

## **Interview with Victoria's Chinese Canadian Veterans Association**

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Interviewee: Victor Wong (黄活光), President of the Chinese Canadian Veterans Association in Victoria

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Zhongping Chen: We can start from your family history and then go to the Veterans Association.

Victor Wong: Alright.

Zhongping Chen: In your family who was the first who came to Canada?

Victor Wong: My grandfather.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, do you know his name? Please write down his name.

Victor Wong: I don't know how to write it in Chinese. But I remember it was Wing Wong Dick Zhong and my father is Joseph Wong.

Zhongping Chen: Do you know from which county they came from?

Victor Wong: Yeah, Taishan.

Zhongping Chen: Taishan, which township .

Victor Wong: Baisha.

Zhongping Chen: Ok, yeah. So that's the township.

Victor Wong: That's where my grandfather came from.

Zhongping Chen: I see. Do you know roughly when did he come?

Victor Wong: When he arrived in Canada? I can't remember.

Zhongping Chen: Why did he move here, not to other cities in Canada or the United States?

Victor Wong: I have no idea. He never told us. Yeah, that type of thing, uh, I think he came to build the railway, you know.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really, that was in the 1880's.

Victor Wong: Pretty early, I think. But I'm not too sure. That's why I can't say. I have to check it out. Then my dad's name... his English name is Joseph Wong. My mother, is Rose Wong.

Zhongping Chen: And did your grandma come... to Canada?

Victor Wong: My grandmother on my paternal dad's side, she was born in the Caribou.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really, in Canada.

Victor Wong: Ya in Canada. She was one of the 11 girls. Half went back to China and half stayed in Canada. Yeah, big family. And Chinese.

Zhongping Chen: For your grandpa, he first came for building the railway. Later, what kind of job did he do in Canada?

Victor Wong: I presumed he came for building the railway. When I knew him, he was, uh, chief cook at the Union Club.

Zhongping Chen: What kind of club....

Victor Wong: The Union Club... It's quite a famous club in Victoria.

Zhongping Chen: Chief cook. In all his life?

Victor Wong: Yes, in other words, he looks after the whole kitchen and menu, and everything. He types it up and says what kind of menu, and makes sure everything is all organized in order and everything is right. Is a man's club, which is quite privileged club.

Zhongping Chen: Oh I see. So did he change his job later? Or he was always cooking in the same place?

Victor Wong: Yeah, he always was a cook, I think. That's his profession.

Zhongping Chen: So, did he later stay here or he went back to China?

Victor Wong: No, he died in Victoria and buried out in the Royal Oak cemetery.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, when was that?

Victor Wong: 1937, I think. Just when Japan attacked China so that time period I remember. He died of a heart attack.

Zhongping Chen: At that time your grandma was not here?

Victor Wong: My grandma was here.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, when did your grandma move here?

Victor Wong: She... as I said, my paternal grandmother was born in the Caribou.

Zhongping Chen: Oh that's interesting, how did your grandpa meet her in Caribou?

Victor Wong: I have no idea. I have to ask my older sister. She knows more about those... I was just a little boy then, you know. When my grandpa died I was about 11 years old. So the history is, for me, forget....

Zhongping Chen: So, what kind of job did your grandma do....

Victor Wong: My grandmother? I don't think she worked. She just looked after the family.

Zhongping Chen: So just as a housewife. So when did your father come here... oh he was actually born here...

Victor Wong: He's born here! He's born in Victoria.

Zhongping Chen: When he was born here?

Victor Wong: He died in 1970... I think it was '76 or '74... He died when he was about 83 years old.

Zhongping Chen: So he was born around 1890.

Charles Yang: 1893... 91?

Zhongping Chen: So, what kind of education did he receive here?

Victor Wong: He received, uh, finished high school, I believe.

Zhongping Chen: So then what kind of job did he do here?

Victor Wong: He was a... one time he was a banker.

Zhongping Chen: Which banker?

Victor Wong: I think Royal Bank or something. He worked as a teller, you know, in a bank. And then later on he, uh, went into greenhouse business. And also was in the lumber mill business.

Zhongping Chen: So you mean he started a factory or something?

Victor Wong: Lumber... like a sawmill.

Zhongping Chen: I mean he started his own business?... he was the owner?

Victor Wong: He yeah, 1930's had a green house, you know, Chinese grows...

Zhongping Chen: Yeah, vegetables.

Victor Wong: Tomatoes, I remember. Flowers, lilies....

Zhongping Chen: So he changed his business quite a bit from bank to a greenhouse and then to a sawmill. So, how many people worked for him in the sawmill?

Victor Wong: I don't know. Quite a few people I guess. I remember Shawnigan Lake somewhere up at the Malahat highway up that way, I guess. He took me there when I was just a young guy. But I wasn't interested in how many people were working there. I saw the mill....

Zhongping Chen: So I guess your mother was actually born here.

Victor Wong: My mother? No, she was born in Hong Kong. And my grandpa, the minister, he bought the family over when she was only 2 years old.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, he actually went back to Hong Kong, you mean Chan Yu Tan ....

Victor Wong: He bought the family over.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, he came together with your mother, who was two years old.

Victor Wong: Yeah.

Zhongping Chen: And then she basically grew up here, in Victoria.... Her father, actually... I think he first went to Vancouver?

Victor Wong: No, I think Victoria.

Zhongping Chen: Really?

Victor Wong: I think he preached in Victoria and then, uh.... he might not have been the minister then .. I think Victoria was his first one...

Zhongping Chen: I think I read his story somewhere. He was uh, he had a brother, also was a minister, I guess.

Victor Wong: I can show you a picture of my-my grandpa's .... Both grandpas were in that picture. My dad's picture in there too. Here it is. You see, if I can point to you. This is my dad, my father there. This is the United Church, 1885 to September 1935. Celebration of some... 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. So that tells you the age of that church. But anyway, this is my dad. And this is my older sister here, Josephine, right there. That's my older sister. And this is Reverend Chan Yu Tan. Right there, and this is his brother in that picture.

Zhongping Chen: Yeah, he also was a minister.

Victor Wong: Yeah, he preached in United States, this is Chan Sing Kai, that's him.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, that's your maternal grandpa...

Victor Wong: This is, um, this is my paternal grandpa. Wong Dik Zhong, right here, chief cook at the Union Club. And my grandmother... is somewhere here. I have to look.



Zhongping Chen: Your whole family's here.

Victor Wong: Oh yeah, this was a celebration of an anniversary.

Zhongping Chen: 1965...

Victor Wong: Long time yeah. But anyway, uh, hm, I have to look more clearly to find where they are. My mother, my mother is somewhere in the lady's section

Zhongping Chen: So how many siblings do you have?

Victor Wong: How many siblings? My family had five children. I'll show you a picture of them. Just a minute here. This is my family there. My dad is there, you know. That's my dad. That's my mother. That's my older sister, she's ninety-six years old now, in Vancouver. My brother passed away now; he died when he was eighty-two. And that's me, and then my two young sisters.

Zhongping Chen: You have two brothers and three sisters.

Victor Wong: Two brothers, three sisters.

Zhongping Chen: So what kind of education did you receive here? In Victoria I guess.

Victor Wong: Me? Uh, high school.

Zhongping Chen: Oh you went to high school, I see. Did you ever go to a Chinese school?

Victor Wong: Yes. I had six years, I think, or seven years of Chinese school at the Chinese Public School.

Zhongping Chen: Is that one in the same place?

Victor Wong: Yeah.

Zhongping Chen: I see. So after you graduated from high school, what kind of job did you do?

Victor Wong: Uh, I was, uh, I worked at the lumber mill for a little while.

Zhongping Chen: Oh that's your father's sawmill.

