

MAYOR EDWARD LUM

- June 27, 1977

Served as Councillor for four terms and currently Mayor of Saanich. He was elected in 1973 and is still Mayor as of the above date.

Q. Mr. Lum, could we begin by me asking you when you were born?

A. Yes, I was born on August 16, 1928 in Victoria and I have lived all my life in the Municipality of Saanich. My father had a business in the Gordon Head area. He started in the greenhouse business in 1924 and he was married in 1927 and I was born in 1928 in the area in which I have resided since my birth.

Q. Where did your father come from?

A. My father originally came from Sun Wai Village of Quanton Province. It's a little way from the City of Canton. He came here at an early age of eighteen, because at the time, as you know, most of the people of Quanton Provinces had heard a lot of this new world called Gold Mountain and he was one of these who wanted to come out and see for himself and he arrived in Victoria in 1903.

Q. Was that Gold Mountain a name that was given because of the Gold Rush?

A. Yes, that was the name given to this country because of the Gold Rush days, so Canada at the turn of the century was known as Gold Mountain.

Q. Did he come to look for gold?

A. I think he had that in mind, but he was very disappointed when he arrived, knowing nobody, he was alone. Subsequently, after some looking around, he found himself a job as a houseboy and this was with a Mr. W. Jameson, who was one of the founders of the W.A. Jameson Coffee Company, which was very well known throughout Canada at that time because they supplied coffee and tea to the Canadian Pacific Railway across Canada.

Q. Did he have a trade in China?

A. Not really, my dad was not well educated, but he came, as I say, when he was eighteen, he was from a farming family; farming I would say was one of his main lines. I can remember my dad telling us that he used to ride the oxen in the fields planting rice and different crops. He thought there must be a better future than that and this is one of the reasons he came to Canada.

Q. He was an expert pistol shooter wasn't he?

A. Yes, he was. As a youngster, I think he was one of a band of people who were trained to handle pistols because in those days

there were a lot of bandits in China and the village that he came from, I think they had a lot of bandits and they were trained to protect themselves and the villagers.

Q. Did he come to Canada alone?

A. Yes, he came out here alone and after a few years out here, working for three dollars a month; I have been told this many many times, how hard a life he had when he first came. I understand he worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day for three dollars a month. He saved up enough money and he brought his three brothers out. After that, he decided working for those salaries, he couldn't get by on, he also had to support his mother and father who were in China. So he joined up with a survey crew just before the First World War and, it was the Gore and McGregor survey crew who surveyed the Prince George and Fort George area. He was with them for a couple of years until the outbreak of the First World War.

Q. Did he go in the war?

A. No he didn't because I think in those days, the Chinese had a very hard time. They were considered aliens. So he came back to Victoria and went back to work for the Jameson family and then he worked in the Jameson coffee factory for some time. In 1922 he decided that he would like to get into business for himself and so he started the greenhouse business.

Q. Did he have any greenhouse knowledge when he started?

A. Well, as I said, he was from a farming family, so he would have knowledge of farming but I think greenhouses were a little bit new to him so there were some friends that he got to know that were in the greenhouse business, like the Little Brothers, who were longtime greenhouse people in this area. From talking to them he decided that greenhouses was what he was going to get into.

Q. I see. When did he get married?

A. My father got married in 1927, and my mother's name was Lee Don Kuai at the time, and she married my father and that was when he relocated in the Gordon Head area. It was 1924 that he started building the greenhouses in the Gordon Head area.

His first greenhouse was on Arrow Street in the Fairfield District. He was looking around for better land and the Gordon Head area appealed to him, so he bought the four acres on which he built his greenhouses on, on Shelbourne. Mr. Irvine was one of the original thirteen landowners out there in the entire Gordon Head area, and the land was bought and at the time I think he paid three hundred dollars an acre. He started building the greenhouses in 1924 and it was completed a year or so later. He was under full production by 1926.

