



Helen Yeung's story of

Anna



My mother was born in 1934, in Nanjing, China. Her father was a secretary in the National Air Force. When she was three years old, the Sino-Japanese War started, and my mother and her family moved to the western part of China in the Szechuan province. Later three sisters and two brothers were born. My grandma had to work very hard. She was very diligent and talented. The whole family drank homemade soybean drink and home-prepared dishes. All six children wore warm clothes, hats, scarves and gloves that were hand-knit by my grandma.

When the Communists took over China, the family moved to Taiwan, where my mother finished high school and university. She was good at all types of sports — softball (catcher position), volleyball, basketball (even though she was the shortest in her family) and competitive swimming. At Taiwan Normal University she trained as a teacher. She left Taiwan in 1958 to teach Chinese and Math in modern Hong Kong. My father also studied at Taiwan University and then went to work in Hong Kong as a social worker. They met through their University alumni association and in 1965 got married.

I was just three months old and my sister only sixteen months old when my parents immigrated to Vancouver in 1967. The Cultural Revolution was happening around them, but they had decided earlier that they wanted to move. My father's brother had moved to Vancouver years earlier, and my parents decided there was greater freedom and better opportunities for the future in Canada than in Hong Kong. We lived with my uncle and his family for a few months, as my parents tried unsuccessfully to find jobs in their professions.

I grew up in North Vancouver, at my parents' "mom-and-pop" grocery store, Lynnmour Grocery, on lower Mountain Highway, not far from the Second Narrows Bridge (now known as Iron Workers Memorial Bridge). My parents first rented and then bought the old grocery store with living quarters attached, so they could earn a living while raising their two girls in the same building. I lived there from age one until I was ten years old. At that time my parents re-built the store, and we lived in a new building with the store on the main floor and living quarters upstairs. My mother learned all about permits, civil politics and zoning while overseeing the new building construction. My parents owned their grocery store for 24 years.

They worked hard, long hours (twelve hours every day or more than 80 hours per week), with hardly any holidays. Just the two of them worked there together, and they didn't hire anyone (unless you count me and my sister!) My parents made lots of friends, gained experience, and learned a great deal about small business and Canadian culture through their customers and neighbours. My friends thought it was cool that my parents owned a store where my sister and I could eat candy and treats every day! Actually, we didn't feel like eating it much when the food was around us all the time. In addition, my parents cooked tastier and healthier foods than what a convenience store sold. The exceptions were the fruits, vegetables, breads, cereals, and milk products sold in the store, which were available to us all the time!

When we were growing up, we helped out in the family business. My parents taught us about purchasing, selling, customer service ("the customer is always right"), stock rotation ("first in, first out"), and I learned about "Canadian food", which I thought was Froot Loops, canned pasta-ghetti, and KD mac and cheese! These food products were new to our family, as my mother would usually cook fresh food from scratch. I think that my experience growing up in the grocery store helped me later to decide to be a dietitian.

After they sold the store in 1991, my mother started teaching Mandarin and Cantonese to adults, teens, and children (reading, writing and speaking Chinese). Because my mother enjoyed teaching, students could easily learn from her. She joined the Chinese Language Association of B.C. and enjoyed working on a committee that helped establish a Chinese as a second language option in high schools in Vancouver.

This was a significant step for public schools in B.C., and one my mother was very proud to help make happen.

My mother enjoys swimming, travelling, reading, writing and hiking with friends. She was a member of the Vancouver Chinese Choir for over twenty years, performing regularly and often at the North Shore Folkfest. Stella Jo Dean asked my mother to volunteer for the North Shore Folkfest Society, and in 2010-2011 my mother became President, overseeing the planning of the 37th and 38th annual Folkfest performances in North Vancouver. She's active in fundraising and in getting more young people involved. Her continued commitment to her high school and university alumni reunion committees has prompted her to learn all about email and the Internet to stay in touch. She is also involved in her church (Catholic Women's League) and volunteers visiting seniors in care homes. Her other volunteer work includes a ladies' Orchid Club on the North Shore and helping the Canadian Diabetes Association. My mother and father both have diabetes now, and my mother is motivated to learn how to manage her diabetes and help others learn too.

My mother tries her best to serve her community for these reasons:

- 1) Working with young people makes her feel young in spirit and optimistic.
- 2) She feels happier.
- 3) Keeping busier leads to a healthier life.
- 4) She wants to give back to a community where she has lived for 44 years.

She hopes that other immigrants will contribute selflessly to make their communities better by thinking of the greater good.

She has traveled with my father or alumni groups to Europe, South America, as well as trips through Canada and the States. At 78, she enjoys visiting her three grandchildren, sometimes as babysitter, sometimes for fun. We have family dinners regularly to catch up on what is happening in our lives. She still makes extra food for me to take home. With two daughters of my own, I can appreciate the challenges and joys that my mother endured with me and my sister!