

Ethnic Group: Chinese
Interview number: 1
Date: July 17, 1991
Place: Toronto
Language of Interview: English

Demographic Information

Gender: female
Age: 39
Place of Birth: India
Religion: Buddhist
Marital Status: married (second marriage)
Education: grade 3
Occupation: glass washer in hospital
Children: son, age 18; step-daughter, age 21
Year of Migration to Canada: 1977

Interviewer's Notes:

I first met Mrs. Vchen in the downtown Chinatown a month ago. She, together with her husband, said hello to my companion, who is doing research in a hospital. Mrs. Vchen works as a full-time glass cleaner in the same hospital. Through my friend, I made an appointment with her a week in advance. I was asked to interview her in English at her workplace as she was working. I was led to Mrs. Vchen by the friend of mine. My friend then left. Mrs. Vchen was working. She answered my questions while working.

INTERVIEW

Interviewer (I): What languages do you speak?

Respondent (R): Chinese and English.

I: Cantonese or Mandarin?

R: Hakka [A dialect in southern China]. I know neither Cantonese nor Mandarin.

I: I don't understand Hakka either. So we have to talk in English. How many people are there in your family?

R: Three. My husband, my daughter and I.

I: Is your husband a Chinese?

R: Yes, he is. He is a welder in a factory.

I: May I know when you came to Canada?

R: I came to Canada as a tourist from Calcutta, India on April 17, 1977.

I: Was there any of your relatives or friends in Canada by that time?

R: Yes. My old sister and brother had moved to Canada. So I lived at my sister's home.

I: Why did you visit Canada? Just because you thought of your sister?

R: I divorced in India in 1976. I wanted to forget everything in the past. I had a terrible experience there. I had a son with my first husband. But I have not seen him since I came to Canada. I myself forced me to come here. But it is not me who wants to come to Canada.

I: When and where did you marry your first husband?

R: In India in 1971. It is an arranged marriage.

I: Is he a Chinese or an Indian?

R: A Chinese, like me. We lived in a Chinese neighbourhood.

I: Do you have any contact with your son?

R: No. I cannot. My first husband told him that I had died.

I: Why?

R: He did not want divorce. According to the local law, children belong to father after divorce. It is a terrible law. In Canada, children should live with mother, you know.

I: Oh? Who first asked for divorce?

R: Me. Because I lived a miserable life.

I: May I know the reason?

R: My husband often beat me.

I: Why? He beat you because he was drunk?

R: No. He likes to beat me. About 70% of husbands in India beat their wife. I had to listen to him. But I am a very independent person. I have strong personality. I owned a hair-dressing salon and a restaurant. I was the boss. I also knit. I enjoy hard-working. I spoke English well before I came to Canada. I often helped others as an interpreter. I like to help others, like I am helping you now. But my first husband did not like it. He wanted me to stay at home. I could not. He then beat me. I don't want to recall that experience.

I: Why did you work so hard?

R: I like to work. Now I am doing two full-time jobs at both this hospital and a university. I also have a part-time work in another hospital on weekend. I come from a very poor family, especially after my father died. My parents have 7 daughters and 2 sons. I am the youngest daughter. I had to drop school when I was in Grade 3. My family could not afford my study. But I like studying. I learn a lot by myself. I started to work when I was very young.

I: How many generations of your family are there in India?

R: Three.

I: How old is your child?

R: My son is 18 years old. He is in grade 11. My daughter is 21 and is studying nursing in a college in Toronto.

I: Oh? Your daughter is elder than your son you have with your first husband, isn't she?

R: Yes. She is my step-daughter. But I treat her as my own daughter. We have a very good relationship.

I: Does she know you are her step-mother?

R: Yes, she does.

I: So you don't have any child with your second husband, do you?

R: No. I don't want any more.

I: Why?

R: I cannot forget the lesson. I don't want to repeat it, although my husband and I have very good relationship.

I: Because of the lesson of your first marriage?

R: Yes.

I: Does he want another child with you?

R: Yes, he does. He likes kids. Maybe I am not going to divorce once more. But I am scared. I was hurt a lot. He understands me. He knows my idea. He never pressures me into doing this or doing that.

I: May I know when and where you was born?

R: I was born in India in 1952.

I: What about your current husband?

R: He was born in India in 1936 and came to Canada in 1937.

I: Oh, your husband is much older than you, isn't he?

R: Yes. He is 22 years older than I. My first husband is 16 years older than I.

I: You don't care about the difference of age, do you?

R: No, I don't care about that. I like to live with an elder man.

I: When did you marry your second husband?

R: In August of 1977, four months after I arrived at Toronto.

I: How did you know him?

R: A friend of my sister introduced him to me.

I: Why did you marry again so soon after you arrived at Toronto?

R: It's not me who wants to marry. Because I had to stay here. I had no job and no money. I got to survive.

I: How do you think about the second marriage?

R: I think I did a very good choice.

I: Are you Canadian citizen?

R: Yes. I became Canadian citizen in 1980.

I: Do you live in a Chinese neighbourhood or a mixed one?

R: I live in a pure Chinese neighbourhood.

I: Do you often contact your neighbours?

R: No. Canadian's way of life is to keep privacy. Everybody has their own life. Nobody knows nobody. We don't see each other much.

