Victor Eric Wong

After an amazing 99 years of life, Victor Eric Wong passed peacefully at home on May 31, 2025. Victor joins his beloved wife Dorothy (nee Chu/York) who predeceased him by ten years. They were married for 61 years, until her passing in 2015. He leaves behind 5 children, 13 grandchildren and 19 great grandchildren (1 deceased) and a sister, Roberta (Lum). Victor's other siblings predeceased him, Josie (Chin), Dennis Wong, Rosabelle (Yuen) and baby Martha.

Victor, a third generation Chinese Canadian, was born on January 16, 1926 at Royal Jubilee Hospital. His paternal grandfather Wong Dick Jong immigrated from China at age 16. Victor's paternal grandmother, Ruth Wong (nee Chan) was one of the first Chinese Canadians born in Quesnel Forks (Caribou) in 1876. She gave birth to Joseph Wong, Victor's father in Victoria.

Victor's maternal grandfather Reverend Chan Yu Tan came from China in 1896 to minister to the Christian Chinese communities in Victoria, Nanaimo and Vancouver. Reverend Chan, with his brother Chan Sing Kai, were two of the first Christian Chinese ministers working in Canada. They had both been raised and educated in China as Christians by their father, himself a converted Christian missionary working in China with the British Wesleyan church. Rev. Chan's daughter Rose, Victor's mother, was born in China but followed her father to Canada in 1899, when she immigrated with her mother and siblings.

Victor grew up in Victoria a typical Chinese Canadian kid. Although he was born in the years after the 1923 Exclusion Act, (an act which essentially blocked all further immigration from China), Victor recalls a happy childhood. He was sent to "Chinese" school in Chinatown to learn Cantonese so that he could be bilingual, since his first language was English. His father Joseph Wong spoke English fluently, working as an

unofficial interpreter-translator for the Chinese Community for 40 years.

Shortly after graduating from Victoria High School, Victor and his cousin Leonard Lee, received letters asking them to enlist in 1944. Both young men, age 18, voluntarily joined the war effort. What Victor did not know is that he and his cousin and 148 other Chinese Canadian men were assigned to a British Special Operations Executive branch unit known as Force 136.

After basic training at Camp Shilo, Manitoba, Victor was sent covertly (by way of England) to Poona, India for final training. The training in India was for guerilla warfare and included silent killing; radio communication; and demolition or explosives training. His assignment (given various codenames like Operation Oblivion) was to parachute into the jungles of Burma (then under Japanese control) without an army uniform or any other military ID. These specially trained men were sent in small units of 8-10, each carried a gold coin and two cyanide pills. Their classified secret mission was to recruit and incite the locals to sabotage and disrupt enemy supply lines, damage railroads and to blow up bridges (like in the movie “Bridge on the River Kwai.”) His cousin, Leonard Lee was sent to another training location in India, as keeping them together would pose a risk under those conditions.

These 150 young men, who were asked to embark on a dangerous mission in enemy held territory, were not considered Canadian citizens at the time. No Canadian of Chinese ancestry had the right to vote. Nor could they hold professional positions in law or medicine or other similar positions of authority. There were also restricted or “red line” areas where Chinese Canadians were not permitted to purchase property, which is why so many families remained clustered in and around Chinatown. Many of these covenants remain in place on municipal records, but are luckily no longer enforced.

Despite these laws and prohibitions, Victor and his cousin

agreed to join Force 136 because they believed Chinese Canadians could lobby for the franchise after the war ended.

A few days before his scheduled parachute jump, Victor's mission was cancelled as the first atomic bomb was dropped. VJ day came shortly after.

Upon his return to Canada, Victor was one of a group of Chinese Canadian veterans who went to Ottawa to petition for the right to vote for all Canadians. Victor is featured in a Historica Canada video called "Double Victory" because he repeatedly stated, we won two wars, one against the enemy and one here in Canada since we fought to receive full rights of citizenship.

Victor, as a returning war veteran was given the right to vote in 1946. In 1947, Canada finally extended the franchise to other Chinese Canadians.

Victor spent the rest of his life speaking and educating others in the Chinese community, so that these rights would not be taken for granted. At the same Chinese school he attended as a youth growing up, around each Remembrance Day, he would tell the students, we won on both fronts, here and abroad. Because the mission was still classified, the men had to wait 25 years before speaking about their experiences. His own family was unaware that Victor was in a commando unit until the 1970's. Even Victor's military discharge papers list him only as a "gunner" receiving the Canadian Volunteer Service Medal. Although he deservedly was awarded the Burma Star (1939-1945) and India Service Medal, these later two medals were never listed on his record.

