about it. Um, I don't know what

Ken
Is it because, I mean, it's almost like you
Alan 0:31:29.0
I don't that has anything to do with my, uh, my Christian missionary teaching about turn the other cheek [laughing].

Ken
Right.
Alan 0:31:39.7
I don't know about the influence of the Christian missionary, I suppose

Ken
All right, do you consider yourself Christian now?
Alan 0:31:50.3
I'm sorry.

Ken
Are you a Christian now? Do you consider yourself Christian now?
Alan 0:31:54.9
Probably not. I was not baptized. I, I, I was leaning toward Christianity because of my exposure at a very young age to some, uh, very good friends who, who were Christian converts, and also the influence of, of, uh, of going to missionary school, where they have

Sunday school, and also they have, uh, uh, religious rallies each year. Um, but I cannot say I am a Christian. I believe there is a universal spirit. As far as calling oneself a Christian, right at the moment, I, I'm studying Buddhism as a philosophy, um. One of the things that I did as a very young person, right after I graduate from university, I work hard as a dentist for somebody, make some money, and then that's, I graduate summer of '62, after I work about two or three months, I went travelling through Europe, and I was in Jerusalem. Part of the reason was I want to see what Christianity is like at its source, which is, of course, the Holy Land, Jerusalem, Bethlehem. When I was in Jerusalem, I, I was at the King David Hotel, and I went to one of the top floor, and I look around. In one direction, you see a minuet [sic]. In another direction, you, you see a Christian church with a cross on top. In other direction, you see a synagogue. In other direction, you see a minuet [sic] on mosque. And in some distance, you see some tem-, old temples in ruins and they say this was pantheism, heathenism, whatever. I ask myself, what is the truth? Is the truth one of these as my missionary teachers were telling me, that you have to believe in Jesus Christ, and this is the only salvation. Is the truth one of these, none of these, or all of these. I came out disappointed, disillusioned from my trip to Jerusalem and Bethlehem and the Holy Land. The host-, there was some hostility there with Jerusalem divided, with guns pointing at each other from the Arab side and from the Israeli side, and even among the Christian churches, there was some internal rivalries, and I found it very difficult to accept any one particular religion whole heartedly. I believe in maybe a universal spirit, and I don't think it's necessary to give a name of whether you call God Allah, Jehonah, Jebolo, whatever. Names are not important because names divide people rather than bring people together. What is the difference whether you are a Muslim, a Jew, a Christian, a Buddhist, or whatever? So I believe in a universal spirit.

Ken

Do you think that in thinking like that, when you did work in Chinatown, did it help you get work in these spaces, or was it just

Alan 0:37:57.5

No, what help you to get work is if you speak the dialect of the [Chinese – Sayep?] people.

Ken

The [Sayep]?

Alan 0:36:06.6

[Toisan, Salui, Hoy Ping, Hanpei, ...]

Ken

Did, did you speak those dialects?

Alan 0:36:10.3

Yes, I, my forefather was from [Chinese]. Is one of the county of the [Sayep]. [Sayep] mean the four county. I came from [Chinese].

Ken

So how old were you when

Alan 0:36:22.2

I lived there from 6 to 9, three and a half or so war years, and the Japanese occupation in the village, in [San Hue].

Ken

But from, so you were 14 when you worked at Hyde Park. How old were you when you worked in Chinatown?

Alan 0:36:40.3

A year later. Yeah.

Ken

A year later, okay. And you were still in high school.

Alan 0:36:45.9

Yes.

Ken

What, what was it like when you, it wasn't difficult for you to get work there either. Was it ever difficult for you to get work at all? Was it just

Alan 0:36:55.6

Yes and no. You had to have some luck. You had to have some, ah, thick skin, you know. You go, you go to one restaurant, in other you ask, you know, I, I need a summer job, do you have any. If you don't have any, can you keep my name just in case somebody quit, or something like that. And, uh, and you speak, uh, their dialect, as closely as possible to, uh, uh, I guess arouse some, uh, kinship in people if you speak their tongue or their dialect. Umm, it's, finally, summer job, I don't think, is ever easy, but if you persevere, and with some luck, uh, you may find it. Well, for example,

Ken

How did you - Why, why did you move from Hyde Park to, to Chinatown, as a job?