Victor Wong: Just out of high school, and I worked at a lumber... no, just a, BC forest, they have a big mill there. They were hiring work there because during the war, uh, when I graduated it was 1944, the war was still on.

Zhongping Chen: Oh yeah, just the last years of the war.

Victor Wong: And they needed men to work because a lot of them were in the army. They didn't want Chinese in the army, you know. Actually, Premier Pattullo wrote MacKenzie King, the prime minister, not to enlist the Chinese or Japanese in the arm forces, for fear of giving us a franchise. At that time, BC had most Chinese people living there, ok. And the Japanese too, were fishing here... fishing type of people, on boats. And they didn't want to let us join the armed services. Because, as I say, for fear of giving us the franchise, which means citizenship and all the things of being Canadian. Then... we were British subjects only. Our birth certificates state that we are not citizens of... not Canadian citizen, but British subjects only.

Zhongping Chen: That was different from Canadian citizens.

Victor Wong: Well when you get Canadian citizenship, you're even keel. That mean you can get all the jobs, you know, anything. You can be a doctor, or a lawyer, or a Pharmacist, or a teacher or any ... lawyers, you know. They won't give you citizenship, even if you graduate from university, passing those subjects, they won't give you a license to operate those business. See, that is the reason why they don't want to give us any citizenship.

Zhongping Chen: So who in Victoria, among the Chinese, who was the first to join the army, Canadian army, in the battle?

Victor Wong: There were only allowed... maybe 1 or 2 or 3 at the most. They don't want a group. Uh, they don't want to enlist us in a group because if it was a group we have power, you see. Actually, very few were allowed to go. They had to go to other provinces to enlist, like Alberta, uh, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, uh, Ontario.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, so they were recruited there..

Victor Wong: No, they weren't recruited. They can join because there were only few, Chinese.

Zhongping Chen: Oh in BC they could not join the army?

Victor Wong: In BC , they don't want it. So we can't. Even though the few Chinese in those provinces, they weren't citizens either, you know. But they would allow them to join. Because they can't join in... in the big bunch, you know. So they were fear that [if] many [Chinese] in the forces, then they can demand franchise. That's what they were afraid. But...when in 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbour, they entered the war. And not long after Japan occupied all of British colonies in Southeast Asia. You understand? they came down and...

Zhongping Chen: Yeah, Japanese army moved to Southeast Asia.

Victor Wong: When that happened, England said, Hey, we have to do what we did in France, organize a force, which is called Force 136 to infiltrate the area to organize guerrilla warfare. So they looked around and say where can we find Chinese that can blend into that area, and organize guerrilla warfare? So, Canada is the best country. Because of the 41,000 Chinese in BC. Yeah, so Winston Churchill wired the Canadian government. MacKenzie King says, hey, we need the Chinese to infiltrate those territories so that we can organize guerrilla warfare against the Japanese in those territories.

Zhongping Chen: In Southeast Asia.

Victor Wong: Yes. Because it was their territories then. Great Britain owned those territories like Burma and Singapore, Malaysia and all those areas. So that's what happened. That's how they decide to call us up. So they conscripted us and they, uh, conscripted every young Chinese of military age in BC.

Zhongping Chen: Every Chinese?

Victor Wong: Every one of us.

Zhongping Chen: Which year was that?

Victor Wong: That was in 1944. Because I just got out of high school. And I was, as I mentioned, working in the lumber mill. And I had to leave my work to be recruited. But we could be recruited for general service meaning going overseas, or we could deny going because we weren't citizens, you see. But we had town hall meetings.

Zhongping Chen: In Victoria?

Victor Wong: In Victoria. Vancouver, too. I guess most of the Chinese at that time lived in Vancouver. In the whole BC the Chinese in military age were caught up, ok. And we have to be examined by doctors to make sure we're ok to be in the army anyway. But anyway, there were 600-700 called out. In all of BC, we don't know the exact total. But there was very, a large number. Between 600-800 Chinese were called out. And we had town hall meetings. At the meeting, the elders would say, you guys have been recruited to go. Why should you go when you're not even citizens? And a lot of them says, uh, you shouldn't join to go fight for a country that denies you citizenship. And the other folks say hey, this is our chance. Maybe we go in large groups and join the army, and when we come back we can demand a franchise, Right? So we all decided, 99% of us decided to say ok, let's go and join general service, which mean we can go over

and fight. And 99% of us decided to do that, in that meeting, our town hall meeting.

Zhongping Chen: So the meeting was in Chinatown....

Victor Wong: In a church, anywhere that opened to... to have a gathering.

Zhongping Chen: It was organized by the CCBA, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association?

Victor Wong: It was organized by the elders and the CCBA, or the church. It was organized any way. It doesn't matter whether the whole Chinese community organized it or the Church did... you know. So we just had a place to meet. It could be a church. In Vancouver they had a United Church meeting, you know.

Zhongping Chen: In Victoria, where was the meeting held in Victoria?

Victor Wong: I think it was at Chinese school. Not too sure but that's easy to find out. But anyway we had that meeting and we decided, ok, we'll go in and join and fight, and we didn't know where we were going, but you know, we all joined up to go general service, which mean to go overseas and fight. Otherwise, if you don't go overseas to fight, you got no strength to demand citizenship.. We could stay home, and defend our homeland, but that doesn't mean anything. So we go general service, that mean go overseas to fight, you know. So that's what we did. And that's what happened, and when we came back, the war was over. We lobbied the government, and in 1946, during the Fall, the government said ok, we'll give you, the Chinese, citizenship. It will be official oin January 1, 1947. But they passed it in law in the Fall of 1946. But we, the veterans... the soldiers that joined up, we automatically became citizens in 1945. I can remember...

Zhongping Chen: Oh after you joined the army you became citizen.

Victor Wong: Yeah, because I can remember during the army I had a chance to vote! I remember, I was in, just about going overseas in early 1945. The election I think was in the spring. I remembered I voted.

Zhongping Chen: That was provincial or federal election?

Victor Wong: Federal. Because, it's a federal election, that's important. That means that you became a citizen. That's when the people that were called up in 1944 being in service in 1945, we were Canadian citizens.

Zhongping Chen: When you were caught up in battle you were in Southeast Asia?.

Victor Wong: No, in early 1945 we were still in Canada. We didn't go to India until the election was over.

Zhongping Chen: So when did you leave Canada for the battlefield?

Victor Wong: In, I think it was March.

Zhongping Chen: March 1945?

Victor Wong: Yes. That's when we left from Halifax, going to England first by ship. One single ship. Go to Iceland Way, then landed in Liverpool and then took a train to London. And we were in billet in a warehouse in Wimbledon Street in London. Yeah, it's just an empty warehouse. And we had bunk beds all over there. And from there we went to Aldershot for little while and then back to London. From Liverpool, we took a ship down the, uh, Atlantic Ocean, um, pass France, pass Spain into Rock of Gibraltar in the Mediterranean, down the Red Sea, and then the Indian Ocean to Bombay, India. And then from Bombay, India, we took a train, no, by a bus, to Poona, which is quite a distance. And then we had to go up, climb a mountain, called Singar Hill, which is a British army camp there. And we trained there for quite a few months, different things. Then later on we were sent. I was sent to Calcutta, and some groups went to Meerut. Different groups, different area. And then we all trained for

different areas of type of work in the organized guerrilla warfare type of thing. And then we were set up into then in a group, with all the different expertise on different things for organized guerrilla warfare. And then we would parachute into, suppose to be friendly area of droppings and organize the guerrilla warfare. That`s what we did.

Zhongping Chen: So did you have a chance to go to the war, the guerrilla war.

