

Mavis Garland
June 1 2012
Interviewed in her home by Elise Chenier
Transcribed by Maurice Guibord

Elise

Okay. Well, first I want thanks so much for agreeing to see me.

Mavis 0:00:08.5

Well, I wasn't sure what it was all about. Arlene said you were doing research on the, um, '50s and '60s. Too bad you weren't doing it, well, the '40s and '50s.

Elise

Oh yeah. No, I'm including the 40s too, so...

Mavis 0:00:21.1

Oh, okay. I was born in '40, I'm 71 now. uh huh. .

Elise

Amazing. I'm sure you hear that all the time.

Mavis 0:00:28.8

Well, they say, um... my husband... it would account for him, you know, because he's 71 also.

Elise

Right.

Mavis 0:00:35.1

So it can't just [inaudible] be the Asian blood. And what about my husband? He's not Asian.

Elise

So you must keep yourself [inaudible]

Mavis 0:00:42.5

Must be what they feed him. Blame it all on the rice. [Laughter] Give it that credit.

Elise

So before we start, this is a consent form, ah. Don't worry about that. And why don't you have a look at that. It just says that you're consenting to be interviewed. This explains the purpose of this study, what we're going to do, which just means we're gonna talk. And, uh, so if you just want to [inaudible]

Mavis 0:01:13.5

Oh yeah, it says the post-war period.

Elise.

Yeah.

Mavis 0:01:16.6

[reading aloud] Ah, yeah, I got that. [reading aloud] OK. [pause] Oh yeah, because researchers or friends willing to talk. I had a bunch of girls contact me recently that went to school with me.

Elise

Really?

Mavis 0:01:52.8

Yeah, back in the [searching]... Where's the days? ... [found] These days. [pointing]

Elise

Oh wow, what a great photo. So where did you go to school. Is this Chinatown?

Mavis 0:02:05.1

This is right on University Avenue, by Dundas. It was called... the CCI it was called. Now I'm not sure what the CCI stood for, whether it stood for... I used to think it stood for Chinese Christian Institution, but I think it was the Chinese Canadian Institution.

Elise

Hmm. On University.

Mavis 0:02:24.6

Right on University, on the west side of University. There was a big building there, just up from the corner of Dundas.

Elise

OK. Well, let's, let's continue to finish this and then we can talk about that.

Mavis 0:02:42.1

OK. Well, it's a good thing you're getting this done before we all die off.

Elise

Thank you. I appreciate that. I'm really, um, just so pleased how enthusiastic everybody's been.

Mavis 0:02:58.1

I've watched some things on TV on things like this where they interviewed, ah, some Chinese ladies and I was interested in their stories, what they, ah, experienced.

Elise

Well, I'll tell you about a new website that's got some great material on it about Chinese women on it.

Mavis 0:03:23.1

[pause] Yeah, OK. This is fine.

Elise

OK, so here is where you sign. So, what you need to know here is, you have to decide if I can use your full name.

Mavis 0:03:34.1

Hm-Hmm.

Elise

And then in publication, initial there. And what I would like to do is donate copies of the interview, if you agree, to the Multicultural History Society of Ontario so that other researchers can also use this.

Mavis 0:03:50.1

Hm-hmm.

Elise

And if you're OK with that, you can initial here to indicate your consent. And then you sign there. Great. [pause] [inaudible] Great. So what I'll do is I'll leave these two papers with you for your records.

Mavis 0:04:19.1

Okay.

Elise

This is one I'll sign it as well. I'll take it home, photocopy it and send it to you.

Mavis 0:04:25.8

Hm-hmm. This is the girl that got in touch with me after 50 years.

Elise

What prompted her to get in touch with you.

Mavis 0:04:31.1

She...she...my name happened to come up and I guess she was looking. She had the same picture, and she said "whatever happened to Mavis Lu?"

There's Mavis. That's me. [pointing to photo]

Elise

Okay.

Mavis 0:04:40.8

And that's her...[pointing] and this is the dentist's children. This one and this one...no, that's Melvin...wait a minute...anyway, then she brought this girl to see me. And that's her cousin, Angelina.

Elise. Yeah.

Mavis 0:04:58.7

We always called her Angie. And here she worked in... we found out she worked in the same building when I worked at the Scarborough Town Centre Passport Office, she was working in that same building. We probably passed each other, and when I saw her though...she was always with a Caucasian lady. I always thought she was one of the Japanese girls that I knew from Walton Street.

