

Royal BC Museum

A Tale of Two Families Exhibit – September 23, 2020

Good morning and thank you Dr. Chung for that kind introduction.

I'd like to begin by extending my gratitude on behalf of the Louie and Seto families and all their descendants, to the entire team here at the Royal BC Museum.

In particular, I'd like to thank Dr. Chung,
The Royal BC Museum and archives staff,
And the exhibition designer Ken Johnson.

You have created a remarkable and necessary experience for museum visitors in acknowledging the significant role my family, the Guichons, and countless other immigrant families have had, on the history and growth of British Columbia and our country.

If you add together the collective years the Louie, Seto and Guichon families have lived and contributed to Canadian society, it represents a total of 438 years.

Each generation has left its mark and each has demonstrated their lived values of honesty, integrity, resilience and perseverance.

They found ways not just to survive, but to give back, to lead and to help build the country their ancestors chose to make their home.

This event marks something very special for all of us. It is cause for celebration and an opportunity for us to pause and reflect on the past, what it can teach us, and most importantly, how it can change us.

The great philosopher Confucius tells us; *"study the past, if you would divine the future."* This exhibit demonstrates the essence of that advice as it serves to inform and educate people on what is often an overlooked part of Canadian history.

I believe this exhibit is very auspicious.

This moment in time, more than any other in memory, is critical in determining how we will move forward as a country.

Facing enormous adversity often brings out the best in a community and a nation.

Sadly, the worst can also emerge, and we've witnessed this in the dramatic increase in racism, over the course of this pandemic.

I'm here to say that racism is not right or acceptable on any level. It is not who we are, or who we want to be, as a nation.

Personally, I believe that it's not enough to simply offer more commentary or hand wringing on these issues.

Part of the inheritance I was fortunate to receive from my family is based on taking personal responsibility and providing leadership.

It also centers on speaking up and taking action when faced with ethical or moral dilemmas, especially those that reduce another person's dignity and humanity in any way.

This is why I have involved myself with a group of Canadian leaders across the country, to marshal our efforts in fighting racism.

Much of what we will be building our strategies around will be providing our fellow Canadians with the information and education they need to recognize racism for what it is.

We will also offer information on how they can take steps to combat the issue in their own communities.

It is my experience that only when we acknowledge and own up to these issues can we begin to deal with them.

Engaging in dialogue, offering information and education, are always powerful strategies to employ.

Education is something that has always figured prominently for the Louie and Seto families who we honour here today.

My grandmother Fannie Lew Kay Seto was the first American born Chinese woman to graduate from high school in Olympia, Washington.

My maternal grandfather, Seto Ying Shek, known as Seto More, was largely self-taught but was considered a great intellectual, artist and scholar. He was widely regarded by many in the political, scientific and cultural spheres, both here, and in China.

Despite the rampant anti-Asian sentiments of his day, he moved freely between both the eastern and western communities.

On his death in 1967, my parents donated his library and papers to UBC.

At over 2200 books, papers and archival materials, the collection represents the largest donation made to the Asian library in the twentieth century.

Lee Mong Kow, was my great uncle and is included here as part of the exhibit.

One of his major accomplishments was to be part of the establishment of the first Chinese public school.

My paternal grandfather Hok Yat Louie was similarly self-taught but ensured his children received an education.

My mother graduated from UBC with a degree in biology, while my father received his degree there in agriculture as they were denied the right to study and receive a professional degree.

At that point in our history, Chinese were prohibited from entering any of the professions as they were not Canadian citizens, even when born here.

My father went on to serve on the board of governors at UBC, received an Honorary Doctor of Laws there, and was granted the order of British Columbia and the Order of Canada.

I share this information with you simply to underscore the extraordinary power of education and learning.

It is after all, what lies at the heart of the museum's work and is the core purpose of this wonderful exhibit.

It is also at the heart of the Chinese culture extending back thousands of years.

That commitment is still in evidence today in very concrete terms, as we see the names of prominent Asian Canadian philanthropists on many hospitals, campuses, libraries and scholarship funds.

Just a few examples are:

- The Robert H. Lee graduate school at UBC Sauder School of Business
- The H.Y Louie 100th anniversary scholarship and bursary fund at Simon Fraser University
- And my own Chancellor's Legacy Fund, at Simon Fraser University where I served as chancellor for six years.
- The Louie family has a long association with St Paul's hospital, where the Tong & Geraldine Cardiac Wing of the current facility, will become a state of the art cardiac care wing in the new hospital, to be built soon.

It is an honour to be included with the Guichon family in acknowledging the lasting impact our families have had over the last 160 years.

They began their journeys before Canada was formed as a country, and even now the echo of their ethics and values can be felt in the legacy they each created.

To honour the journey of those that came before us, we have work to do.

We all stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, their courage in the face of daunting odds stands as a lesson to all of us.

They came here as immigrants just as so many do today, to create a new life, to contribute their skills and resources, and to live safely and peacefully.

Given Canada was one of the first countries to create a multiculturalism policy and it is written into our charter of rights and freedoms, we enjoy a reputation globally, for our inclusiveness.

As a nation we understand that our approach to multiculturalism is one of our greatest resources and the fabric of our future.

We must protect that reputation at all costs and work to preserve our civility, and our way of life.

Racism and intolerance have the ability to impact our country profoundly, not just socially and culturally, but also in terms of economics, innovation and future growth.

Beyond that, at an individual level, when even just one person is made to feel less, the cost on all of us is immeasurable.

I feel that together, it is within our reach to ensure that every individual who calls Canada home, can do so, knowing they are safe, valued, and an equal member of a nation that cherishes kindness, diversity and inclusion above all else.

Our humanity is something we have built over time, and it should be the legacy we leave intact for our children, and for all future generations of Canadians.

Thank you.