

# Immigration Stories: 1947–1960

## Fred Mah

Fred Mah's grandfather came to Canada in 1878. His family was very poor, so he left China to earn money. He helped build the Canadian Pacific Railway. He also worked in logging camps on Vancouver Island. Because of the Head Tax, he couldn't afford to bring his whole family to Canada. But in 1911, Fred's grandfather paid the Head Tax for Fred's father to come to Canada.

In 1926, Fred's father went back to China and got married. Fred's older brother was born in 1931 and Fred was born, in China, in 1935. Because of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923, Fred, his mother, and his brother had to remain in China.

Although life was very hard in China during World War II, Fred and his mother could not move to Canada until after the Chinese Exclusion Act was reversed, in 1947. Fred's brother was sixteen years old in 1947. Under the Canadian immigration law, he was not a child and was considered too old to join his family. Fred's brother lived his whole life in China away from his family.

Fred had never seen his father until the day he and his mother arrived in Canada in 1949. He was fourteen years old. When Fred walked the streets of Vancouver's Chinatown, he was shocked. All he saw were men. There were no women!

Fred attended the University of BC and earned a degree in Chemistry. He worked in a pulp mill and then for the Ministry of the Environment.

In the early 1960s, Fred was very active in the Chinese community. He organized English classes for Chinese garment workers in Vancouver. He also planned activities for young people living in Chinatown and tutored high school students in math and science.

## Gim Wong

Gim Wong came to Canada in 1951 from the Guangdong Province of China. The new Communist government in China took away people's land and government officials bullied people. Some people were even tortured. Gim's father lived in Canada and his mother had died. There was no other family member in the village to look after him. Gim's father thought it would be safer for Gim to be in Canada too.

Gim Wong attended high school in Prince George. After he graduated in 1957, he operated the Sunrise Café in Hazelton, BC. He married Lena Chow, from Hong Kong, in 1958.

In 1963, Gim and his wife left Hazelton and opened Gim's Restaurant in Terrace. Gim took much interest in his family and attended school events and sports tournaments with his children. He also became a volunteer in the community and sponsored hockey and soccer teams in Terrace.

In 1985, Gim Wong was given an award for his service to the community. During the award ceremony, he was described as a dependable and reliable man.

## May

May was born in the Hoiping district of China in 1929 and attended a school in her village. Her family farmed, so there was always plenty of food to eat growing up.

May's husband was born in Canada. He came back to China in 1947 to marry May. She was eighteen-years-old. May's husband left her in China and went back to Canada.

In 1954, with the Communist government in power in China, May's husband wanted her to leave the country. She lived in Hong Kong for three years before immigrating to Canada in 1958 at the age of twenty nine. She didn't mind living in Hong Kong because she knew she would soon be with her husband in Canada.

When she first arrived in Victoria, May knew very little English. She got a job as a dishwasher at Oak Bay Marina for \$1 an hour. She soon learned to make salads for \$1.25 per hour. Her husband worked at a sawmill.

May quit working when her two children were small. But when the youngest was six-years old, May went back to work and became a salad maker for the Empress Hotel working from 6:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. For years May was the only Chinese person and the only woman working in the hotel kitchen. May worked at the Empress Hotel for twenty-eight years.