Victor Wong: Oh yeah, groups were dropping in already. And the reason that some didn`t get in there was when they dropped the atomic bomb, they ended it, you know. So, we were lucky that way. Otherwise, one group was supposed to be in there. And I think that was the group we were in... that I was in. The Japanese knew where we were dropping in. They would`ve massacred us. They knew exactly where that drop was, we found out. But luckily the war ended. And we were saved. Lot of guys would`ve been dead. You know, if they didn`t drop that on August 6, 1945. They dropped that bomb and that ended it. That was very lucky, yeah.

Zhongping Chen: So where did they plan to send you... in Malaysia or....

Victor Wong: Burma. Into Burma.

Zhongping Chen: So basically you didn`t go to Burma, you stayed in India before the war ended.

Victor Wong: Well, we were ready to go. I was in, uh, in Singapore, no, Calcutta.

Zhongping Chen: Oh you were in Calcutta. Ready to be dropped in Burma.

Victor Wong: But luckily the war ended, and later on we found out about that the Japanese found out where we were dropping. They knew that, and it was just luck. The British army gave us Cyanide pills in case we were captured, because we were dropping in as civilians, not soldiers.

Zhongping Chen: Really, did the Canadian government consider you as formal soldiers?

Victor Wong: Oh, yeah, they knew we were soldiers. We were automatically soldiers. You can't deny that, okay? But we were loaned to Mountbatten who is the commander of the British army in India. We were loaned to the British, actually. The Canadian loaned us to the British. We were under Mountbatten. Lord Mountbatten, you know. Dickie, they call him Dickie, Lord Mountbatten. He used to be an uncle to the Prince of Wales, you know. And he was the overall commander in Southeast Asia, for the British. As I mentioned, Churchill wired MacKenzie King to obtain us in the first place. That's what... they knew exactly what was happening. We didn't know. MacKenzie King enlisted us. We didn't know we were going to be loaned to the British. We had a choice though. A British officer came to our army... different areas of army camps, because we were in different areas in Canada training, basic training. He came to every camp to talk to us. He told us that we were going to go to China to fight.

Zhongping Chen: MacKenzie?

Victor Wong: No, no, the officer. He came from England to come over. Commander... I forgot his name. But anyway he went all the army camp in Canada. Chilliwack, Shiloh, Brandon, Manitoba, all those different areas you know, where all the Chinese were recruited to train. And they asked for an enlistment to go to China to fight. So lots of us signed up to go.

Zhongping Chen: So you were actually happy partly because you were going to fight in China.

Victor Wong: But you know that Chinese are all over Southeast Asia.

Zhongping Chen: Yeah.

Victor Wong: Okay? We can speak Chinese. So that's what they want. We can speak English and Chinese. So they know that we can go and drop in the area to organize guerrilla warfare, teach them how to do things, you see? To disturb the Japanese in any way we can. You know, interrupt them any



way we can. Blow up bridges, their ammunition dumps, and everything like that, you know. Uh, blow up railway tracks and stuff like that, you know. We were taught to do all those stuff, and train the ordinary people in that country. And we would be dropped in civilian clothes. We weren't soldier's type.

Zhongping Chen: So if you were captured, you were not considered as a war prisoner.

Victor Wong: We weren't under Geneva Convention. When you are not under Geneva Convention, they can shoot you on the spot without penalty, you know. They say you're not in uniform. So, that's what we were doing. Because when Germany occupied France, you know, German took all of France, lot of the French went to England. In Dieppe, they all went on ship to England. And they used the French to organize their own guerrilla warfare, and it was very successful. That's why England did the same thing in Far East, wanted us to do that. That's how it happened.

Zhongping Chen: So you went to the war a little late. Did anyone in Victoria actually join the war, you know, joined the guerrilla war in Southeast Asia? In the battles.

Victor Wong: Oh yes. There were groups in there already. We were all getting ready.... Groups were dropping in. So some were in there already, yeah. Some were in Sarawak, you know, Roy Chan was there and he's passed away now.

Zhongping Chen: I see. Roy Chan... From the Chan family... So yeah he actually had a few brothers, some of them also joined the war.

Victor Wong: Oh yeah, there were four of them. There was Paul, there was Roy, Ira, and Herby, he's in air force. So there were four of them.

Zhongping Chen: So did any of these soldiers from Victoria, I mean the Chinese serviceman die in the battlefield? in Southeast Asia?

Victor Wong: Yes, there were serviceman died. It was from Vancouver... I forgot his name. Anyway and also there were quite a few Europeans that died. Margery Wong's book has a list of them. Yeah, I don't know by name as much.

Zhongping Chen: So in the army, did you feel like any difference in the treatments. Did the army treat you and Caucasian soldiers differently?

Victor Wong: When you're in uniform in Canada at that time, I noticed they look up to you.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really?

Victor Wong: They didn't talk to as Chink, you know. Some... they admired us, I think.

Zhongping Chen: Even inside the army, there was no discrimination?

Victor Wong: No, no, no discrimination. I never felt any. We were all buddies type of thing. I think that was the best time of our lives. We feel good, you know. You're young then too, and adventurous and interesting. You're in your group, and you're buddies, and you're going overseas, and you know... You don't think of dying.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really? You're not afraid...

Victor Wong: Well once you think about it then you get scared.

Zhongping Chen: So in your military unit, how many Chinese were there?

Victor Wong: In my unit that went over?

Zhongping Chen: Yeah.

Victor Wong: Total over 100... 150, 160. We went in a group, a whole group of about 160...

Zhongping Chen: Chinese?

Victor Wong: Maybe even 180, close to 200 anyway.

Zhongping Chen: You mean Chinese?

Victor Wong: All together. Yeah, went by the ship, the Mauretania, to... to as I said through Iceland and down... down to Liverpool, England. There were about 200 of us, approximately.

Zhongping Chen: So that was in a division or in a regiment?

Victor Wong: Well, that was our group. There were... We were going in groups, different groups going. There were more than that, the other group... I don't know how many in the other group. But we, in my group, I remember was about 200.

Zhongping Chen: Like your group, was it a division, military division?

Victor Wong: Not as a division. We're just in groups. We didn't have enough to form a division.

Zhongping Chen: Really?

Victor Wong: Yeah, we... As I meant, the total was 800 you know. 7-600 to 800 you know. Not enough for a division.

Zhongping Chen: What's the title of that army... called a regiment?

Victor Wong: We're just known as a group, in an army group, that's all.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really?

Victor Wong: Yeah, because of our... it's all Chinese Canadian.

Zhongping Chen: You mean all the people were Chinese?

Victor Wong: The group that I went was... all Chinese Canadian.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, all Chinese?

Victor Wong: But there were other whites but they were going to Europe to fight.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, different groups.

Victor Wong: They send us because we signed up to go to China. But we end up in India.

Zhongping Chen: So...

Victor Wong: We didn't know we were going to India. We... I didn't know we were going to Burma. We thought we were going to China. The officer came and interviewed us and told us we were going to China. He just put it in that way so we will sign up and go. But when we go there, it's a different thing. They... they actually going to the occupied territories of the British. They didn't tell us the truth, I guess.

Zhongping Chen: So when did you come back?

Victor Wong: When the war ended, we were still in India. We didn't come back till Christmas of 1945.

Zhongping Chen: Then you left the army?

Victor Wong: We didn't leave the army. They kept us in the army for awhile till 1946, planting trees in Nanaimo.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really?

Victor Wong: I didn't get discharged till... uh... I think it was in May something... yeah, May the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1946.

Zhongping Chen: So after that, what kind of job did you do here?

Victor Wong: Uh yeah, after I got discharged in May, I stayed home doing nothing for a while. My brother, Dennis Wong, he and his brother-in-law in 1942, bought a restaurant in Prince Alberta, Saskatchewan. He didn't have to go to the army... delay going because I was in the army. At that time, one brother could stay home, you know... So he delayed going because he

was... he had a business, owned a business. When I got discharged he phoned me and say come in Prince Albert and help me in my restaurant.