Elise

Ah.

Mavis 0:05:19.1

And I never talked to her. She never spoke to me. But when her, she brought her, I kind of recognized her, then, passing her in the building. And this girl, they're the only two half-

Chinese, these two. All rest are full Chinese, oh no, he is too, he's half, and the rest are all full Chinese.

Elise

Okay. So this CCI, was that just a language school, or was it a full-day school?

Mavis 0:05:42.8

No, what it was...a missionary lady called Mrs. MacTavish or Miss MacTavish so somebody told me. I always called her Mrs. MacTavish. She was a missionary's daughter, apparently raised in China, and uh, she was interested in having this, uh, school for teaching children, I guess, their culture, and... because they used to teach us Chinese songs and we used to write in the little books. They were very thin paper, and they'd give us a brush and ink and they'd teach us to copy letters, and different characters. And, uh...it was like a nursery school, pre-school.

Elise

Yeah.

Mavis 0:06:22.1

Before we went to regular school. And uh...she...anyway, rounded up all these children. All I remember, is my stepfather came to me one day, um...and he said I was gonna be going to school. And he knew I knew this girl from...'cause she lived right down on Elizabeth street near Queen, and her father had a tailor shop, and I used to play with her whenever the parents got together. And he said "June Poy is going to the school, so you'll be going too." And I guess I was about five then. I hadn't yet started regular school.

Elise

Hmm.

Mavis 0:07:57.6

And so I went there till I was about six or seven, in this school. And Miss MacTavish would come around in her old Model T Ford, and pick us up at the door and take us to the school.

Elise

At the door of your home.

Mavis 0:07:11.1

Yeah, at the door of your home.

Elise

Wow.

Mavis 0:07:13.6

And I never considered that I lived in Chinatown, because somebody told me one day, they said "You lived in Chinatown." I said "No, I didn't. I lived just off from Chinatown." But if I tell you... you'd probably understand. I lived on Edward street.

Elise

Yeah.

Mavis 0:07:30.1

On Edward street

Elise

Okay.

Mavis 0:07:31.6

It was Yonge here...Bay...and I lived on the north side of Edward street just in from Bay street...so many houses in. They pulled a lot of the houses down, and there was a block of four homes that were on the north side and they were about three stories high. Well, that would be the attic...the third storey. But my mom had, I guess you would call it a rooming house.

Elise

I'm going to show you, oops, a map, actually, because I'm very interested in Edward street.

Mavis 0:08:04.2

That's where I grew up, before I was thirteen years old.

Elise

And your mom ran a rooming house?

Mavis 0:08:09.1

Yeah. So we had a lot to do with the Chinese people because we had...we had rooms.

Elise

So there's Edward. Here's Elizabeth.

Mavis 0:08:18.8

Okay.

Elise

There's Dundas, Gerrard...so that's going north, right?

Mavis 0:08:24.5

Yeah. That's...that's where we finally moved, where I grew up 'til I was 18, which was Walton street.

Elise

Walton street, you lived...

Mavis 0:08:32.1

Walton...that's where we moved to. But first of all...this is Edward street. Okay...there's the Grey Coach company. [*Note added to transcript by Mavis: later known as the Greyhound Bus Terminal*]

Elise

Yeah.

Mavis 0:08:38.7

Okay, now where is...

Elise

So maybe it doesn't go far enough? This is University.

Mavis 0:08:48.1

Yeah... we're over here on Bay street.

Elise

Oh, you're closer to Bay, okay. So it doesn't go far enough.

Mavis 0:08:54.1

Yeah... I don't even remember a street called Barnaby.

Elise.

Barnaby Place.

Mavis 0:09:00.2

Yeah. I know there was a street called Dudley Place. There was a laneway here... before you got to Walton.

Elise

Oh yeah?

Mavis 0:09:06.1

And it came back to Bay street.

Elise

Oh that's it there.

Mavis 0:09:09.1

My life was on Bay, between Bay and Yonge street okay? But this is where I went to school...on Elizabeth and Gerrard. Yeah...Elizabeth and Gerrard...it was before they built the Nurses' Residence. That was our school that we went to. And Lucy... Lucy went... Lucy Seto also went to that school... showing in that picture.