Alan 0:37:53.0

It pays more in Chinese restaurant downtown, [bell rings] um, because the tips are better. In the coffee shop, all you get is dimes, nickels. In a proper restaurant in Chinatown, where the client are, uh, uh, maybe, uh, upper scale, your tips are better, so you make more money.

Ken

Were you still living in, uh,

Alan 0:38:22.1

Oh yeah, I live in the same, same place for several, ah, for quite a few years.

Ken

And then when you, which restaurant did you work at Where was it in Chinatown?

Alan 0:38:30.7

I, well, I work in one Chinatown restaurant called [Ho Sai Gai]. Is now under the Nathan Phillips Square, the new City Hall because was taken over. After I, I worked there about three summers, and then I work in Lotus Garden, and then the famous Lychee Garden. Lychee Restaurant was the most elegant restaurant in Chinatown, with two doormen,

uniformed doormen, uh, upstairs, uh, uh, a big room, uh, with a banquet room, and has a three-man band playing jazz music. So was quite a upscale restaurant, probably in Toronto Chinatown at that time, with a capacity quite large, uh, uh, I would think probably 300 or more.

Ken

And you were a waiter throughout this time.

Alan 0:39:55.2

Yeah, waiter, yup.

Ken

What was it like to be a waiter, um at these restaurants? What was the type of people that you would see? I mean, what was old Chinatown like at the time?

Alan 0:39:46.2

Well, when I was working at the first restaurant, [Ho Sai Gai], ah, I would say clientele half Chinese, and half, uh, white people, and they have uh, sometime, meeting, and dinners, and the clans, you now, different clans, uh, is the Lum clan, or the Lee clan, they have dinners there. We served mostly authentic Chinese food with some Americanized Chinese food like chop suey, chow mein, uh, that kind of thing, uh, for, uh, western clients. From, when that was taken over by the City to build the City Hall, then I found a job, uh, in the summer working for Lotus Garden. Lotus Garden is on the, uh, east side of Elizabeth Street. There, they also served liquor. At that time, getting a liquor license was a very very difficult thing to do. Very expensive to get a liquor license, and, uh, maybe restaurants, including my first, we sold liquor, kind of under the table, put it into little teapots and in Chinese teacups.

Ken

Cold tea.

Alan 0:41:27.3

Usually scotch and rye [laughing]. And we called them tea. For when I came to Lotus Garden, they have a proper liquor license, so I made a lot more tips, but you also sometimes had to deal with a little drunken customers, so you had to be careful.

Ken

Were there any, like, was it, was Chinatown ever a tense environment, or was it

Alan 0:41:53.8

Tense?

Ken

Yes, was it ever a tense environment?

Alan 0:41:57.4

Well, there was, um,

Ken

Because, I mean, there's historical records of what Chinatown was like, right? And there were the stereotypes of, like, you know, there were white racist stereotypes of Chinatown

sort of being this place where, you know, crazy sex happens, and drugs, and, I mean, even now, these stereotypes are still very, very prominent, uh, sort of the, sort of the social imagination, right? Was, was that the case?

Alan 0:42:24.8

Toronto Chinatown, uh, because I don't live that way, I probably don't, uh, see as much, though I did see a few fist fights and things like that, because, uh, some western, uh, white, person, swear or slurs, things like that. I seen some fight. [pours liquid].

Ken

Thank you.

Alan 0:42:57.3

But because I don't live there year round, I just go there and work and then I go home, I probably don't see

Ken

As much.

Alan 0:43:04.5

As much. And when they, they, the best job that I got to Lychee Gardens, because of the clientele being very, uh, upscale. Uh, I get to meet Roland Michener, who was the Member of Parliament and later became the Speaker of the Parliament in Ottawa. So we have some very well-known person, person, persons who frequent the Lychee Garden that I was working that summer. The only thing I didn't like about working in that restaurant called Lychee Garden, older, older people, white people probably will remember Lychee Garden was a very famous, uh, restaurant. The shift work was really difficult to get used to, particularly sleeping, because one week you start working 11 o'clock in the morning, for eight or nine or ten hours, and next week, you, you, your shift would start at five.

Ken

Wow.

