

Ken Yip (video interview)

Q-When were you in Paldi?

(00:07:00) I was born in 1942 and left there in 1964 and moved to Victoria. (Lived in Paldi from 1942-1964.) I waws there for my whole childhood days right up to when I finished school and then a couple years.

Q-What do you remember ?

(00:40:00) It was very primitive, by todays standards, we never had running water, we used an outhouse, we had to go out and cut our own firewood. We didn't have any excesses, my Mother used to make some of our clothing out of old Rice sacks and uh no such thing as a barber. We had funny looking haircuts and people used to say that you know, used a rice bowl for a pattern. (1:32) but uh (1:39) and my father was very antisocial so we never really mingled with other people neither. (2:03) We never had any kind of social life, my Dad never drove even, of course we couldn't afford a vehicle anyways uh yeah, so there's a lot of things we didn't do. He was really (2:21) uh tough you know especially by todays standards. On the weekends we'd uh get up early in the morning..... (2:25) So whats your question. (2:58) Well most of it centered around home, we didn't socialize with the rest of the community because you know there was that language problem. My parents didn't speak English (3:17) and you know the rest of the community there was only one other Chinese family like by the time I was ready to go to school there was you know a lot of people had already left the camp to go to other places....so there was very few (3:38) kids up in the area where I grew up. There were more kids up in the other side at the other end of the camp uh although we were closer to the school, but we didn't mingle much for the first few years (3:58) Went to school and went straight home, we had lots of chores to do. Uh we had to pack wood, you know pack water. We had to weed the garden (4:14) I guess things kids these days don't even know about. (4:20) Oh really poor, like we had a little Pre-war shack I'd say it was probably less than 800 square fee and there was 5 kids in that place. The woodstove we had to boil our water on the woodstove, cook on it, you know like I said before we only had an outhouse.... (4:57) and the well was about an equivalent say 3 blocks from the house and we had to pack you know it with the old woodenpole with a bucket on each end. Barely tall enough you know, the bucket one or the other would be dragging on the ground and spilling, start all over again uh (5:27) uh course there was no insulation, in fact the house we lived in never had a coat of paint on the outside uhh and when I got to be about 7 or 8 years old uhh, my father threw up a lean to on the side of the house and that's where I slept. (5:53) You know there'd be mornings I'd wake up and there'd be frost on the blankets. It was that cold. No wonder I never wanted to get out of bed (6:10) He worked in the mill but you know he was like he was like the average guy, he refused to speak English (6:19) He wouldn't let us speak English. I never spoke English till I started school and he didn't even want that (6:26) He was really from the old country. It wasn't until years later when my younger brothers , that we weren't going to be anything without education. His concept (6:43) we shouldn't learn to speak English. He never adapted to the country I guess, I don't know. (7:00) There was East Indians,

Bad
tape.

Natives, whites, Japanese and a few Chinese. (7:20) There was a lot of single Chinese men here without their families. Of course they couldn't bring their families here because of the Head Tax. Which you know basically curbed any immigration at all from the Orient. (8:09) Well we didn't have a car and the only way we could get into town was to take the bus. (8:44) That's how we got our groceries too. Saturday morning was a ritual, we'd get that bus going to Duncan, pick up groceries and come home on the 1:00 o'clock. That went on for years until I was old enough to drive. By the time I was 17 we had a family vehicle and so it was a little easier then. (9:10) I did the driving cuz I was the oldest. (9:20) There was other, because my parents couldn't speak English, when I was 7 or 8 years old I was doing a lot of the uh I was going into town myself to get groceries. (9:40) One of the things I could get away with, I'd go to the liquor store and pick up the bottle for my Dad. I'd give them the money, they'd give me the bottle and I'd put it in the shopping bag and go and that went on until I became a teenager, then they wouldn't allow it anymore. (10:24) We got our meat from an English butcher shop. Got our pork from a Chinese butcher and groceries from a Chinese store. For fresh fruits and vegetables there used to be a Chinese man who delivered our groceries. (11:09) Used to get our rice in 100 pound sacks, he'd get it from Victoria and deliver it.