Elise

This is, uh, [inaudible] at their house.??? Oh! This is the Nurses Residence...so before this is Hester How in the '60s.

Mavis 0:09:36.8

Before that... okay... this whole park was... was... um, from Gerrard part way down. Because I know there was a bank at the corner,

Elise Right.

Mavis 0:09:48.2

There was... uh... there was... uh... our school, Hester How.

Elise

Okay... yeah, Hester How that was very popular... yeah... a lot of people went there.

Mavis 0:09:56.1

Well, I've got pictures of everybody if it's at that...in my class there. Yeah...let's see...here we are....this is Hester How. There's half-Chinese kids in there, as well as full-Chinese kids. He was half-Chinese. That's Lucy that you see here.

Elise

Ah, yes.

Mavis 0:10:27.1

In school...and there she is, older. And there I am. And she was part Native...that girl. That's June...here she is here...and there she is there.

Elise

Okay.

Mavis 0:10:39.8

And she was half-Chinese, and Gary Marr. I think one of them...I...I saw that name come up out west, and he was an M.P. or something. He...he...he had a brother, and I remember a commercial that they put on for a car...and he was in this car being driven around, and they said his name was Gary Marr....and I said..."I wonder if he's the same boy that grew up on Elm street?"...before, you know...then we lost track of all these families...when they dispersed.

Elise

Right.

Mavis 0:11:14.1

Before that, when I was growing up on Edward street, we could come out on our step on Edward street... like there was a wooden step. It was actually a store front... the places were... they were all store fronts.

Elise

Right.

Mavis 0:11:27.1

They'd been, you know... converted. And then they were... our house... that was our home. And I could come on the stoop... what you'd call it... and we'd step one step down to the sidewalk.

Elise

Yeah.

Mavis 0:11:40.9

And when I'd look over there...there was the Greyhound bus terminal. That's how close we lived to it. But I didn't consider I lived in Chinatown, because you had to walk a couple of blocks down Bay street...along Dundas...and then you're in Chinatown. We walked towards Elizabeth street.

Elise

Right. Did that have any... did it mean something to you to live in, or not live in Chinatown?

Mavis 0:12:05.1

Um... I just didn't consider I lived in Chinatown. I thought I went to Chinatown when I left my house.

Elise

Okay.

Mavis 0:12:11.1

Because next door was Jewish neighbours, lovely people...the Bergmans. They lived next door to us. And then, there was another house...and was the establishment of U-Needa-Cab...and then they changed to Diamond Cab after.

Elise

Okay.

Mavis 0:12:30.1

And uh...they were I remember U-Needa-Cab. I thought that was such a cute name, right? On top of this cab company. I knew the people who started that company, and he was a partner with them, and then he died in the backyard one day. He was sitting out in the back yard in the summer, and I heard all this screaming going on. I wondered what on earth was going on, and uh...apparently he sat down to have a cold beer, and he took a heart attack or whatever. But there wasn't any big fuss...until the woman found him in the backyard sitting in the sun chair and he had died.

Elise

Wow, Yeah.

Mavis 0:13:04.1

And he was the one who had started the cab company. But um... anyway... we used to go out, and my father used to say every Sunday... he'd say, "go down under the Lychee Gardens"... which was a store down there on Elizabeth street, on the west side and it was a store on the main floor before you went up to the Lychee Gardens and he'd say "buy 60 cents worth of lean pork" and then I'd bring it back and he would cook Sunday dinner. And that's how.... but he used to always sit us down, there was three of us. What happened is...I guess I should tell you first of all my Mom and my Dad, um...

Elise

That's right, can you tell me their names?

Mavis 0:13:47.1

Okay. My mother's name was [deleted] Eileen Neeson. [pseudonym].

Elise

Oh, the rest of her name.

Mavis 0:13:58.1

"Yeah."

Elise "Okay."

Mavis 0:14:01.1

[deleted].

Elise

And you said she was born in South Africa?

Mavis 0:14:07.1

Port Elizabeth, South Africa. [Note added by Mavis: *the British colony...*]

Elise

Do you know what year?

Mavis 0:14:13.1

Yes, 1905.

Elise

Okay, and what...how did she... how did she end up married to your Dad?

Mavis 0:14:23.1

Uh... well, she came over to... they brought her... um, let's see... once when she was three. But then they took her back again for the war, because my grandfather was a Major in the Canadian Army.

Elise

World War II?