Alan 0:44:31.0

The third week, you start at 8 o'clock till the next morning 2 o'clock. And then there's, um, and then there's a split week, one week when you work, two days start in the morning, two days start in the afternoon, you start the evening.

Ken

Shift work is like that. It can be difficult.

Alan 0:44:47.2

So that was very difficult.

Ken

Generally speaking, you found it to be a pretty OK work environment.

Alan 0:44:52.6

I made the most, most money, and for my tuition. The other thing I didn't like was, because I was the youngest one, and, and kind of extra one, all the other waiters are permanent waiters, they put me in the farthest, most of the time, I served table at the

farthest corner of the restaurant. So you have to run and walk the most to get to the kitchen. The farthest corner. [laughter]

Ken

Right. Yeah. It sounds, it does sound like a lot of work.

Alan 0:45:24.8

Oh yeah, a lot of work. And because they're so busy on the, on the weekends, that you don't have time to sit down. Actually, you, you go in and out the kitchen, you grab a bite here, grab a bite there. You don't really have a 20-minute, or half an hour time, for, for eating.

Ken

What did you do when you did have time? Like if you had to have fun. What, what was it like to, you know. I mean your life seems, I'm trying to put it together, right? You lived in [Roncesvalles?], you worked in Chinatown, you went to school. What did you do when you weren't doing those things? I mean I have someone ask me that question, like, I sleep, 'cause I

Alan 0:46:13.5

Well, I, I mean I work, I sleep, uh, I think my salvation is I love reading. So I read both the Chinese books and English literature. Uh, I regret that I did not participate in as many high school and university activity, like, uh, uh, school dances, and uh, plays and musicals that they have in high school. So I kind of regret those activities that are integral part of, uh, high school life, because I had to work, I had to clean house, I was vacuum the place Friday after school, that kind of thing. But, but on the other hand, I value my time. I, uh, read, read a lot, uh, I did some jogging, at school, I did some track and field, that kind of thing, so time went on pretty fast. You don't have time to think too many things. You know, my father was sick with cancer when I came in 1950. He passed away in 1951. So, I, and I lived with stepmother, so I had to, uh, behave myself, and also work to earn my keep for my tuition fees. In high school, you had to pay for your own books.

Ken

And did it ever get lonely? Does it ever get lonely?

Alan 0:48:13.1

Oh yes.

Ken

I mean, it just seems like, that is an adjustment call, it's just, you seem to worked a lot throughout most of your life, right.

Alan 0:48:20.5

Oh yeah, you get, you get lonely, and I miss my own mother. She was in Communist china. She, she was living in [Guangzhou], in our house, uh, under the Communist rule, until 1957, when I bought my mother her false identity paper as the wife of another man to come to Canada, because even '57, I could not sponsor relatives or [noise of dishes] family to come to Canada, so I had to buy a paper.

Ken

So we were talking about, so you brought your mother over? You brought your mother over. What year was that?

Alan 0:49:12.4

'57.

Ken

You brought your mother. OK.

Alan 0:49:15.5

She, she arrive in fall of 1957.

Ken

Did she live with you when you were in [Taiwan??]?

Alan 0:49:24.0

By that time, [Dai Ma] passed away in 1956. A year before. So what, when my mother, we live in the Beatty Avenue house, uh, as I say, near [Roncesvalles?] and King or Queen. For about a year and a half.

Ken

Is that house still there?

Alan 0:49:45.6

Yeah, house is still there, yeah. The house is, as a matter of fact, uh, earlier this summer, I, I went, because I, because I'm am writing , uh,

Ken

Your memoir.

Alan 0:49:55.5

My memoir. So I went back and, uh, had a look, and talked to the new owner, and she was there doing – they have converted into two apartment, not rooming house. They live downstairs, and upstairs, they converted into two apartments now, rather than seven rooming.

Ken

Is that strange for you to see the house.

Alan 0:50, 18.1

It bring a lot of memory. It brought a lot of memory. [phone rings]

Ken

So, um, so basically, I mean, you worked, you brought your mother over. I have – how did you spend time with, with friends, or how did you do the normal things of someone who's is 16, 17, 18, like did you run out and get into trouble? Did you want to go to the pool hall? Did you

Alan 0:50:55.0

No, I just was too busy, occupied, to do those things. I sleep, I study, I read.