Q. Those greenhouses on Arrow Street, are they still there?

A. No, the greenhouses on Arrow Street I believe they were demolished about seven or eight years ago and a housing project is in its place right now.

Q. How many children were there in his family?

A. My father? He had three other brothers. That was the extent of his family.

Q. Can you tell me a bit about your early childhood?

A. Well, my early childhood was, I think, fairly tough because we were born in the depression days. Food was very tough to get, because we weren't from a rich family. So, we sort of survived on everything that we grew ourselves. And, in fact, I still have a lot of my friends who I went to school with in the early days, that still talk about my helping them out during the depression, or they would have never survived. I say that because out of the food production that my dad grew in the greenhouses, it was more or less given away for quite a few years to help people out.

Q. Was he able to make a living at that time?

A. Yes he was able to make a living, he sold a lot of his produce to the market, but any time that he heard of anyone who had troubles, not having enough to eat, he would give them something from the greenhouse, some fruits and vegetables. Going back to my early childhood, you know there weren't many people in the Gordon Head area, I remember when I first went to school, this was Cedar Hill, it had about four different grades in one room. When I first started school at the age of seven, I was six years old when my mother took me back to China for a visit, so I didn't start school until I was seven years old. When I did start into primary school I had quite a bit of difficulty with the alphabet. I didn't know the ABC and

and in fact it was very comical, I would talk to my grade teacher in Chinese and just couldn't communicate.

Q. Was your teacher Chinese?

A. No she wasn't Chinese, but not knowing how to speak English except for yes and no, you had to communicate in some way. I think it was very comical because all my friends teased me about it in later years. I took me quite a few months in order just to master the alphabet.

Q. Did your teacher just take her time with it?

A. Yes, I think we had very patient teachers in those days. You know, the area of Cedar Hill School, the school population was very small because it was mainly a farming community in those days, and there weren't that many students around so I think the teachers were very patient with the students.

Q. What sort of recreation was available to you?

A. Well, recreation in those early days really was softball and soccer and there was no playing field, that I can recall. Any corner lot would do, it meant being together. Sometimes we would play in grass that was a foot high, but we still had a lot of fun. I don't think in those early days, the people were as demanding as they are today with playing fields. They want everything so maticulate. In the days when I was going through my childhood almost any place is playground as there were so many open fields.

Q. Did you work in the greenhouse?

A. Yes, I unfortunately or fortunately, had a very strict father who taught us everything the right way and we had to help in the green house when we were very very young. In fact, one of my chores when I got about twelve years old was to put in four cords of wood into the boiler room for the furnaces every day after school before I went to my Chinese classes. And I can tell you that was a very tough chore, when sometimes you were handling wood that was twice your weight.

Q. I can imagine, not much time for recreation.

A. No there wasn't much time for recreation. It wasn't until I was in about grade seven or eight that I was involved with school sports and I must confess now, that I did play quite a bit of hookey from the Chinese school in order to participate in the sports at my school.

Q. Did you attend Chinese school voluntarily? Or was that something that was expected of you?

A. Well I think that was something that I was expected to do. All the Chinese kids around that time. I think it was something that was very beneficial to us, I'm glad in a way that we were forced to go to Chinese school because the generations that followed us, I think they are missing a great opportunity by not going to Chinese school. I think that with air travel in the world, it has shrunk to a very small size and the more languages that one can acquire, I think it is much better.

Q. What high school did you go to?

A. Well, after Cedar Hill School and my primary and elementary years, I went to Mount Douglas for grades eight and nine and then because of the bus scheduling for Chinese school after that, I had to transfer to Victoria High and I was at Vic High for grades ten, eleven and twelve. In a way, I sort of regret having transferred because most of my friends were at Mount Doug and I had to make new friends all over, but because of Chinese school it was a necessity. I was going to a much larger school than what I was accustomed to because out at Mount Doug my ex-class mates had classes of about eighteen to twenty students. When I went to Vic High you were suddenly faced with classes of about two hundred students in the same grade.