Prejudism.

(12:00) Not a whole lot until I got older and then it was significant at times. (12:12) In Paldi we used to call each other all kinds of names, but it was in jest. I couldn't repeat those now without getting thrown in jail.

Housing

(12:33) Pre-war houses, just ship lap, we had a little bit of electricity later on. Extension cords running out from the mill. Electricity was shut off at 11:00. Ten or eleven o'clock and it came back on at six in the morning. (13:10) Gave us a little bit. (13:26) We used Kerosene lamps and a woodstove in the kitchen. Everyone had those 45 gallon drums in the living room. There were lots of chimney fires. We were forever putting out chimney fires. (13:48) As time went on some people graduated to sawdust, the odd person graduated to oil for heat not cooking. (14:09) When I left there in 64 Mom and Dad were still burning wood, until they move to Victoria, then they got into some real modern stuff, like an oil furnace and an electric stove. (14:34)

The Mayos

The only family that had any real money was the Mayo family. Course they owned the whole thing and they treated everyone well as kids. Mr. and Mrs. Mayo treated us really well, they had a little wading pool that we used. They would give us lots of food and fruit, you know it was a real treat. (15:11) and I remember when they got the first TV set. All the kids in the camp used to go down there and watch TC, you know they were really good that way. (15:34)

What kids did for fun

We used to make up teams and play ball, touch football. I remember when we got strap on roller skates, other than that it was typical hide and seek, or we'd hike down to Cowichan River for a swim. (16:24) You just had to make do.

The school

From Grade 1-4 went to Paldi school and then in Grade 5 they bussed up to Lake Cowichan. Once we got into High School we got into baseball and basketball. We never had a proper field in Paldi. (17:18) They were really into volleyball so we played a lot of volleyball.

Beheading of 300 chickens

(17:25) I remember for one of the ceremonies I beheaded 300 chickens with an axe.
(17:53) I remember one time in preparation for one of these temple celebrations they needed 300 chickens. One of the guys started this but is started flopping around. I did the rest 299, chopped the heads off. (laughs) That was quite an experience. (18:37) Don't think you could get away with that now.

Used to watch movies for entertainment

(18:48) Fellow by the name of Leo Bernard. He used to show movies in the old school house. Think it was Wednesday nights for....I think we paid two bits to go. First movie of significance I remember was the story of Crazy Legs Hearst. Levi Hearst, football player. (19:28) In the old, original school house they'd show movies Wednesday night. No seats or anything, just wooden benches. You'd sit on wooden benches. I remember seeing a movie about a foot ball player named Leroy, Crazy Legs Hearst. Running with legs flaring. We saw lots of good movies there. You saw 20 minutes of news before the movie. It might be old news or new news but id didn't matter. We got a radio, I don't remember when. (20:55) I remember listening to Superman. Magic Island and the Lone Ranger. (21:16) For me 49-55. After that (21:33) maybe it was 48 and then after that TV started coming in.....

What do you remember about the Japanese internment

(21:54) The Japanese as I recall it, they only came back, they only showed up around 1955 when they first showed up for me. They were interned when I was little. There was about 6 or 7 families that came back. (22:58) When they were interned I would have been only 3 or 4 years old, so I have no recollection at all. (23:18) I was born in Duncan in 1942. A lot of things had like there were no Japanese around when I went to school. The mill burnt down in 47 or 48. (23:44) I can remember the fire being really close to the house, but that's it. So the mill had just quit working when I started in school. Even the train they were logging with wasn't they'd already starting deactivating it.

(24:32) The only thing that was left as I remember, there was still two bunkhouses full of Chinese workers. There was 2 cookhouses and course I was one of a half dozen kids at one time, and it didn't take long to realize that if I went down there and behaved I'd get lots of tips, because they didn't have their own families around. Nice kid comes around and says hello, it was worth it.

Sikh temple

(25:43) Theres that language barrier right. They just went and did their thing, everybody minded their own business. You know it was on the other end of the camp from where we lived in those days.