Mavis 0:14:43.1

World War I.

Elise Really?

Mavis 0:14:44.5

He was in the Boer War.

Elise

Your grandfather?

Mavis 0:14:46.5

Yeah. He was in the Boer War. That's where he met my grandmother...and um...they brought my mother back from Port Elizabeth. They lived there for a long...Port Elizabeth... they brought my mother back from Port Elizabeth, South Africa. And then... um, from Port Elizabeth, South Africa, they lived here in Toronto. He... he actually was born in Campbellford... which is now Campbellford, Ontario. He was Irish background. [inaudible] has been doing genealogy on them.

Elise

Oh, okay.

Mavis 0:15:14.1

And I found out in 1840, the first great-great-grandfather came there. Then they had eight children, and from them they had James [deleted] who was Harold Neeson's [pseudonym] father.

Elise

Okay

Mavis 0:15:25.3

He then had my mother in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. So, um, when he went back, when the war broke out, he brought her back again. He brought her here when she was three, but when the war broke out, he went and joined up for World War I, and then my grandmother was a nurse, so she went back to nurse. Take up being a matron in Redding. Reading or Redding, England, and she had my mother with her. My mother had to go to boarding school and everything there. And have interaction with her family, um, my grandmother's family. And when the war was over, they got together, and either came

back, I think they came back separately, or together, I'm not sure. Um, I haven't found those documents yet. Um, they lived in Toronto then, from the time my mother was 14.

Elise

Okay.

Mavis 0:16:19.1

And they lived out in Cobourg. They lived just outside of Cobourg. And then they came, they finally ended up in Toronto. And that's where they finished their lives, in Toronto.

Elise

And what was your father's name?

Mavis 0:16:32.9

My father's name was [deleted].

Elise

[deleted]

Mavis 0:16:38.5

Yeah. He had a few names. Because on his head tax paper, he has Chew, C-H-E-W, but then, this is their interpretation...Chu Ying Y-I-N-G Bo B-O, or B-U-L-L, they've also spelled it. I think they've got it two ways.

Elise

But you also mention a stepfather.

Mavis 0:17:06.1

Oh yes, because my father died when I was three. In 1943, he died. He had cancer of the liver even though he didn't drink. You usually think it's with people who drink.

Elise

Is that right?

Mavis 0:17:19.5

He couldn't drink apparently. I think the Chinese are a lot like the Natives. They have... she said if he had a tablespoon of liquor, he would turn bright red. And I find...I have a brother who does that also. If he drinks any liquor, he turns bright red.

Elise

So funny that you're Irish, right?, kind of opposite when it comes to alcohol.

Mavis 0:17:39.1

Yeah

Elise

And so...

Mavis 0:17:42.8

My grandfather, though, he got in different things...how he's a Temperance man. So apparently, his family never drank.

Elise

So your mother remarried?

Mavis 0:17:51.8

Yes, my mother then married [deleted].

Elise

And what year did she marry him?

Mavis 0:18:09.1

Ah...1940...let me think now... about '47.

Elise

Okay, so you were born, what's your birthdate?

Mavis 0:18:19.1

[deleted] 1940.

Elise And were you born in Toronto?

Mavis 0:18:23.5

Yes. On Dalhousie street.

Elise

Do you know if you were born at home?

Mavis 0:18:27.1

Yes, we were all. My mother said she had all her children at home.

Elise

That's, uh, interesting. Do you know any of the story behind that, because by 1940, most women are starting to have hospital births?

Mavis 0:18:42.1

No, they all had children at home. Most of the women my mother knew had their children at home. They just had a doctor come in, a nurse, and they would give birth at home.

Elise

They would be attended in the home?

Mavis 0:18:53.5

Yeah, she told me that. I remember she told me about my birth. She said that, uh, she had a big meat basket. I guess they got it from the butcher's, and they would line it. They would make the baby bassinet out of it. So where we lived...on Edward street, anyway,

Elise

Right.

Mavis 0:19:10.1

We lived at 62 Edward street.

Elise

Okay, I'm just going to, I have...I actually have...so this is you...now you were born on Dalhousie?

Mavis 0:19:18.1

On Dalhousie. And then my parents went out...they used to run a restaurant...or they'd be in the restaurant business. First of all, my father had a gift shop on Yonge street, and I have the card from his business and everything. And uh...that's how my mother met him.

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