Q. Did you commute then from Mount Douglas to Vic High?

A. Yes, we commuted. We either rode our bikes or caught the first bus out in the morning, and then walked up to school. Gordon Head buses used to go along Hillside to Douglas and from Douglas we used to walk up to the school.

Q. Reading about you I saw you were quite prominent on the sports teams,

A. Yes, when I was going to school I was on the different sporting teams at Mount Doug and Vic High, softball, soccer and basketball and also I did a lot of track and field.

Q. What did you do after your schooling?

A. Well after I finished grade twelve I went into business for myself. I think primarily because I think business is a challenge. I know that in my father's business, I was looking after a lot of his affairs when I was about fourteen and so it gave me a lot of knowledge of the business world when I was just in high school. My father was in several businesses. He was in the greenhouse business, he was in the import-export business, grocery business, restaurant

business, so I had a good familiarization of what was happening in the business world. When I graduated from high school I worked in the grocery and importing/exporting business for a while and then I started a restaurant of my own.

Q. Was the importing/exporting business an awarding company.

A. Yes, that's right.

Q. What did you do exactly there?

A. Well I did just about everything. I uncrated boxes and costed the goods coming in and keeping control of the books that we had, inventory, I filled orders. A sort of a joe boy of everything. The business consisted of my father and a partner and he had some sons too that were working in the business, so because we were younger we more or less did everything that was expected of us.

Q. Did you have a long work day?

A. Yes, I could say we had long work days. When I graduated from high school and went into the grocery and importing and exporting business, I worked for my dad, for which I received the grand sum of seventy-five dollars a month for seven days a week and about a twelve hour work day. Sometimes fourteen hour days.

Q. What business of your own did you do?

A. Well the first business I was into was the restaurant business, which was Ming's Kitchen, which I sold. I was a partner with two very good friends of mine for almost eleven years. Also, I was in construction for a while, I was in the paving business. I was a silent partner in a cleaning firm. Shortly after my father passed away in 1956, and I had brothers who were out of school then and so we went into partnership and bought some more greenhouses. For a while we had the largest greenhouse operation in the Province. Over 400,000 square feet.

Q. When did you get married?

A. I got married in 1952, July of 1952, to a girl that I first met when I transferred to Vic High. Her name was Rose Lee at the time and she graduated from High School the year before I did and was the first lady of Chinese extraction that worked for a Canadian Bank. That was the Bank of Commerce.

Q. Is that right? It was not common?

A. No it wasn't, she was the first one to work for a Canadian Bank and she was hired because she spoke fluent Chinese and this particular

Bank was getting a lot of Chinese business and subsequently after that other Banks hired Chinese girls to try to recoup some of the business that they had lost.

Q. Was she born in Canada?

A. Yes, she was born in Victoria.

Q. Can you tell me a little bit about your first restaurant, Ming's Kitchen?

A. Yes, Ming's Kitchen was a Chinese restaurant and the idea came from a friend of mine, he served in the Services and coming back from the War he couldn't get settled into doing anything and I happened to have a little small coffee shop, right across from the Post Office on Yates Street and I said "Well, why don't we take a chance, because the idea sounded great to me. It was a delivery service for Chinese food, and there wasn't any at the time. So this is how we got into it. We began with a capital of three hundred dollars and within a couple of months we could see that it was going to be more than we could handle so we had to find larger premises. We became so successful that other people started to get the same idea and went into the delivery of Chinese food. This is how the idea of the business got started in Victoria. We were the original delivery service in Victoria. Oddly enough, our biggest clientele was the Navy. Every time a ship came back in from a cruise or exercises we would be swamped with calls for delivery service to the boats and we also, I think, were the first to get clearance to make our delivery right to the jetty instead of just to the main gate, where the other food services that came after us had to leave their food and the personnel had to come up to the gate for it. We were able to drive right down to the jetty.