Zhongping Chen: He went to Saskatchewan.

Victor Wong: Yeah, so I went there and stayed there for three years. Then after, I came home because I got tired of staying in the prairie town and came back to Victoria. And I worked in a retail store for about a couple of years.

Zhongping Chen: So that's your father's business?

Victor Wong: No, it wasn't with my father. He was... I think at that time he's the... he retired from sawmill. I think he... he got rid of it or something, I don't know. Anyway, I wasn't working for my father. I was working with my brother-in-law. He had a store on Government Street called "The Orient" After that I left and went into real estate. And I stayed in real estate for thirty-five years, I guess. Then I retired from that.

Zhongping Chen: In Victoria, I noticed one famous Chinese veteran called Zheng Tianhua. I think he also came from Victoria.

Victor Wong: Yes, he's a lawyer.

Zhongping Chen: What's his name?

Victor Wong: He's Doug Jung [Douglas Jung, or Zheng Tianhua]

Zhongping Chen: So he joined the same group as yours or...?

Victor Wong: He was in a... the earlier group. He and Roy Chan... Roy Chan's group were ... trained in Australia.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really?

Victor Wong: Yeah, they were called Oblivion Group.

Zhongping Chen: What does that mean?

Victor Wong: That means suicidal group.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, ok. Oh I see.

Victor Wong: There were five of those groups... Men in that group got certain medal for bravery. That's the most in any group...

Zhongping Chen: So they did go to the war?

Victor Wong: Oh, yeah, they were in the war. They were in Sarawak area. That was British territory in Malaysia area. Roy was there. There's pictures of him with those natives, you know, just a little loin cloth, blow guns, and that type of thing. Yeah, they were in the Sarawak.

Zhongping Chen: So did he also come back to Victoria after the war?

Victor Wong: Yes. He went... he moved to Vancouver.

Zhongping Chen: Later, he went to Vancouver?

Victor Wong: And he became the first Canadian Member of Parliament.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, I see. A Chinese member in Parliament.

Victor Wong: Yeah, a member of Parliament. He only served one term.

Zhongping Chen: Only one term? Then he lost in election?

Victor Wong: He lost it in Vancouver Centre because he made a bad statement.

Zhongping Chen: What?

Victor Wong: He was in Chinatown, and some Chinese were saying: "... talking about things," and he went out and said: "I don't need you Chinese guys."

Zhongping Chen: You mean he said it?

Victor Wong: He said it, that's how he lost.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really?

Victor Wong: He shouldn't have said that. Very smart man, though.

Zhongping Chen: I think he later also served in the United Nations?

Victor Wong: He was under Diefenbaker government, Conservative, and Diefenbaker gave him the job to be chief person to look after Canada in United Nations. Matter of fact, one chap asked him: "Why are you here?" You know, in United Nations, they sort of discriminate him. He said: "Why are you here?" and he said: "I am the chief person that is looking after Canada in United Nations." He shut that guy up.

Zhongping Chen: But it's interesting why he... in Vancouver, he said did not need the Chinese guys...

Victor Wong: He made that bad mistake. He should never have said that.

Zhongping Chen: Probably he became a Westernized politician?

Victor Wong: He's Canadian born. I know his dad very well, tall man. I know his mother, mother belonged to the church. I know that. My mother and them... and my dad and his dad, are very good friends. And I knew him. He's aloof, you know. He's not... he's not friendly type of man. He was sort of aloof, hard to reach type of person.

Zhongping Chen: Is he still alive?

Victor Wong: No, he passed away when he was about 76 years old. He's older than me, by two to three years. I'm eighty-five. So he passed away when he was 76.

Zhongping Chen: A couple of years ago...

Victor Wong: A few years now... And he married a white woman.

Zhongping Chen: A white woman?

Victor Wong: A white woman. She's from England. She's a teacher. They divorced, and he has two sons. And the son wasn't too close... The mother took the two boys back to England, and the son never really was reaching out to him at all, you know. But when he passed away, his son came over for the service and stuff like that. But They weren't very close.

Zhongping Chen: So he died in Vancouver? Not here?

Victor Wong: Yes. He didn't... He had his society pay for his service. So I don't know what he did with his money. He did a lot of immigration work.

Zhongping Chen: Like what kind of work?

Victor Wong: For the Chinese, making immigrants to come to Canada.

Zhongping Chen: To help the Chinese immigrants. So when did he move away from Victoria to Vancouver?

Victor Wong: Oh, he moved away when he was a young man going to university. After the war, he never returned to Victoria.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, before the war he actually left here already?

Victor Wong: Yeah. More or less, he went to Vancouver.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, so he joined the army in Vancouver?

Victor Wong: Yeah he was ... He left... A lot of them left Victoria because businesses were better in Vancouver, you know. So lots of people move to Vancouver.

Zhongping Chen: Like in Victoria after the war, what kind of activities did you join?

Victor Wong: Well after the war, I immediately went to Prince Albert. Three years in Prince Albert. So I don't know too much after the war in Victoria. But I think things started to be better. The shipyard I guess slowed down. But anyway, I think most people moved away to Vancouver to look for doing business.



Zhongping Chen: Most of your friends in the battlefield... in the military group?

Victor Wong: Yes, because I think opportunity for business is better in Vancouver. So a lot of them moved to Vancouver. They were then able to be professional people. Like being pharmacists, lot of... I know... remember Mr. Lim became a pharmacist. My brother-in-law was a pharmacist. A lot of them became doctors, dentist, lawyers, like him-Doug Jung, he became a lawyer after the war.

Zhongping Chen: After the war?

Victor Wong: Yeah, not before the war. He was just nothing before.

Zhongping Chen: They were not citizens, and they could not practice law...

Victor Wong: They would not give you a license then. But they became, you know, afterwards. And then things became better and better because we had a lieutenant governor, David Lam. Yeah, of BC.

Zhongping Chen: But that was quite late. That was in 1980's I guess?

Victor Wong: Yeah, but he didn't come till late you know. It was during the Cultural Revolution that they came over. Remember China had Cultural Revolution.

Zhongping Chen: Yeah, that's right.

Victor Wong: Lot of people left Hong Kong, went to Richmond, build... buying out properties and everything there. They all got scared, you know.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, Richmond started from that time?

Victor Wong: Yeah, remember Hong Kong was getting ready to be given back to China too, you know.

Zhongping Chen: So yah, let's talk about your association, the Victoria Chinese Canadian Veterans Association. It was established in...

Victor Wong: 1969...

Zhongping Chen: 1969?

Victor Wong: Yeah... Because we weren't a big enough, large enough group to be technically known as an organization. So we just... it was actually by name only because we don't have enough people. But Vancouver had a large one. Large group because there were more people... We only had about sixty-two people called up in Victoria. And a lot of them moved away...

Zhongping Chen: You mean right now or before?

Victor Wong: Before the war started. We have a list of about sixty-two. A plaque on the gate shows you. That's all the Victoria people that were caught up. So that plaque represents Victoria ones. But there was a large group in Vancouver, and Vancouver had a large group of veterans. They were able to form a legalized society called Army Navy Air Force Unit 280. That's what their... unit... I belong to Battalion No.7 here. A legion, it's a legion. But we are not recognized as a society in a...

Zhongping Chen: Not formally registered.

Victor Wong: Not registered. Yeah.

Zhongping Chen: Your association is never registered with the government?

Victor Wong: We can't because we don't have enough people.

Zhongping Chen: But you have like 60 people. That's good enough.

Victor Wong: No, but they all moved away.

Zhongping Chen: So how many people does the association still have right now?

Victor Wong: About... we just have... maybe about a hand full of nine.

Zhongping Chen: Nine people...

Victor Wong: When we first... even when we first organized it, we had less than 20.

