

INTERVIEW DATE: April 7, 2011

INTERVIEWEE: Edmund Benny Wong (audio recording of interview begins midway through filling out Pre-Interview Information Sheet by Interviewer as Ed is legally blind).

INTERVIEWER: Brad Lee

A follow-up interview with Ed Wong was completed Thursday, April 7, 2011, a few months after a first meeting, which was also attended by interviewee Gilbert Chu. During the first meeting, Wong is present and he does contribute to discussion, but the primary interview on Nov. 9, 2011, is with Chu, who grew up in the old Dundas Chinatown of Toronto.

The second interview, on April 7, 2011, with Wong picks up on comments made during the first interview, when the interviewer (BL) asks:

BL: “Why do you think there was this relationship between the prostitutes and these single, bachelor men ...?”

... relationships ... (Ed and Gilbert comment)

Ed Wong: “Look at me, that’s what happened to my parent ...” [See Nov. 9, 2010, interview notes]

Audio recording of the second interview picks up mid way through filling out the Pre-Interview Information Sheet, which provides some structure to charting Wong’s movements, which brought him to Toronto for one year in 1967, followed by moving to Jamaica with his wife, and returning to Toronto in 1970. Movement between 1950 and 1970 coincided with Wong’s post-secondary education and early career development. He trained and worked most of his life as a mechanical engineer, spending time in California, Jamaica, western Canada and Toronto. During this time he also met his wife Karlene Chen, of Chinese Jamaican heritage, and they raised two children.

For the purposes of this research project, it’s Wong’s origin story and early experiences that are of interest. Wong was born Dec. 18, 1933, as the mixed-race child of an unwed 15-year-old white girl and a 50-year-old Chinese man in Comox, B.C. Wong’s birth mother managed to keep him until he was about 7 months old, but then gave him up for adoption. This history was accessed by Wong in 1995 through his own freedom of information research on his adoption by the Wong family of Olds, Alberta (Wong credits his daughter’s curiosity about his family history as motivating his research; also, for other details see notes from Nov. 9, 2010, interview). Much of Wong’s story about his adoption is somewhat speculative, but he references a 12-page letter he wrote to his birthmother that was presented to her through the B.C. adoption apparatus, as well as a letter from his birthmother, who does not directly identify herself, that he received along with a photograph of her. As recently as 2009, Wong tried to make further enquiry as to her identity, but was unsuccessful, except to learn that she might still be alive and in her 90s (this is deduced by Wong who says that full information on B.C. adoption is accessible

two years after the deaths of known parents; when he went to Victoria and asked about his records in 2009, he was told they were still under restricted access.) Parts of the interview with Wong include discussion about his origins, while a larger part of our discussion focused on his perceptions as the adopted son of Wong Pond and Mary Mah of Olds, Alberta, and half-brother of Frank Wong.

During a trip he made when he was age 11 or 12 with his half-brother Frank Wong and another acquaintance to Connecticut to visit an uncle, Ed Wong talks about happenings during their journey by train across Canada. He shares some impressions of Toronto's Chinatown just after World War II, and recounts an incident at a Montreal hotel, during which he was propositioned by a French Canadian prostitute. At this point, several attempts are made by the interviewer to get details on this encounter, but only with slight success.

Perhaps more value from this interview comes from the perspective Wong provides on Chinese Canadian family structure and socialization into his community. From anecdotal evidence and other oral histories in other projects, Wong's unconventional family experience does not seem too far out of place and time. Indeed, as Wong himself points out, his life could have been much different had he not been adopted by the Wong family and raised as one of their own.

While Wong has no direct experience living in Toronto's Dundas Chinatown during the 1950s to 1970s, except for one year that he lived in Toronto with his wife, he is knowledgeable of the community and period of this study. Wong has also suggested various other possible sources for this project. **One possible interviewee is Sylvia Chu**, who currently lives in Toronto (contact information available from Ed Wong). Another possibility is **Vera Pon, nee Wong**, but as a personal friend of the interviewer she has expressed reluctance.

From the Nov. 9, 2010, interview with Gilbert Chu (unrelated to Sylvia Chu), suggestion was made that possible interviews with Gilbert Chu's older sisters could be arranged, as they would likely have insight into the goings on in the Toronto Dundas Chinatown during the 1950s (Gilbert is seven years junior to his youngest sister). Additional notes from the first interview to follow-up with queries about a "marriage" camp at Geneva Lake were not undertaken as Wong denied any specific knowledge.