Q. What other Chinese Restaurants were there in Victoria at that time?

A. At that time there were about four or five, there was Don Mee, Sun Lock Restaurant, there was the Mandarin Restaurant, there were quite a few restaurants in the City. This city has been noted for its Chinese food and even in the very early days because a major settlement of Chinese people was in Victoria at the turn of the century and I believe, at that time, there was about 10,000 Chinese coming in and out of Victoria.

Q. Was your restaurant in the area we call Chinatown?

A. No, this is one of the unusual things about it. We departed from the normal and started at Yates Street, which was quite a ways from Chinatown. The main reason being, was that for delivery service, we didn't have to be right in Chinatown because we relied on a car for deliveries. When we expanded, we expanded on Yates Street, only a few blocks away. It was the old Cyril Cafe next to the Capital Theatre. We expanded to that location with a dining room because people were asking us to put in that type of service and they enjoyed our delivery service too.

Q. I see, so you only delivered at first?

A. Yes, we started out as a delivery service.

Q. I remember the old Mings Kitchen very vaguely. It's gone from that location now isn't it?

A. Yes, the building has been demolished and I believe a parking lot is in its place right now. Right next to the Capital Theatre.

Q. Did you sell that business?

A. Yes I sold that business back in 1961 to one of my partners, because I had enough of other businesses to handle and the hours were just not long enough for me at the time to look after all these other businesses.

Q. What other businesses were you involved in?

A. Well, I was involved in construction business, I was involved in a painting firm and I was also involved in a motel, at that time, and the greenhouse business. With a big staff to contend with and the various types of businesses that had no ties with one another, I felt that my health was more important and so I sold Mings Kitchen.

Q. Did you operate the Cherry Bank Hotel at that time?

A. I built and operated it, the Cherry Bank Hotel.

Q. How did you become interested in politics?

A. Well I think this is something that still amazes myself, I was a member of the Social Credit Party and then in 1963, there was a sort of election and I think the Saanich riding was looking for somebody to run and so I said "Alright I'll run, I know that I won't make it but I'll run as a candidate so that our Party is represented". I didn't make it as I wasn't that well known, and then also in the year 1963, there was a bi-election in this Municipality and at that time, also in the year 1963, the Reeve



of this Municipality had resigned to take up a teaching post in Rhodesia, his name was Stanley Murphy. Mr. Curtis who was already a Councilor, he resigned his seat to run for Reeve. The indications were that he was going to be elected without any competition. Myself and four friends were talking one day over a cup of coffee and felt that for an office as important as that of Reeve, that there should be some competition, and we decided to look for somebody to run but was not able to. So, in the end we decided to draw straws to see which of the five of us would run against Mr. Curtis and I drew the short straw and so this was my first experience into Municipal elections.

Q. Do you recall who the other five people were?

A. Well I don't think they would want to have their names made known. This was our agreement at the time, that which ever one of us won would not divulge the other four.

Q. Were you successful as a candidate?

A. Well, I came very close. There was some mistake in counting at the time. It was not official, but as the counts came in it looked like I might have won the election. But after the recount, Mr. Curtis came out ahead of me by, I believe, 127 votes, which was really a relief to me because I had no experience in the Municipal field. I had never attended a Council meeting, so I had no idea how to conduct one.

Q. You certainly had support.

A. I was very surprised at the support that I did get because I was really an unknown.

Q. Why do you feel, or for what reason do you feel you got that support?

A. Well, I think mainly I got the support because a number of people living in the Municipality that knew my father and remembered what he did during the depression. I think a lot of support came from that area. And, I think being in business up to that point, I got to know a lot of people. You know, Saanich was very small in terms of population in those days and I had been born and raised in the Municipality and most of the people who were around were of voting age, and my age, that I knew through school and sports activities, and I think that is where the bulk of my support came from.

