

Community history, Chinese

King Fong (b. 1938)

He was born in Suva, Fiji to parents from Zhongshan in southern China and came to Sydney in 1946 en route to China. From 1956-86 he worked in the family business, finishing up as general manager. From the 1960s he has been active in Sydney welfare, charity and business organisations including the Chinese Cultural Association of New South Wales, the Australian Chinese Charity Foundation, the Chungshan Society of Australia and the Sydney Chinatown Chamber of Commerce.

King Fong: We lived upstairs from the fish shop at 475 Harris Street, Ultimo. I was the eldest son. I would help my parents in the shop and do some of the domestic chores. We carried on our import/export business in the back yard. I would also help my father go down to the fish market. Some of the European fish merchants didn't understand how to cook octopus or abalone or scallops, so they threw them out. My father got me up at 5am to accompany him to ask these gentlemen if we could have the throwaways.

By that time, at eight years old, I had studied two years of English in Fiji. So I was able to translate for my parents. To improve my English, I told my father that I had to join the Salvation Army, the Boys' Brigade and also the Presbyterian Church. And that's where I learned a lot more about Australian life.

Diana Giese: So you were set on becoming a little Aussie?

King Fong: That's right. Well, I adapted quite well and integrated into the Australian system. At school I learned to play cricket and marbles. Today, about 20 per cent of the population of the school I went to is Asian or Chinese. In my day there were only about three or four Chinese in the whole school.

Diana Giese: Did this reflect the fact that most of the people working in Chinatown were in fact single men?

King Fong: Yes. In those days the White Australia Policy was still very active, so most of the Chinese merchants in Chinatown were either single or they had an Australian-born Chinese spouse, so there weren't many children around in Chinatown. The ones that were in my school had recently come from Hong Kong, and were children of merchants who were eligible to sponsor their families.

Diana Giese: What about your other playmates?

King Fong: At school there was a multicultural mix. There were a few Dutch boys and a few Maltese, and quite a lot of Greeks and Italians. They had also come from the old country and they all learned to speak English and we got on very well.

Diana Giese: Where did the other children's parents work?

King Fong: In Ultimo most of them had shops, but many also worked in the factories we had there. Some worked in the woolstores. We were surrounded by woolstores. All the wool would come in from the country towns through the railways and be stored in Ultimo ready for export. After school each day we used to play cricket in between the woolstores, which would close around 3 o'clock each day.'

(From interview with Diana Giese, ORAL TRC 3260, 1995, *Post-War Chinese Australians* project, National Library of Australia)