Restrictiveness of father

Mom and Dad said you don't venture outside of the yard a lot. (26:06) It wasn't until I got to Grade 3 that I got out and did a little venturing on my own .

School again

(26:24) When I was going to school at that time at Paldi, the school house had 4 grades in it, from Grades 1-4 and we only had 4 rows. There couldn't have been any more than 35 kids in the school at that time.

Family homes

As far as family homes..... (27:01) there was maybe 2 dozen cuz a lot of people at that time, cuz the mill had burned down, had moved to Lake Cowichan or Duncan. Like even for my Dad to go to work, he'd catch the crummy and come home on it.

His father

(27:48) The old man used to get together with another old fellow once in a while for dinner and the two of them woould get pretty oiled up and talk a lot about the old country. Theres a lot of folklore in Chinese history, but that's all Adult talk you know.

When they were drinking and talking everybody else just stood back.

(28:28) In retrospect I feel sorry for mom, life for her was very simple. She was. My father was demanding and simplistic and she just did what she was told. She never was allowed to think for herself, not ever, she was a mother to his children.

(29:10) No there wasn't in fact at that time a lot of people had left Paldi. There was maybe a dozen families left you know. There was nothing there. I mean you either went to school or you had to leave to find a job. You didn't need to leave to find a job. If you wanted to work in the mill or in the woods you could stay, but if you wanted to work at something else you had to leave and so anyway I picked construction and came to Victoria. I did work in the mill for 3 years before that, up at Nanaimo and yeah that was the year, the year that I leaft they finally got telephones in. (30:17) I'd say all of it was good.

Talking about the Mayo family

Like I said before their house was always open to us. In the summer we used to go to their place and use the wading pool or swimming pool. They'd always give us candies and ice cream, stuff we never ever got at home. Fresh fruit, yeah they treated us really good. The youngest son Mike was the same age as me, so we used to play together quite a bit.

Mr. Mayo

(31:18) He was nice but very imposing. He was a hefty fellow with a moustache. As a kid you can be easily intimidated. (31:33) But yeah he was nice. Mrs. Mayo was especially nice and the rest of the family is good too.

What was your best memory of Paldi?

(32:04) From a family point of view, my best memory, not my favorite, was when the old used to make breakfast and kick us out of bed by 5 oclock. Have breakfast, then he'd send us out with a sack and we'd pick up Cow patties for the garden and we couldn't come home until that sack was full. That was not a lot of fun and very embarrassing.

(32:45) and then uh when that was all done and we got the garden going and every year we had to clear a little bit more land for more garden and collect more cow patties for fertilizer and when that was done we had to cut wood for the winter. (33:04) so yeah we had lots of chores to do, didn't have a lot of time to get a little playing in between here and there. (33:23) And an example of how bad his temper was, when he broke down and bought me a 2 wheeler it only lasted an hour, cuz I was riding it in front of the house and it was raining and it was also lunchtime and he said come in for you lunch and I kept riding, and the next thing I knew he came out with the axe and that was the end of the bike. (laughing) That's the kind of temper he had, didn't have it very long did I ?

(34:00) I guess in retrospect everything else was pretty average, well I used to go.....

(34:25) As we grew up all the kids were hanging together....

BAD AUDIO

(35:50) In the mid 50's when Crofton became a reality, bunch of kids got jobs. My kid brother that's what put him through University. The mills were going full blast. Most of them all ran 2 shifts, 3 shifts going full steam ahead. You would never know that now, 50 years later. (36:25) There was, you know they still had the old steam trains, they phased them out finally in the 50's, in fact in the late 50's I had a part time job and personally cut up old steam lockies for scrap metal. Which in retrospect I wish I had never done it, someone else would have done it anyways. (37:04) One of the things we did to make

some money, I think it was 57, 58, we picked cones for (BAD AUDIO) the Forestry.

(37:47) One old Japanese fellow, Mr. Cugan, he'd picked 5 or 6 sacks a day and through his hard work he was able to bring his whold family out from Japan, he wife and I think at that time it was 3 kids, from 1 summers' picking.