Ken

Why do you think you were too

Alan 0:51:06.8

That's the extent of it, that's what I mentioned it a little while ago. Those are the few things that thinking back, I, I missed some of my best years in high school, go out with the gang. I don't know. At the time, you do what you have to do, and you accept it.

Ken

What is, what does that mean, though?

Alan 0:51:26.2

Stoicism, probably.

Ken

No, no. But what does that mean when you say you do what you have to do? Like because what you have to do isn't what other people have to do.

Alan 0:51:36.4

Yeah. Um, our cousin came with me at the same time, and other young men a little older than me came at the same time. One young man, we came in the same boat, he went to a small town north of Toronto and opened a restaurant. Um, my cousin, first cousin, that's Third Uncle's son, came; he work in the laundry. He was by that time, my father had retired, and sold the laundry

Ken

To someone else.

Alan 0:52:10.6

To, to my Third Uncle and, and the two nephews, in other words, to sons to do it, so my first cousin, he's about year and a half, nearly two years older than me, he worked, he worked in the laundry, and didn't go to school much, so I was the one that the studious type, I suppose, so I spent most of my time studying, reading, working, you know. Not a lot of fun, I suppose.

Ken

Are there reasons for that? I mean, I, I ask because I know that there are reasons why I am the way that I am, right? Like, not many people decide to do a PhD. Still, I, I ask, there are reasons that I study the stuff that I do. I work, like the way that I do, and certain questions are more important to me than others. And very simply, when I look back at the idea of why I study and why I'm doing a PhD as opposed to being a lawyer or being a high school teacher is like I can, I have memories of my, my grandfather and my grandmother, and they, they still do this. They'll say something in Chinese, in [Chinese], uh, because that's my dialect.

Alan 0:53:34.8

[Chinese] Vietnam?

Ken

Yeah. So

Alan 0:53:38.3

So you are Vietnamese Chinese.

Ken

Yeah, yeah, but what they

Alan 0:53:40.9

Born in Vietnam then?

Ken

No, I was born in Canada. My parents were refugees. And so what happens

Alan 0:53:46.7

Oh, you were so-called “boat people”?

Ken

Yeah, yeah. I’m the son of “boat people”.

Alan 0:53:52.3

Uh-huh.

Ken

But I guess in, in Mandarin, do you speak Mandarin at all?

Alan 0:53:58.9

Some.

Ken

You might be able to recognize this word. So it’s like, they would tell me: [Mandarin]. So it’s just, you have to study, you have to study. And since I was 5, maybe 6, I have these memories of these, and I have a very deep sense of responsibility. So when you tell me, I’m, I’m trying to, I, I guess, push a little bit. It’s like, why, why was it that you had to work so hard?

Alan 0:54:27.1

Want to make something of myself. My mother has always, my own mother, being the second wife, and being the inferior decision in the family, she herself was not formally educated, but she had a lot of common sense, very honest, very sincere person. And she was not formally educated, but she always drummed into me about the value of higher education, to make your life a successful life, to make something of yourself, you have to work hard in your studies. Because knowledge and education is your means to make something of yourself, be a somebody instead of being anonymous, nobody that go through life without much purpose, without much productivity and results. So I work so hard because I want make, I want to make something of myself. I want to make my mother proud of me. Of course, my father died when I was 13 so, he was already gone. And certainly when I came to Canada and I saw how hard people work in a laundry and the restaurants, and I work in the restaurants, so I know how, how it was working long hours and hard work, as somebody’s order and things. So, so I want to make something of myself. Independent, free to do what I like to do, and also important was to have a secure job, and I suppose not many thing more secure than the health profession, because [laughter] we all need health workers whoever you are. And certainly at that time in the ‘50s and ‘60s, uh, dentists and physicians and health workers were at a premium and certainly a job is almost guaranteed. And that was an economically speaking an important

factor for me to enter, uh, the health profession. I had in mind either medicine or dentistry, um, but I finally choose dentistry, partly because it takes, uh, two year shorter. In medicine, uh, it took an extra year of, uh, after grade 13 and, and matriculation, the college matriculation in Ontario, at that time, in the '50s, '57 when I ended university, for dentistry, we need one year science to enter. That's the minimum. For medicine, you need two years of science. And after our of medical school, you need one year internship in the hospital before you are ready to come out, and have a license to practice. In dentistry, we have one less year

Ken

One less year on both ends, yeah.