Zhongping Chen: This book says it's in 1967 the association was established.

Victor Wong: Yes, but there was just a small group.

Zhongping Chen: There were about twenty people?

Victor Wong: Yes, just about twenty. So we can't be registered as a society in a sense, but the Chinese community does recognize us because we are veterans.

Zhongping Chen: So do you also join the Canadian Veterans' Association?

Victor Wong: We... yeah well... we all belong to a legion.

Zhongping Chen: In Victoria?

Victor Wong: I have a badge, that's a legion.

Zhongping Chen: Does your association have regular activities?

Victor Wong: Oh yeah, we have... we organize reunions with Vancouver all the time. But that's what I'm saying now. We're getting less and less, older and older and pass away. I have lots of pictures of our activities.

Zhongping Chen: What kind of activities did you organize?

Victor Wong: We organize activities like reunion. We have a big nice supper and speeches and stuff like that at restaurants. All get together at a restaurant, have a good time, talk and ... introduce individual presidents and stuff like that. Vancouver has their president over, and officials and secretaries.

Zhongping Chen: Do you have regular schedule?

Victor Wong: They have one, maybe once a week, and we have one once a year, type of thing.

Zhongping Chen: You mean Vancouver has meeting once a week? And you also here have once a year?

Victor Wong: Yeah, type of thing. I mean we're all buddies of the same group at one time, you know. So we just come over and have a good time and drink, maybe a few drinks and family talk and whatever. Sometimes dance, yeah, there's a dance hall, we have a dance.

Zhongping Chen: But you do not have a meeting hall.

Victor Wong: We used to... mostly at that one time at the Cultural Centre in Chinatown.

Zhongping Chen: Where is the Cultural Centre?

Victor Wong: It's right across the street from Don Mee, that building.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, the Chinese-Canadian Friendship Association.

Victor Wong: Yeah, yes.

Zhongping Chen: So usually you have meeting there?

Victor Wong: Yeah.

Zhongping Chen: So do you remember who are the chairpersons of this association from 1965? Can you remember their names?

Victor Wong: The presidents?

Zhongping Chen: Yeah.

Victor Wong: Um yeah, there was Bill Lowe. Bill Lowe was a president at one time

Zhongping Chen: He was the first one?

Victor Wong: Um... yeah, Bill I guess...

Zhongping Chen: Can you remember roughly from when to when his tenure was?

Victor Wong: Bill Lowe? No, I can't. He was there for till... quite awhile then... there's also Roy Chan, and then after Roy Chan, there was me.

Zhongping Chen: So when did you become the president?

Victor Wong: 1992. I think it was.

Zhongping Chen: 1992.

Victor Wong: I don't know, I can't remember. Bill Lowe was there for a long time too, but he died, you know. Then Roy Chan took over and then nobody... I've been running since 1992.

Zhongping Chen: Right now it's 20 years.

Victor Wong: They don't want me to retire.

Zhongping Chen: So did you have election or just do it voluntarily...

Victor Wong: They elected us. They elect us and just say you're the president.

Zhongping Chen: So you have like annual elections?

Victor Wong: Oh yeah, we have a secretary. We have a meeting, you know. Now we're more or less thinking of disbanding.

Zhongping Chen: Why?

Victor Wong: Because not... We don't really need it much now because only about Five show up. Five people now. Now some of them are not well to go and...

Zhongping Chen: But I think there were also Chinese veterans who joined the Korean War. Did any Chinese here join the Korean War?

Victor Wong: Not much. Not much that they...

Zhongping Chen: So they are not members of your association?

Victor Wong: Well, if they were in the Korean War, they would be. All I can remember is one Chinese that went to the Korean War, and that was Alfred Lim in Vancouver.

Zhongping Chen: Oh he left from Vancouver?

Victor Wong: Yeah. He wasn't in World War Two, but he was in the Korean War.

Zhongping Chen: He stayed in the army?

Victor Wong: He passed away now, Alfred Lim, yeah. He was in the American army. I think he joined the American army.

Zhongping Chen: Why did he join the American army?

Victor Wong: I think...uh... I don't think Canada had an army to go.

Zhongping Chen: I think Canada did have an army in Korea...

Victor Wong: I don't think he joined the Canadian to go. He went in... went down to states and joined to go in the army or something.

Zhongping Chen: He really liked the war?

Victor Wong: I'm not sure, maybe he was in the Canadian army. Not sure... I remember he came to our meetings and everything, and he joined the Vancouver Chinese Legion, Army Navy and Air force 280.

Zhongping Chen: So did any Chinese join the Vietnam War?

Victor Wong: No, not that I know of.

Zhongping Chen: Not a single one?

Victor Wong: That's not a popular war though... I don't think... They shouldn't have been in there in the first place. It was a bad war.

Zhongping Chen: So in Victoria, do you also join other associations? Like the Wong Association?

Victor Wong: Well, we all joined into our own Battalion No. 7 Legion, which I showed you that badge. Sometimes they have functions, they ask us to help them. They like us to be there, that they can claim, say here is a group of Chinese that was veterans. That gives them prestige type of thing.

Zhongping Chen: Did you have any function in Chinese community? Like giving lectures to the students in the Chinese Public School.

Victor Wong: Well, every Remembrance Day I'm up there talking to the Chinese people. I have the pictures that show a lot of times... I got a lot of pictures.

Zhongping Chen: So apart from the veterans' association, do you also join other Chinese Associations like Wong Association?

Victor Wong: Wong Association? Jee... I don't really know. I don't attend to their meetings too much, you know. I don't go to the Wong's.

Zhongping Chen: I see.

Victor Wong: I don't know how many members there is. I know that Kit Wong would probably know.

Zhongping Chen: Is he also a member of your veterans association?

Victor Wong: Yes, but Kit Wong was not a World War Two veteran.

Zhongping Chen: Oh...?

Victor Wong: He was in the navy. Kit Wong is actually much younger than us...

Zhongping Chen: Yeah, that's true.

Victor Wong: He was... He joined the Canadian Navy.

Zhongping Chen: Yes, that's true.

Victor Wong: On his own. He wasn't called up. He just joined. So he became a commander... some... commander, 2<sup>nd</sup> commander or whatever in the navy. So when he heard about us, he wanted to join our club, and we said sure, so he joined our club.

Zhongping Chen: So do you also join other associations?

Victor Wong: I belong to Taishan association...

Zhongping Chen: Did you go to their activities?

Victor Wong: I'm a member, but I don't... haven't been attending their meetings. But I do join all their functions. They have dinners, picnics and stuff like that. When I was single, I did more work for them then, but lately when I got married, get children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, I haven't been doing that much... These are my two great grandsons. He's only... one is only a year old, the other one is five. I got a big family. I got thirteen grandchildren and two great grandsons.

Zhongping Chen: Did your family originally live in Chinatown?

Victor Wong: No. I was... we were more privileged. We lived outside of Chinatown on Queen's Avenue which is right by Victoria Central Park. Right in the middle of the... on Queen's Avenue, 936 Queen's Avenue, and we had a big house, duplex house that was... that had a basement, another floor, then another floor upstairs, bedroom and... the other side was a relative of ours: my grandmother side has a sister. They used to live on one side, and we live on the other side of a whole duplex house.

Zhongping Chen: So you were not born in Chinatown?

Victor Wong: I never was near Chinatown. Always in our area. It's a very nice area. And there was another big family, Lim Bang. He used to own a bank. I understand on Douglas Street, it's Douglas Hotel. Lim Bang, he was quite a prominent businessman then. He lived on the corner of Queen's Avenue



and we were in the centre and then across the park, there was Harry Lou-Poy. That's all the Chinese that I knew live around that area then.

Zhongping Chen: When you were young, did you always go to Chinatown or...?

