

## Remembering my Grandfather, Nin Fon Yee (aka George)

by Janet Yee

My grandfather came to Canada in 1921 at the age of 13 to join his grandfather. He died in 1989; and I remember some of the stories that need to be told. I wished I listened more.

Sitting on a patio table on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue Mall across from Hudson Bay in Calgary, my grandfather and I eating ice cream. I was a child given the responsibility of 'taking care' of Grandpa when going downtown. An Aboriginal Man sat down with us, 'how's my kind of people?'. My grandfather responded in a language that I did not understand. Grandpa and Aboriginal man spoke for what seems like hours; and I not understanding a word. I asked Grandpa what he was speaking. He gruffly said 'I speak Indian'. At the time, 'Indian' was term for Aboriginals.

Coming at the age of 13 by ship, Grandpa was entrusted by another Chinese man who robbed him. Leaving him detained at the BC port with nothing. He was met by his Grandpa who he only lived a brief time. He did not even have money for thread to sew his only tattered pants. However, it was the Aboriginals who helped him survive. When he was sick, no white doctor would touch him. It was only the Aboriginals who would treat him. I falsely used to think that Grandpa was bitter against the white people when he said in our Toisan language, "the lo fan gree (white devil) would not touch me! They would not care – they would rather see me die".

One day while at the restaurant, my sister said something negative about the Aboriginal people. She received a slap across her mouth; and a never-ending lecture that we do not ever speak like that again. 'Yeen Cheen' Aboriginals were always good to him.

Towards his older years grew dementia, Grandpa would often scream, yell and lecture people in his flashes of memory. I could never really 'place' where he was. One day I heard him mumble in his aged and past memory, when he started to speak of the 'Yeen Cheen's', his eyes swelled with sad tears and he could speak no more.