Alan 0:58:06.6

Science, one less year of hospital, although I did working a hospital after I graduate. But working in a hospital, you still get some pay, not much pay, but some, some pay.

Nowadays, nowadays, to enter dentistry, you need four year of honours science program, you need four year of dental school, and if you specialize in any of the dental specialty

Ken

You need at least two more years, yeah.

Alan 0:58:35.5

No, three years. In my time, was 24-25 months, but now it's three years.

Ken

It's different, yeah. It's more competitive

Alan 0:58:41.8

Like, uh, my younger associate who took over my practice when I retire from orthodontics, ten years at university.

Ken

That's whereas

Alan 0:58:51.3

He has only a general B.A. before he entered into dentistry. When now, as I said, you need a four-year honour B.A. or BSc.

Ken

It, it, it, the nature of the profession is you open the profession to become more competitive. And it is definitely, there is some gate keeping going on. Um, so I want to close the interview by, and I'm not sure if I'm gonna ask you for a second interview, but I think that

Alan 0:59:18.6

Yeah, yeah. Whatever you

Ken

Yeah, I think it's, it's interesting because you, you do have stuff to say, and I, I do appreciate it, so there might be [inaudible]

Alan 0:59:27.3

Anything about, more about Chinatown. Where there were gambling joints, and then there were brothels, probably [laughing].

Ken

Where there? Did you see the gambling joints and the brothels?

Alan 0:59:39.6

Oh, I, I, I, I see, not intimate knowledge, but I see, I see them, you know. There, there were, you know, prostitutes around. Because here was, there was some little hotels in Chinatown, you know, run by the Chinese, you know.

Ken

And were the sex workers whites or were they

Alan 1:00:02.6

White, yeah.

Ken

They were whites.

Alan 1:00:04.2

Yeah, uh-huh.

Ken

How did people talk about these places? I mean, like, did people talk about these places or it was just common knowledge. People just

Alan 1:00:14.6

Well, I don't see, I don't see an actual, an actual brothel per se. I seen men accompanied by a white woman go into, go into

Ken

Did you ever hear of a place called the Intercontinental Hotel?

Alan 1:00:32.1

Yeah. Intercontinental. Is that – Intercontinental. It's a [inaudible] hotel.

Ken

In think the Intercontinental, there was a hotel in Chinatown. Specifically. Yeah. And specifically, in this hotel, this was a place where Chinese men would have sex with sex workers.

Alan 1:00:58.4

Uh-huh.

Ken

I mean, what was, were there stereotypes and people talking about this sort of stuff, or

Alan 1:01:03.8

Maybe because I was young, so the older men [laughing]

Ken

Didn't talk about it.

Alan 1:01:09.4

Didn't talk too much about being. I was, I mean, I was working

Ken

You were 15, 16.

Alan 1:01:12.4

15, 17, 18, you know. I was still innocent so they want to keep me innocent [laughing].

When I asked them about these things. They said: "Ah, you are too young, you know.

Wait til you are 21." [Laughing]

Ken

But you knew, everyone knew about these things.

Alan 1:01:28.0

Yeah, they all. Human activity that is inevitable, you know. There are brothels, and there men who go with prostitutes, and the gambling joints, because there were less so-called, the bachelor men by the '50s-'60s, but still a significant number of them, because it's only about '48, '49 that they allowed family to be reunited with the husband in Canada. So inevitably, you know, there would be gambling joints for the leisure, and you know, for the, someplace to go if they work all week and have one day free, you know. They either

Ken

They want to blow off some steam.

Alan 1:02:02.1

Socialize, you know, with the [inaudible], and Chinese are notorious for gambling, and you know, they might, uh, hire women and. So that's inevitable, uh.

Ken

This didn't really affect your life very much in so much as it didn't affect your life

Alan 1:02:39.2

No.

Ken

but it was something that you knew about.

Alan 1:02:40.7

Yeah. I was more like a bystander, yeah.

Ken

Yeah.

