

**Community history, Chinese
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Familiese**

Bishop George Tung Yep (b. 1927)

He is Cairns' first Anglican Bishop of Chinese descent, and assistant Bishop to a 20,000-strong diocese.

(From summary of interview with Diana Giese, ORAL TRC 3062, 1995, *Post-War Chinese Australians*, National Library of Australia; see also interview with his wife Marion Tung Yep, ORAL TRC 3446, 1996:)

His father was the importer Yee Tung Yep, who also ran the Sam Sing store in Cairns and his mother, Maggie Leong Hong, was a devout Buddhist who encouraged him to worship at the Temple in Grafton St. She married his 29-year-old father when she was 17. George Tung Yep observed that 'we had a lot of freedom in our childhood', but also family responsibilities such as washing bottles containing the goods sold in their store, such as soy sauce and peanut oil. Aboriginal people would come over in the launch from the mission at Yarrabah, bringing in crabs and oysters for the shop to sell. Cairns was always a mixed community: Greeks, Italians, Spanish, Yugoslavs, Malays, Kanakas, Japanese, but 'I would not say that we were conscious of our racial origins', even though the Chinese tended to be farmers, greengrocers and storekeepers. His father was part of the second wave of Chinese immigrants, following those who were gold-seekers to the Palmer River, most of whom returned to China. Family reunions were made difficult by the restrictions of the White Australia Policy.

Bishop Tung Yep left school in 1941 to become an apprentice boiler-maker with the Queensland Railways. At 16, he left to help in the family business. At 18, he joined the Air Training Corps. In 1951, he went to study Theology at St Francis College, Brisbane. When he graduated in 1953 and was about to be ordained, 'my Bishop wrote to every other Bishop in Australia and sought some reaction from them as to how I could handle a white congregation'. The response was that 'it's worth trying'. There have been no problems since.

His vocation is a personal one. He remembers sharing his mother's Buddhism, and the shrine in their house at 48 Spence St, Cairns. He trimmed the wicks of the candles and lit joss-sticks on high days. He 'reverenced with the body' and banged the big drum. He recalls New Year, Moon Festivals and remembering the dead, pig feasts and other auspicious occasions.

When he was 11, his mother died. While the whole family waited at her hospital bedside, he begged God for three hours that she wouldn't die. When she did, he was 'in a spiritual wilderness'. He did not return to God until he was 16. After his first year of theological college, his father died a baptised Christian. Both his sisters became involved with Church activities. He made the decision to be trained 'as a faithful minister of the Word in the diocese'. He was first sent to the mining town of Mary Kathleen, and became part of 'a very lively multicultural endeavour' in a time of growth. He worked as a Bush Brother for 50 pounds a year plus keep. Hotel keepers supported men of the Church with meals, and graziers 'would fill up the tank of your vehicle and send you on to the next place'.

He married Marion Tung Yep, of Welsh descent, after meeting her through educational work for the Church. Her father was a lecturer at an agricultural college, and at first opposed their marriage. Later the family came round, helped by the birth of their four sons. In this part of the interview he discusses the nature of tolerance: 'because God loves us, we have to love one another' and make cultural adaptations.

He lived his formative years in what some might see as the 'bad environment' of Cairns' Chinatown, with its brothels, gaming houses and opium dens. He played his first and last gambling game in the Greek club, until summoned sternly home by his father. But he also remembers 'respect for the person' and family support, the 'security and solidarity' of Chinese culture building the confidence to survive and develop. The White Australia policy meant that people like his brother, who topped the Public Service exam, 'could not be given jobs in the Post Office'. Post-War, however, many

men of Bishop Tung Yep's generation managed to get into organisations such as the Far North Queensland Electricity Board. Of later waves of Chinese immigrants he comments, 'if a person does something silly, like sailing halfway around the world to come here', you 'can't expect people to feel sorry for you'.

The first three years of his life were spent in China, with his father's first wife and his *amah*. He remembers the aroma of the special birds the adults cooked and ate at night, and the cries of the beggars in the streets and feeding them with leftover food. Afterwards, his father's first wife and family stayed in China and were sent a monthly cheque. He has good relationships with his sisters: Maude, who still lives in Cairns, and Ruby, who worked for the World Bank in Washington. They kept the family business going until 1952.

George Tung Yep believes in 'a personal God'. When he ministers to the dying, he puts them 'in touch with God'.

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