Victor Wong: Well I... We go to Chinatown to buy groceries all the time because that's the only place you can get Chinese groceries then. They didn't have stores that sell Chinese groceries [Near my home]. You used to go down to Chinatown to buy the rice and whatever you may need, and we had Chinese school right across from the police station on Fisgard Street, That's the same Chinese school we went to. And then the church that we go to was right on Fisgard Street. It's torn down now, it's not there, that church that I showed you in that book. Remember that book?

Zhongping Chen: Yeah.

Victor Wong: That was when the United Church used to be there.

Zhongping Chen: That's the first Methodist...

Victor Wong: Chinese Methodist United Church.

Zhongping Chen: The first one?

Victor Wong: Yeah. It's gone now.

Zhongping Chen: Why was it demolished?

Victor Wong: The United Church of Canada wanted to sell it. So we got rid of it, and Mr. Lu Pui got it, bought it. Took it down and made a parking lot. It's a parking lot now.

Zhongping Chen: Why did the United Church try to get rid of it?

Victor Wong: I guess there weren't enough people attending church.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really? There were not a lot of Chinese Christians?

Victor Wong: Oh, that was in 1960's you know. Not many then.

Zhongping Chen: Not many Chinese went there?

Victor Wong: Not many, yeah. That was in 1960's, early 60's.

Zhongping Chen: You know, Christians have different groups, like Methodists, Presbyterians. For the Chinese, what kind of Christian groups did they join?

Victor Wong: Chang Lao Hui (Presbyterian) is one. It was still there then. But they built another church just a little way from there. Then there's another church over on... I forgot which area it's in, somewhere in a residential area. There's a Chinese church there. I think there's about three... still three Chinese churches in Victoria.

Zhongping Chen: You mean apart from the earliest one that was demolished?

Victor Wong: I'm not just particularly remembering which church... another name for it. But I do know when one was gone, they joined the other one, you know. Alan Chan used to be one of the members and he passed away just recently. That's [one of] the Chan boys.

Zhongping Chen: Yeah, the Chan family...

Victor Wong: I think they're all gone now. Everyone of the boys. The one... the one, the veteran was the last one, Paul Chan. He just passed away earlier this year.

Zhongping Chen: And the minister Chan Sing Kai, he actually came from Panyu, I think, not from Taishan.

Victor Wong: Yeah, well it should be there. That's my grandpa's brother.

Zhongping Chen: Can you tell me a little more about the two brothers. And he was the first Chinese priest in Canada I guess?

Victor Wong: I think he... yeah. I think he mentioned that he got his brother, my grandpa over too.

Zhongping Chen: That's true.

Victor Wong: Oh there it is [show a book]. Yeah, my maternal grandpa was born on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1863.

Zhongping Chen: In Hong Kong?

Victor Wong: Yes. That's what it says here. I remember I came back from overseas he [grandpa] was still alive. And here's the children and his... there's my mother Rose Chan. She was born on May the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1894. And she died in October, 1976, that's what I remember. My mother's name is Rose Chan, and Joseph Wong, my father, and my sister's name is Josephine, and my brother is Dennis Wong. Then there was a Martha Wong, she died when she was 2 years old, and then I was born in 1926. Then my sister Rosabelle was born in 1929, and then my younger sister Roberta was born in 1934. So that gives you the history of us anyway.

Zhongping Chen: In your family, who was the first one converted to Christianity?

Victor Wong: My... of course my grandfather, he was the United Church Minister, Reverend Chan Yu Tan.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, that's maternal side. I mean in your paternal side.

Victor Wong: Oh, my paternal side. I guess my grandfather on my maternal side got my grandpa to be in the church. I believe.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really?

Victor Wong: Because you know, the influence... I think that's the influence, you know. Of course they know each other and got him in the church, maybe, I don't know.

Zhongping Chen: So your grandfather actually was the first Christian in...

Victor Wong: You know why I say that? I noticed my grandpa was in that picture when... in the United Church picture.

Zhongping Chen: So your father automatically became a Christian?

Victor Wong: He, oh yes.

Zhongping Chen: Like in your case, when was you baptised?

Victor Wong: I was when I was born.

Zhongping Chen: Just born? Ok.

Victor Wong: I know I was baptised. I don't know, I was a little baby.

Zhongping Chen: So have you always been going to church here?

Victor Wong: I was brought up to go to church, you know. My mother made sure I go to kindergarten, and I remember going to church and sitting in the church and all the music and preaching. I don't know what they say anyway whatever but later on I grow older then I know. But I became a Christian.

Zhongping Chen: So as a Christian, do you still have any belief in Chinese religions like Buddhism?

Victor Wong: No, I don't.

Zhongping Chen: Daoism?

Victor Wong: No, I don't go into other religions. I just remain... United Church member. When they have services I just bow my head and pray. And we taught to pray at home in Chinese, you know. Yeah, my mother taught me I guess when I go to bed, pray, all those type... So I was brought up as a Christian.

Zhongping Chen: When you were young, how many Chinese families went to church, like the church you went...

Victor Wong: There's quite a few. Doug Jung's family as I know. There was quite a few. I would say there would be at least fifty odd couples.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, fifty? That's a lot.

Victor Wong: So fifty couples be 100 people we'd see in it.

Zhongping Chen: Just the church you went? Just one church.

Victor Wong: Yeah, just one church.

Zhongping Chen: There were also other churches?

Victor Wong: I don't know about the other churches. I don't... we don't inter-go to different churches. Just the one. The one I used to go was on Fisgard Street, United Church. All I knew it was Chinese United Church.

Zhongping Chen: When was that church demolished? You just mentioned it, I forgot.

Victor Wong: 1960, early 60's.

Zhongping Chen: So where did they move the church like later...? After 1960's.

Victor Wong: They didn't have a church anymore.

Zhongping Chen: They never rebuild it?

Charles Yang: It was sold, right? So they just--

Victor Wong: They wanted to get rid of it.

Zhongping Chen: But how did the local Christian families do? They still have meeting...?

Victor Wong: They went to other churches then I guess. Because I wasn't involved too much when they were gone. When I came back, there was no more church.

Zhongping Chen: So which church did your family go after that time?

Victor Wong: I think my mother, she probably went to Chang Lao Hui.

Zhongping Chen: Chang Lao Hui?

Victor Wong: It's on... that church is on Caledonia. It used to be there. I think it's still there.

Zhongping Chen: It's not a Chinese church?

Victor Wong: I think it is still there as a Chinese church. On Caledonia. Corner of Caledonia, it's not far from the arena.

Charles Yang: Yeah, it's right beside... it's right across the street.

Victor Wong: Yeah, it's still there.

Charles Yang: My parents used to. I used to go.

Zhongping Chen: Caledonia and which street? Which intersection?

Victor Wong: It's Caledonia and Blanshard or something.

Charles Yang: Yeah, Caledonia and Blanshard.

Zhongping Chen: So that was mainly Chinese...

Victor Wong: Yeah.

Charles Yang: Yeah, it's still a Chinese church.

Victor Wong: It's still there, I think.

Charles Yang: It's a very small church.

Zhongping Chen: Actually, I'm very interested in the personal story of your family. Chan Sing Kai served in Victoria. When did he die? You know? He probably died long time ago...

Victor Wong: Yeah, it's in the book somewhere. He went to US, United States to preach.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really? He left here?

Victor Wong: He left Canada, went to the States.

Zhongping Chen: Yeah, when Sun Yat-Sen came here, he was a host of Sun Yat-Sen.

Victor Wong: Oh, is that right? I didn't know that.

Zhongping Chen: In 1897.

Victor Wong: Oh, I didn't know that.

Zhongping Chen: Because at that time, everybody was scared by Sun Yat-Sen, he was like a rebel. Nobody wanted to, you know, have any connection with him. But he actually was a host for Sun Yat-Sen.