Victor was also the President of the Chinese Veteran Association (Victoria chapter) for decades. He marched in every parade on November 11th, and lay the wreath at the Cenotaph on behalf of the Chinese Canadian Benovolent Association for at least 25 years. He was a proud Canadian and

was grateful to be acknowledged as a citizen in 1946.

After returning from the war, Victor was sent by the army to plant trees in Nanaimo until his discharge in May 1946. While attending the wedding of a mutual friend in Nanaimo, he met future wife Dorothy again. The pair met years earlier at a skating party, but both had been teenagers and too young to date. Later, after leaving the army, Victor moved to Prince Albert to live and work with his older brother Dennis at Dennis' restaurant Wing's Café. During his 3 years in Saskatchewan, Victor and Dorothy corresponded and maintained a long-distance courtship until their engagement. They married April 15, 1954 at Metropolitan First United Church in Victoria. They settled in Victoria after a brief stay in Nanaimo.

Victor's close relationship with Dennis (his elder by 9 years) was partly responsible for his career as a realtor. While interviewing for the job with Byron Price, a real estate developer, Price discovered Victor was Dennis' brother and said "You're hired!" It turned out that Dennis had been a good school chum to Mr. Price. Victor's relationship with him lasted for the rest of their lives, as Victor worked his whole real estate career with Byron Price and Associates. Even after retirement, they continued to meet for lunch together at Moxies every Saturday, until Mr. Price passed away.

Alongside Dorothy, Victor's main focus in life was their family. Dorothy's motto "Family always comes first" matched Victor's "I am the richest man in the world" because of my family. Victor and Dorothy lived life to the fullest, with a joie de vivre and deep faith in each other and their shared values. Victor was kind, charming, funny, sociable and a bit feisty, but always interested and engaged in the world. He loved the Montreal Canadians, NY Yankees, fishing, chess, travel, art, cooking and DANCING. Victor and Dorothy shared their love with extended family and friends, enjoying frequent trips, reunions, picnics and any gathering with food, which

included Sunday dinners with the immediate family every week, for more than 45 years.

Victor and Dorothy taught us the value of family and the meaning of love throughout their lives and left us with their legacy, how to live a good life. We are grateful to have had him for so long (almost made it to 100 dad!) and our hearts are full now that he has joined the love of his life, Dorothy, in heaven.

The family would like to extend special thanks to Dr. David Woodley and Dr. Catherine Jenkins for their care of Victor. Thank you to the team at Backfit who with Dr. Jeff Bartlett kept dad going. Another special thank you to his friends and "second" family at Veterans Health Centre with a special note of gratitude to Derek and Selena for their kind care. Thank you to Joan Henderson, Community Island Health team lead and to Occupational Therapist Sylvia Adams for all their guidance and help. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to Veterans Health Centre (or Veterans Memorial Lodge at Broadmead) or the Chinese Canadian Military Museum in Vancouver (located at Chinese Cultural Centre).

And a grateful thank you to Cindy Harnett for a wonderful tribute in the Times Colonist.

From The Family:

Children and their spouses – Karen Louie; Greg Wong (Becky); Kim Eison (Rick); Regan Wong (Debbie) and Tracy Wong (Brendan Rush)

Grandchildren and spouses and great grandchildren by family

Karens's: Allyson Ell (Adam) – Caleb, Liam and Zoey; Melissa Young (Sean) – Victoria and Holly; Amanda Thompson (Brett) – Brayden, Ethan and Sam; Ryan Louie (Aisling) – Niamh and Aoife; Megan Munro (Jordan) – Joey and Avery

Greg’s: Dr. Alix Wong (Luke); Dr. Rachel Wong (Luke)

Kim’s: Michael Eison; Chris Eison (Denise) – Lukas and Kaelyn (passed); Kimberly De Voss (Shane) – Kobe and Mila; Kati Eison (Joey Nemeth) – Arianna and Siena

Regan’s: Emma Wong (Pat Gardner) – Harvey and Reggie; Gregory Wong (Cam)

Notes: Victor was featured in the CBC programme “Generations” in 2007 alongside nephew Todd Wong, as one of the descendants of Reverend Chan Yu Tan – 7 generations of Canadians directed by Halva Kuchmij – Cousin Leonard Lee is also a descendant of the Chan family.

A celebration of Victor Wong’s life will be held in the Sequoia Centre at McCall Gardens, 4665 Falaise Drive, Victoria, BC on Saturday, July 26, 2025 at 2:00pm.



Condolences may be offered to the family below.

McCall Gardens

www.mccallgardens.com

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