- A. And, because of that election, it was in October, the general election for Councilors came up in December and all my friends said "Well, you came so close to being Reeve, you might as well go on and get some experience in the Municipal field and try for a Councilors seat" and I topped the polls in that election.
- Q. What was your platform?
- A. Well, I think my platform at that time was Saanich needed someone with business experience because you know, running a Corporation such as this was no different than running a business. And I think if one understands how to run a business it would be a natural followup.
- Q. What did you do as Councilor?
- A. Well, I think as Councilor, I was delegated or appointed by the Mayor, to sit on different committees and because I wanted to do a good job, I spent almost full time at being a Councilor. It didn't pay very much but I was always taught by my Dad that no matter what you do if you want to be successful at anything you have to devote the time to it. So I devoted, as I say, almost full time as being a Councilor. All the committees of Council, in fact while I was a Councilor I served on more committees than any other of my fellow colleagues.
- Q. I recall reading that in 1966 you were on 18 boards.
- A. And committees. I think the most that I was on one year was 27. That was because I wanted to do the job, I told the Reeve one time, that was Hugh Curtis, and whatever he wanted to appoint me on, I'd do it. That was only because the greenhouse business was my main business then and I had two other brothers that were in partnership with me and they sort of had to carry my weight for those years.
- Q. In the greenhouses?
- A. Yes, in the greenhouses. I spent very little time in the greenhouses. Only when they needed me. During those years I devoted most of my time to the Municipality.
- Q. How were the greenhouses doing at that time? Were they well established in Victoria?
- A. Oh yes, they were well established because one of the greenhouses that we were operating was started by my father and then we bought other ranges, three others, which I think, you know, no matter how

or large your operation gets, the work is involved.

As long as your staff, you have good foremans and good superintendents, then your job is made easy.

Q. Did your greenhouses supply locally?

A. Yes our greenhouses supplied a lot of the local market and we also supplied markets as far as Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa. We were dealing through a brokerage firm that handled most of our produce. Safeways I think is one of our major customers.

Q. When did you run for Mayor?

A. When I finished my term as Alderman in 1972 I felt that I should hang up my hat. I had given eight years to Municipal life and I thought it was about time I started making some money for retirement. I did quit for a year, I was out of Municipal politics in 1973. But in 1974 a lot of the citizens kind of got me to change my mind. They all wanted me to get back into the municipal field because I did a good job when I was Alderman and they wanted me to be their Mayor and I was more or less talked into running for the Office of Mayor. So in 1974 I became Mayor.

Q. Mayor of Saanich?

A. Yes.

Q. You had served four terms by then as Alderman.

A. I had served four terms by then as Alderman, yes. And I think because of my experience and I do do my homework, I know what subjects are and I know what I'm talking about, that people have confidence in me to elect me as Mayor.

Q. Can you tell me what your platform was as a Mayor candidate?

A. A Mayoral candidate you know, is a little different that when you run as Alderman. I think when you're the Mayor, you're the chief magistrate, although you only have one vote but some of the decisions you have to make are more important than when you're an Alderman. My platform at the time, I believe, was just good common business sense in the Municipality.

Q. Can you give me some examples? How you felt?

A. Well you know when I come to voting for somebody in the Federal level or Provincial level, I always seem to vote for the man. If he is successful in business he could do the job properly. And if he has had good experience in the field he is going into then I would have to take that experience into consideration.

I think this is the whole thinking that, maybe other people don't think the way that I do. And I think a lot of Councils, in different areas, there hasn't been enough thought by the voters going into selecting their candidates as to whether they will do a good job or not. I think, you know, you have to rely on successful people in order to do a good job.

Q. What was your early term of office like?

A. Well my early term of office as Mayor I don't think or see it any different than being Alderman. The only big advantage that I had was, because of my experience of being Alderman, I stepped into the Mayor's seat quite easily. There was no difficulty in the transformation.