Victor Wong: I didn't know that, no.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, you never heard of any stories of him?

Victor Wong: No, I don't know stories about that, no.

Zhongping Chen: So apart from these churches, do the Christians have any other organizations?

Victor Wong: Yeah, they had organizing called... CGIT for the girls.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, for girls.

Victor Wong: I don't know what the name is, CGIT. But they all had certain clothes on as a church group. They had Sunday school. Sunday schools, you know.

Zhongping Chen: Teaching English?

Victor Wong: Young people, yeah. But they had the white person, Mr. Pete used to teach us. Pete teaches at a Chinese United Church Sunday School. That's after the church, you know... Later on in the afternoon they have Sunday Schools.

Zhongping Chen: You also went to Sunday School?

Victor Wong: Yeah and so did Doug Jung. Mr. Jung, you know, Douglas Jung he went to Sunday School.

Zhongping Chen: Were you learning Chinese or what? Why do you go there...

Victor Wong: Well, we learn Chinese in different churches too. They had Chinese school in different churches. But main school was the Chinese public school.

Zhongping Chen: So the church also taught Chinese?

Victor Wong: Oh, yes, because the one we were just talking about, the church that's still exist on Caledonia, they had a Chinese teacher teaching Chinese there too. A lot of the people that went to that church learned their Chinese from that school, from that Chinese school. Quite a lot of them.

Zhongping Chen: Like in your case, did you go to the Chinese public school in...?

Victor Wong: In my case, I went to public school and then after public school, school was over, we went to the Chinese public school. Not in the church but the Chinese public school. You pay to go there you know.

Zhongping Chen: So the church Sunday school also taught Chinese?

Victor Wong: Yes, they also taught Chinese. They had teachers teaching reading Chinese and everything.

Zhongping Chen: So like in your impression, what is... has been the major change in our Chinatown from when you were young to today?

Victor Wong: It's integrated.

Zhongping Chen: In which way?

Victor Wong: There's a lot of white stores now. Not all pure Chinese, used to be all Chinese. It's integrated now, isn't it? You see things are... um it's been beautified.



Zhongping Chen: Better than before.

Victor Wong: Yeah, beautified quite extensively. Didn't have a gate there before. It's a well known gate, even the Queen knows about it so it made Chinatown what it is today more recognized, I would say, in history. The Fan Tan Alley was never known as it is today, so famously. Although they put in little words here and there saying they still think there's opium operating there. I don't think so. But it used to be a place where the Chinese gambled because a lot of them were never married. You can't bring the wives over, what else can they do? They don't go to movies. They just get together and each guy has a few bucks and they gamble with each other, Fan Tan, you know. That's how the Fan Tan Alley became known.

Zhongping Chen: Called the Fan Tan.

Victor Wong: It used to be a "Hai Moon", that means a watchdog guy, see a cop around... They know they gamble so they just warn them hey there's a cop. But a lot of the cops were... been paid anyway to ignore it. You know, the cops were never that honest but I don't want to say too much about that. But I know they got paid, you know. Once in a while they raid the place, saying they're doing their job, but most times they forget about it because they get money and allow them to gamble.

Zhongping Chen: When did gamble place disappear? In Chinatown.

Victor Wong: It didn't ever really disappear.

Zhongping Chen: Even today they are still there?

Victor Wong: Yeah, nowadays they are given official... issued a license that you can operate a gambling house.

Zhongping Chen: In Chinatown?

Victor Wong: A license, yeah there is.

Zhongping Chen: I never... I never knew that.

Victor Wong: It's a certain gambling license that you can buy.

Zhongping Chen: You're not talking about mah-jong? It's different?

Victor Wong: Mah-jong, they're still playing up there. They don't care you're playing mah-jong up there. You can hear it, Dart Coon Club, you walk by there, you hear it every night. Click-clack-click, mah-jong. They don't bother you. It's a friendship thing anyway, you know. They don't bother you up there. You can hear it all the time, click-click. You walk down there, you hear it every night. The police don't bother you.

Zhongping Chen: Did you ever visit Taishan? Have you been to Taishan?

Victor Wong: Taishan? No.

Zhongping Chen: You personally never went...?

Victor Wong: No, I went to China.

Zhongping Chen: Not to Taishan?

Victor Wong: For thirty days, travelling around. But I never went to Baisha.

Zhongping Chen: So just once you went to China? When was that?

Victor Wong: I went to the orient quite a few times but only once throughout Mainland China, that was 1990.

Zhongping Chen: 1990...

Victor Wong: Everything changed now.

Zhongping Chen: Yeah... twenty years earlier.

Victor Wong: It's very modernized now. I never went back. I want to go but so far my wife doesn't... didn't care to, so we didn't go. But I like to go again. See what it's like.

Zhongping Chen: So you're really healthy, you're eighty-five?

Victor Wong: Yes.

Zhongping Chen: Wow. I hope I will be so healthy as you when I'm eighty-five.

Victor Wong: I feel ok you know.

Zhongping Chen: Do you still go to Chinatown very often?

Victor Wong: Mhm. I go down and buy groceries still.

Zhongping Chen: Oh, you still do shopping there?

Victor Wong: Oh yeah, I go down sometimes and buy Chinese stuff.

Zhongping Chen: Really? But you have the Fairway Market nearby...

Victor Wong: I know but I always drop down there once in awhile. Roast pork, to buy some roast pork fresh.

Zhongping Chen: Some time you cannot even get from Fairway Market yeah.

Victor Wong: Like, you know, the bbq duck and Chinese bbq pork.

Zhongping Chen: Yeah, yeah that's true. You still like Chinese bbq pork?

Victor Wong: Oh yeah.

Zhongping Chen: So when he (Chan Sing Kai) left for the United States, where did he go? Which city?

Victor Wong: I think it was down in California somewhere.

Zhongping Chen: Did he leave any descendants, children here? After he left.

Victor Wong: No, I think they're all down in the States.

Zhongping Chen: All went to United States?

Victor Wong: United States. It's not here.

Zhongping Chen: So you know anybody in your grandpa's family...

Victor Wong: Yeah.

Zhongping Chen: Did any of them join Sun Yat-Sen's Nationalist Party?

Victor Wong: Not that I know of.

Zhongping Chen: Not anybody?

Victor Wong: I don't think so. Nobody involved in politics with... none of them.

Zhongping Chen: But like...

Victor Wong: They would recognize them, in those days.

Zhongping Chen: Like Chan's family, Roy Chan's...

Victor Wong: Roy Chan?

Zhongping Chen: His father was Chan Dun, he was actually a leader of the Nationalist Party in Victoria. They actually opened a flying school here.

Victor Wong: I know that public was quite involved with Sun Yat-Sen, the Chinese community was involved with him because I think Sun Yat-Sen came to Victoria to raise funds.

Zhongping Chen: Yeah, that's true.

Victor Wong: And those older groups would know. I think maybe even Jack Lee might know about those things.

Zhongping Chen: Jack Lee...

Victor Wong: He knows something eh? Because he's the older group that was involved in Chinatown quite a bit.

Zhongping Chen: He's actually only five years older than you.

Victor Wong: But he was involved with a lot of the Chinese in that area. Because he had a store in that area and he also was a president of the Chinese...

Zhongping Chen: Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, CCBA.

Victor Wong: But I wasn't involved in those things. I was aloof, in those days, you know. I was just very involved in the veteran stuff, because I know quite a bit about our veteran stuff, that's all. So far as Chinese community stuff, I don't know too much about that. I'm a... in our generation, we weren't involved too much with it.

[All look at a family history book]

Victor Wong: So there's no date here. Maybe I can find out about it from my sisters, they might know. She's older than me and I'm sure she must know more. She knows more about where... my grandpa's brother people lived, from which city and stuff like that. But she's ninety-six now and ...