Alan 1:02:44.3

Yeah.

Ken

So you would just see these thing happening, and

Alan 1:02:45.9

Yeah. Uh-huh.

Ken

Yeah. What was it like for you, I mean, how did you make sense of, because there were certain stereotypes of what Chinese men were supposed to be like. You saw Chinese men act in certain way in Chinatown, and, and so much of your own life seems to just desire to do well for your mother, which is definitely something I understand. Um, how did you begin doing your own thing, let's say, meeting women, like how did you eventually meet Juliana, how did, you know, because you were a boy. You were busy. You had, had things to do.

Alan 1:03:26.5

Well, because at the time, I did not went on too many dates. You know, I went on the senior, let me see, senior prom. And [inaudible] a few days when I got to university, and I met my wife when I was working, I was working at Hospital of Sick Children. She was working in the operating room at Sick Kids, and the dental department and the surgery department were next to each other, so, but. So we seen each other in the hospital, but I, we didn't talk to each other until we were formerly actually introduced at the Chinese student dance in October of 1962.

Ken

The Chinese student dance.

Alan 1:04:20.1

Yeah.

Ken

And this was

Alan 1:04:22.1

Chinese, University of Toronto Chinese student

Ken

Program

Alan 1:04:25.7

Dance, yeah. That's when we were introduced by mutual friends.

Ken

Uh-huh. And that's how you met her. Was your wife the first girlfriend you ever had, I guess, then?

Alan 1:04:39.2

No. I had a few, not very serious one. I, I went with, uh, couple of other Chinese girl, uh, uh, very casual, with maybe [inaudible]. One or two white girl, and a Japanese

Ken

You went out, you went out with white girls?

Alan 1:05:01.2

Nothing serious, dated as a whole group, [inaudible].

Ken

Alright, so you'd go out on group dates and stuff like that.

Alan 1:05:09.0

Very few, because I didn't have time to do much on weekends. When I get to university, I had a little bit more time, because I didn't work as much on weekends when I was at university, particularly when the last two year, when I was nearly ready to graduate, and, uh

Ken

How old were you were you started dating, like let's guess in terms of a year, like 1960, and this is important to me cause I know that you're a little bit younger than the target age of the audience, but these attitudes, social attitudes influence who we date and how we date. Because they, they sort of serve as the background, in terms of when is it appropriate for someone to go on a first date, to kiss someone for the first time, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Do you remember around what, like for me, I started dating in 1997. I wouldn't call that dating. I was 14.

Alan 1:06:10.4

Yeah.

Ken

So I really started dating when I was 17, I guess. So that was in 2000. Do you understand my meaning?

Alan 1: 1:06:21.8

Yeah. I was, I mean, actually, dating [noise, cutting on board?], think of it, one on one, I didn't do that until I got to university, so I, I was about 20 or

Ken

So that was in 19.., if you were 20, that would be around 1962, yeah.

Alan 1:06:38.6

No, not 1962. I graduated from university in [inaudible], so you know, '59, '60, something like that. I was 24 when I graduated from dentistry.

Ken

It's interesting that, like, you, I mean because attitudes weren't even

Alan 1:06:51.0

Yeah, but I, I would probably, uh, your question, you might ask, are you interested in dating only Orientals, or, uh, white girls too? I probably had in mind that if I was ever going to get into a serious relationship, probably at that time, I was thinking of a Chinese. And then I think again partly because of my mother, as you probably surmised, was very close to me. She was the one that practically, uh, raised me because I didn't have a father for along, long time. And we suffered through the war, and the horror of living under Japanese occupation, and then the civil war of China between the Communists and the Nationalists, and then separation, and then coming to Canada. So, I, I was very devoted to my mother, and certainly her happiness, and her desire for me was very very important in my life. That's one of the reasons I worked and bring her here. Actually, for the first number of year, we live, after I marry, we live for a number of year in the same house,

and then when she got older, she move uh, into, into a condo apartment. She passed away 2002, 92, age 92.

Ken

Wow. Yeah, that's, uh

Alan 1:08:42.5

So my life, more or less in a nutshell, without [inaudible] into the details too much.

Ken

Okay, I'll stop it here.

Alan 1:08:50.8

Yeah.

Ken

That's great, actually.