Q. I'd like to ask you some of your views on certain areas, and one of them is farming. Saanich is growing larger and is getting to be known as a dormitory area of Victoria, what do you see as the future of farming in Saanich?

A. Well I think the future of farming under this Agricultural Land Reserve that we have now, I think some of the farming will be preserved, unfortunately some of the better farmlands have been lost to housing over the years. I think as time goes on farming is going to be very crucial to any area of the country where food production has population increase and have to be met. But, one of the things that I am very concerned with is the number of younger people coming up who are not interested in farming and I think that, mainly, is because the time that a person has to put into farming in order to get a decent living is out of balance with the forty-hour week job, shall I say. You know, if you wanted to become a farmer then you have to accept the fact that your income is not going to be very good. If you do have the advantage of, food, shall I say, for your own table, that you grow yourself and you don't have to pay for it.

Q. Are farming families having this problem?

A. Well I would say, from looking at the situation right now, that eighty percent of the farming families are having a very tough time surviving. The return for their investment and the time put in may work out to about two dollars an hour, which is not even the minimum wage. The minimum wage is three dollars or three and a quarter. But, some people are happy and I think there

are a lot of things that the senior government can do to protect farming in Canada and especially in British Columbia, I think the Department of Agriculture here, or Ministry of Agriculture, has to come up with some better incentive to get people into farming. Mainly because of the imports from the United States. You know, during the year you are paying very high prices for your agricultural products and when our local produce is in season, the prices generally fall by half. So, you know, there is an area that the government should be concerned with. Why, is it, when you import, you can demand high prices and when your own local growers are not even existing on what their returns are. But, getting back to the way that Saanich is growing, the farm land that we do have now, although it goes a long way to helping the food production in this area, but it only produces to a very small percentage of the need.

Q. Are these farms small farms?

A. The majority of them are smaller farms. They are family operations I think the reason why a lot of them would like to get a little bigger is because of the fact that farming wages are generally lower than the going rate for labour, and if you got any larger then you can't find the help. I think this is more of a major problem than being just family operations.

Q. Do these farmers have room to expand?

A. I would say some of them have. There is always room for expansion. If you're farming ten acres now and you feel you can handle more, I think one can buy land to expand their farming operation.

Q. What are your views on amalgamation?

A. Well my views on amalgamation, you know, my stand on amalgamation ever since I was elected to this Council is that it would not be beneficial to the people as a whole. The old saying pertains to this case, "Bigger is not always better". I think under amalgamation we would have a government that would not be as close to the people. The thinking today, and especially if the indications hold true, the last two years that I have been on this Council, the people want their elected officials to be more accessible to them. Under an amalgamated area you are going to have very few people being accessible to a much larger number of people and I think, when you look at other areas to compare,

that when you get bigger you're really not saving any money, but your costs get higher. I think Winnipeg is a very prime example. You know, I have been talking to elected people from Winnipeg and some of them wish they could back to the old system because its too unwieldy.

- Q. Mr. Ash, who I was talking to a while ago, is a real proponent of amalgamation. He's come to that viewpoint now that the people must want it.
- A. Well I think they have enough facts before us to show that amalgamation is not necessarily the best. I think under amalgamation you may save in certain areas but there are areas that are going to be a lot more costly and the benefits that will derive from it are really very minimum.
- Q. It's a dead issue then, I guess.
- A. Well, as far as I'm concerned it's a dead issue, but from time to time you are still going to have people wanting to bring up the subject of amalgamation. If they are running for any office I think you will still see this subject of amalgamation come up from time to time.
- Q. Do you feel the present structure of Municipal departments is adequate?
- A. Well I think the present structure is working out very well, in fact since I've become Mayor we've made some major changes in our structure within Saanich.
- Q. What changes have you made?
- A. I think some of the changes that we've made is the division of responsibility from one department to another, and to coordinate different departments so that information is gathered more readily. I think the defining of responsibility is working out much better than it did before.