I: Are you living in your own house?

R: Yes. We spent \$85,000 to buy a 2-storey house in 1981 and we returned all the debt the next year.

I: Do you like your life in Canada?

R: Yes. I am lucky to move to Canada. Everybody is equal. I've got job and everything. I am really lucky.

I: Does your husband have any relatives in Canada?

R: Yes, his mother and his sister.

I: Do you often contact them?

R: Yes. I get along with them well. His mother lived with us for five years. Then they moved to their own house.

I: Who mainly takes care of housework in your family?

R: I do. I do cooking, cleaning, laundry, and shopping. My husband vacuums house and keeps the lawn clean. My daughter does dusting.

I: Do you have any religion?

R: Yes. I am a Buddhist.

I: Do you go in for any Buddhist activity?

R: I go to temple twice a month. I donate \$10-20 each time.

I: Do you keep a figure of Buddha at home and worship everyday?

R: No. I have no time to do that. But I love to do that.

I: Do you want to go back to India someday?

R: Yes, I will go back to look for my son, if I am rich.

I: Are you accustomed to Canadian life?

R: Yes. When I was in India, I lived with many foreign people. I have been used to get along with foreign people and familiar with foreign cultures.

I: Do you have any friend here?

R: A lot of friends.

I: How many close friends?

R: Six or seven.

I: Who are they? I mean how you knew them?

R: Most are my roommates in school. Some are Canadian workmates.

I: Do you often contact them?

R: Yes.

I: How?

R: We have dinner together. We play cards on holidays. We talk about all how the life is.

I: Who do you first talk to if you have something to need to discuss with others?

R: Mostly to my husband. Sometimes to my friends.

I: Do you and your friends help each other?

R: Not very often. Sometimes I am asked to help cooking in a party hosted by a friend of mine. We also help moving. Nothing else.

I: Do you speak Hakka at home or speak English?

R: Hakka.

I: Why? Your English is very fluent and you have immigrated to Canada for many years.

R: Well, I always feel myself a Chinese because my culture is Chinese culture. I have to be a Chinese and I am proud of being a Chinese.

I: Do you still keep in touch with your relatives in India?

R: Yes. I write to my mother once a month.

I: In Chinese or in English?

R: In English. They can find some people to translate the letter. I cannot write Chinese. I also mail presents on Christmas and in the Chinese new year.

I: Do you celebrate the Chinese new year here?

R: Certainly. I make all kinds of Chinese foods in the new year.

I: What kind of food do you prefer?

R: I like Chinese food and Indian food.

I: Does your daughter speak Chinese, too?

R: No. She is not very good in speaking but she can understand. We try to speak Chinese to her because we like her to know more languages.

I: But she will spend all her life in Canada and English is much more useful than Chinese.

R: It's not that. You are Chinese. You speak Chinese. Otherwise, you will forget your mother tongue.

I: As a step-mother, do you make any decision for you daughter or just let it be?

R: I take care of a lot of her things. She follows me mostly, eighty percent. We try to explain Chinese custom to her, say, showing respects to parents.

I: How does she call you? Call you by name, like other local kids?

R: She call us dad and mummy. We teach her how to do. We don't like Canadian's way, calling parents by name. We don't like her to become a Canadian. Looking at our face, people never forget you are Chinese. As she grows up, she has accepted more Chinese customs.

I: Maybe your daughter will get into trouble if you insist that she must act in a Chinese way in school.

R: I don't think so. She would like to be like that.

I: Will you accept it if you daughter marry a non-Chinese?

R: I want, or I wish her to marry a Chinese. If she loves a Canadian, that's all right for her to marry him because it's her life to go. But so far she is okay. She's a very good kid. She just concentrates on her study. I keep trying to tell her not to make boy friend until she finishes school.

I: Who is the major decision-maker in your family?

R: I am. I govern my family finance. I take care of banking, tax reporting, writing letters, and so on.

I: What about your husband's educational level?

R: Like me, grade 3.

I: Maybe his English is not as good as you, so...

R: No. He is lazy. He just takes care of his car to keep it in good condition. He likes car very much.

I: So you are the actual head of your family, aren't you?

R: Before we got married, I had told him that I would master the right of decision-making. I've told you my personality is strong.

I: Did he agree?

R: At the beginning, he did not agree. As time flying, many facts have proved I'm right. He changes his attitude. So does my daughter. She is independent, too. As she grows up, she gradually recognizes I am right. I advise her to choose nursing. She can't go to medical school because of her poor mark. She now likes nursing very much.

I: What's your daughter's hobby?

R: She loves movies, shopping.

I: Do you give your daughter some pocket money?

R: No. She works as a cashier in a Kentucky Fried Chicken store on Saturday for her pocket money. But we pay her housing, clothing, tuition, everything.

I: Do you think you will depend on her when you become aged?

R: I can't depend on her because the way of life in this society. That's why I am working so hard.

I: Is your banking account a joint one or a separate one from your husband?

R: A joint account. Everything is joint.

I: All right. Finally, could you please tell me which category your family income of last year belongs to, if I rank income into category by every \$10,000?

R: \$70,000-\$80,000.

I: Thank you so very much.