Zhongping Chen: Oh! ninety-six?

Victor Wong: Yeah, she's ninety-six, my older sister. Just turned 96. Her birthday was just 3 days or 4 days ago.

Zhongping Chen: Oh wow. Your family, all of them, have long life.

Victor Wong: Because we have longevity in my grandma...

Zhongping Chen: Tradition.

Victor Wong: She lived to be about 100.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really?

Victor Wong: Yeah, my grandma.

Zhongping Chen: So that is his wife?

Victor Wong: Yeah, his wife.

Zhongping Chen: How old did he live?

Victor Wong: He died when he was about 84... He died on October 3, 1948.

Zhongping Chen: So apart from church, was he involved in community organization? Like CCBA or something?

Victor Wong: I'm not too sure what he was involved with. But he was the main minister of Chinatown. He was quite well known. I don't know what he was involved with but all I know was that he was a minister of the Chinese church.

Zhongping Chen: Apart from that, what kind of activities do they have? Like as minister.

Victor Wong: Well I guess he's involved with all the church stuff. Anything to do with church for sure and other churches he probably was involved with a lot of other ministers and discuss things maybe. He was probably a consultant for Chinese community affairs, I'm pretty sure he would be involved. They would rely on the minister... do official functions and stuff like that. You know how they... the minister were called upon to do things. And I would imagine he would be doing all that kind of functions. He would be a leader of Chinatown, I'm sure. You know, they would look up to him and check with things. I'm pretty sure of that. You would go and need their... require their help. I think a lot of them would require their help. But as far as being in politics, I don't know much that he was involved with. But I do know he would be very much so involved with the Chinese community. Because I was just a young man, I wouldn't know too much about those things. You know. When I was boy, he was in Nanaimo preaching.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really? He was in... also in Nanaimo?

Victor Wong: I remember ... we go visit him. I was only six years old. In Nanaimo, he had a church, running a church. And there was a population of about 10,000 or more in Nanaimo. They had a big Chinatown which burned down in 1960's. It all burned... it looked like a cowboy town in those days. All made of wood, the houses all wooden made. And it caught on fire in the 60's. It all burned right down. And there's a church right by the railway, I remember, because my dad would, mom would take me up there to visit him. It would drive all the way up the Malahat, all the way up to Nanaimo or take the train. It used to be a train that goes to Nanaimo from Victoria. I remember going up on the train too. And we would visit him and I was only six years old. I can remember the old Chinatown place, chickens running around and a cobbler next to the church that I used to go, remember seeing him fixing shoes and little chickens running around. And then I can remember the church, the church was separated from his resident and it's in the same yard, and I can remember going into that church and play with my grandpa and grandma. Have some fun there every summer.

Zhongping Chen: But you said he actually was priest here. But he also...

Victor Wong: He was here, but I wasn't born then when he was preaching in Victoria. When he was preaching in Victoria, I wasn't old enough to know. I don't even remember him in Victoria. So he was in Nanaimo that I remember...

Zhongping Chen: Oh, he moved out of Victoria already?

Victor Wong: Right, he moved away from Victoria already.

Zhongping Chen: So what was the relation between the Chinese church and Caucasian church? Was the Chinese church independent from the Caucasian churches?

Victor Wong: Well they... the difference was in language. He was preaching in Chinese.

Zhongping Chen: So the Chinese churches still belong to the whole...

Victor Wong: Yeah to affiliate to the United Church, to the white church. See, in Hong Kong they were... he was affiliated with the white people, you know, to organize church. I guess he was taught in white churches to be a minister. I believe that, and not from the Chinese that taught him. I think it was in a white church in Hong Kong.

[They turn to a book regarding the Chinese Canadian Military Museum]

Victor Wong: There's Harry Fong, Gordon Quan, Victor Eric Wong, that's me and that's four I think I mentioned. That's just the four of us. Gordon Quan, Phillip Young, Victor Wong, Harry Fong.

Zhongping Chen: When was that museum established?

Victor Wong: Twelve years ago.

Zhongping Chen: 2001? 2000? Oh, 1999.

Victor Wong: That's approximately then.

Zhongping Chen: Yeah, it's... the museum is actually quite impressive.

Victor Wong: Yeah, it's about that time.

Zhongping Chen: So how many founding members in total? Like for that one.

Victor Wong: I don't know.

Zhongping Chen: It's actually for whole Canada, I think.

Victor Wong: From Victoria, it's four of us, the founding members. We're lifetime members.



Zhongping Chen: So by the way, you grew up in Victoria. So did you see any... like in your life, did you see any discrimination against Chinese in your life?

Victor Wong: As I mentioned, I don't live in Chinatown and I do not feel that much discrimination because I wasn't segregated when going to school. In the school, I was able to go to Quadra primary school then George Jay School. It's in our district, you know, and then Central junior high, and from junior high I went to high school, and I graduated from high school, then I got into the army by being drafted because they wanted us then. They didn't want us Chinese in the forces before as I mentioned. And I think it's because Japan occupied all of the British Empire in 1942 that they wanted us and we got into the war and we came back and we demanded a franchise. And I mentioned that we were Canadian citizens as soon as we were in the army.

Zhongping Chen: On this list... So did you go to army at the same time or somebody actually went there earlier?

Victor Wong: Let's see now. I think Roy Chan...

Zhongping Chen: He and Douglas Jung went there earlier.

Victor Wong: Bill Lowe was one of them, William Bill Lowe, he was our first president I think, veteran's association, as I mentioned. Well these are the only ones that are living in Victoria.

Zhongping Chen: Yeah, some of them left.

Victor Wong: They left for Vancouver, like Richard Mar, he was in the paratroops. So he was one of the earlier ones too. But he was actually a Victoria boy. So I don't know anymore. Oh yeah, there was Doug, Doug Sam fly in the air force, he was in Canadian Air Force.

Zhongping Chen: When was that? In 1940... still. 1945?

Victor Wong: He was earlier than that. He was in the air force. 1943, maybe.

Zhongping Chen: How could he join the air force?

Victor Wong: They didn't really want to be pilots, but I think in 1943 somehow he got in, he was able to be... He was either a pilot or something in the air force. He was shot down, I remember. He landed in France and the French hid him from the German.

Zhongping Chen: So he was saved by the French people. So then he managed to come back?

Victor Wong: Yeah, he was... and then he was able to escape and came back to England or whatever there was at the end of the war. He was one of the early ones too. So that's why I mentioned there's only a few that got in. Not many in those days when they were in. They were allowed a few.

Zhongping Chen: You mentioned like your group, as military groups. Do they... did they belong to Canadian army or British army at that time?

Victor Wong: We actually were in Canadian... always in the Canadian army. Never, never discharged from the Canadian army until at the end of the war. But we were loaned to the British.

Zhongping Chen: So the military unit actually was in the British army?

Victor Wong: We were controlled by the British to operate, not under Canadian command. In other words, our group was actually loaned to the British. We were Canadian army but loaned to the British in a sense. No records was kept of us, it was so secret.

Zhongping Chen: Oh really? Canadian army did not keep the record?

Victor Wong: No, they did not keep a record. The British never kept a record of us. We were unknown.

Zhongping Chen: Really?

Victor Wong: Because they didn't want the Japanese to know that we were in the army. We were just parachuted into occupied territory, organizing guerrilla warfare. Japanese were not supposed to know we were in the army. We didn't carry anything as being in the Canadian army of any sort. We don't carry on, you know, the necklace that says private what or whatever. We were just civilians, ordinary civilians of whatever we were there. That's so secret, you know. It's just like the French that was in the army that went to England. They went back to their own country as people living there, organize guerrilla warfare. That's all. That's what it is.