

Biography of Ellen, Miu-Ling W. Lo

December 25th, 1911 - December 23rd, 2012



H.Y Lo

Ellen Wong

Shanghai, 1936

The Biography of Ellen, Miu-Ling Wong Lo 盧王妙玲

C.C. Lo
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Foreword

In this document, I will refer to my mother as Ellen, my father as HY (Hong Yuen 康元), and my grandfathers as Ellen's father and HY's father. A large part of the biography was derived from what my mother (Ellen) told me. The rest of the story is from my own memory.

Biography

Ellen's grandfather (father's side) was the chief chef of the English Royal Guest House at Victoria Peak in Hong Kong.

Her other grandfather (mother's side) was the General Manager of Watson Pharmaceutical of Hong Kong.

Ellen was born on Christmas day in 1911 in Hong Kong. Her father was a self-taught solicitor of a famous law firm in Hong Kong. He also learned short hand on his own and was very good at it. He was very successful in his career, and eventually owned his own high-end house, as well as a two-deck cruise boat complete with a crew.



Ellen's father's house in Kowloon Tong

At the back of this house, he built another house for his brother

Shortly after the Second World War, he lost everything to an unscrupulous stockbroker who convinced him to buy phony stocks. After years of hard work, he was able to re-

establish himself and he earned a very comfortable living thereafter. Ellen's father was also very interested in tennis and golf. He played golf well into his nineties and quit only when he physically could not play anymore. All this time, he was a widower, having lost his wife in a horse racetrack fire when Ellen was 7 years old.



Ellen's Dad



Ellen's Mom



Ellen in front of her father's house

In the early 1900's, women participated in public events to show off their clothing and jewelry. On February 26, 1918, Ellen's mother and father, along with 6 other aunts and 1 uncle, went to watch the horse races at the Hong Kong Racetrack. Ellen's mother wanted to bring Ellen along, but her father wouldn't let her go, and Ellen stayed at home. Back then, the racetrack seating and stands were built with bamboo, wood and mats. While food and drink were always part of the fun at the horse races, one fatal mistake people made was to cook their food underneath these highly flammable wood and mat structures. Although people had been doing that for a long time, their luck ran out that fateful day.



Hong Kong Race Track with the Mat-Sheds Grand Stand in the background



The Grand Stand on fire on February 26, 1918

Over 670 people burned to death when the structure caught fire and instantly went up in flames. Ellen lost her mom and 6 other members of her family. Only her uncle and father survived the tragedy. They happened to be snacking underneath the structure when the fire broke out. Her mother's death came as such a big shock to the 7-year-old that she withdrew into a "shell" and wouldn't talk again for many years. Ellen's grandmother, on her mother's side, spent a lot of time with her, and the pain eventually healed over time. However, it was her father who cared for her and guided her through the years all on his

own. He took her almost everywhere he went, including drinking places where there were many barmaids. A couple of these barmaids were very kind to Ellen and even looked after her. With her father, Ellen also learned how to play tennis and golf in her teenage years.



Game, Set, Match



Yacht outing

Ellen had two younger brothers and one younger sister. One brother and one sister died when they were only a few years old. Before he got married, her other brother was involved in gambling and alcohol, among other things. At one point, things got so bad that their father disowned him and cut off all supports to him. In order to help her brother survive, Ellen had to pawn her jewelry. Her brother was eventually able to turn his life around and got married. Unfortunately, he contracted TB in a village in China and died of the disease in his 30's. He left behind a widow and three young daughters.

Ellen attended the prestigious St. Paul High School. To this date, St. Paul is still one of the top schools in Hong Kong. Her high school years were fun-filled, and included hanging out with friends and swimming. She met Hong Yuen (HY) Lo, her eventual husband, during the last year of high school in 1931, through a friend.



Ellen and her high school friends

HY Lo was from a wealthy family according to the standards of that time. HY's father did business with Japan by importing and exporting seafood. HY's father could speak Japanese fluently. This skill turned out to be the key to survival for HY's family during the war when Japan occupied Hong Kong (between 1941 and 1945). In 1931, HY enrolled at the University of Shanghai to pursue a degree in Economics. Ellen went along with HY to Shanghai despite the objections from her father. This caused the relationship between Ellen and her father to sour a little in the years to come. While HY was attending the University of Shanghai, Ellen went to a private university close by. In 1932, one year into her college education, the Sino-Japanese war started in China. With idiotic rulers in charge of China at the time, Japan just marched into China without much of a fight from the Chinese. The Chinese military force was weak and in total disarray. With China in complete turmoil, Ellen and HY headed back home to Hong Kong.

They were lucky to get onto a freighter heading to Hong Kong. The accommodations on the freighter were on the deck - no bed, no room, no shower. Traveling with a friend and Ellen's cousin, they used newspaper to line the deck - this served as their seating and bedding for the 3-day trip back home. Upon arriving in Hong Kong, Ellen's father was so mad that he wouldn't talk to her for a while - this also effectively ended Ellen's pursuit of a college degree. She was not allowed to go back to Shanghai to finish her college program even after the war subsided. However, HY did return to Shanghai to finish his studies. HY was very athletic. He was a member of China's national volleyball team and swimming team, as well as a member of the City of Shanghai's and the University of Shanghai's teams. He participated in various competitive sports meets. He also enjoyed golf and tennis.



The Volleyball Team representing China competing in Manila 1934



HY golfing 1934



HY playing tennis 1934

Upon graduating from the University of Shanghai, HY returned to Hong Kong. Their relationship continued to blossom and they exchanged wedding vows. The wedding took place in Shanghai on January 21, 1936.



A romantic afternoon stroll



Wedding in Shanghai 1936

Their first son, Chu Shek (柱石), was born in November 1936. Their second son, Chu Chung (柱中), was born in 1938, and their first daughter, Milly (美莉), came in 1941. Maple (美普) was born in 1945.



Mother and first son 1937



Two sons 1940

In 1940, at the age of 50, HY's father suffered a stroke that paralyzed half of his body, requiring him to have 24-hour care until his death of heart failure in 1950. At the time of his death, he had been bedridden for almost 10 years. His occasional exercise was dragging half of his body around the room with the help of another person. His second wife, Wong, must be credited for taking care of him during those years through all the pain and frustration.



HY's father with his second wife, Wong ~1946



Miu Ling and HY with their two sons in 1940

In 1941, Japan invaded Hong Kong, a British colony, and occupied it from 1941 to 1945. During Japan's occupation, it ruled with an iron fist, committing numerous atrocities on the island. Many horror stories were comparable to those of the Massacre of Nanjing. Japan surrendered in 1945 after occupying Hong Kong for 3 years and 8 months. That was the year that Ellen and HY's second daughter, Maple, was born. Because of the war, HY's father lost practically everything and they barely escaped with their lives. When the Japanese soldiers came ashore, they occupied any house they desired. If it was not for HY's father's ability to communicate with the Japanese soldiers and establish some sort of mutual understanding and agreement, the entire family could have been wiped out in

the very beginning of the invasion. Consequently, the entire family had to move to the mezzanine of the house and left the rest of the house for the Japanese soldiers. The Japanese soldiers became a little friendlier as time went by. They even offered cookies to the children at times.

During the occupation, food and other resources were hard to come by. It was lucky if one could get enough rice for the whole family. Rice was rationed out for purchase according to the number of people in a family and the portions were anything but generous. Once in a while, chicken or pork was available. However, the main source of food was just rice. Life was not easy and the entire burden of support eventually landed on the shoulders of HY who worked for the Bank of East Asia at the time. During this time, gold and jewelry were very desirable, as opposed to the fiat currency that was practically worthless. All the real assets the family owned were used to barter for food and other essentials. Although the wealth and fortune of HY's father was completely wiped clean, the family was lucky to survive the hardships and brutalities of the war.

When the Japanese soldiers began to leave Hong Kong after Japan surrendered, they walked single file with their hands locked up over their heads. Angry Hong Kong residents lined the streets and threw rocks at them. The British and other gun-toting allied soldiers watched as the line of defeated Japanese soldiers walked by with their heads down. As a result of the war, Hong Kong was scarred with bomb craters. The Japanese had also built tunnels in the hills. Unexploded bombs and shells, and shallow graves of horses and humans were found there. In the tall grass on the hill behind the family flat on 30 Fort Street, my brother and I and a couple of neighborhood kids found quite a few skeleton heads of British soldiers and local guerillas. These were the result of the beheadings of prisoners practiced by the Japanese soldiers. It was said that they actually held competitions on beheading techniques to see who could cut off a head with a single clean swipe of the sword. Other extremely hideous torturing techniques were used on downed allied pilots. Based on these practices, it was understandable why residents of Hong Kong threw rocks at the Japanese soldiers as they left Hong Kong.

After the war, two maids were hired to help out the growing family. At that time almost every family had some hired help. These two maids stayed with the family through the ups and downs and were very loyal to the family. They virtually became part of the family. They stayed with Ellen and HY's family until October of 1966. Ah Yau then went to work for a family friend, NT Chan and eventually died in a nursing home. Ah Lin went to help out her nephew who was starting his own family and business. We lost contact with her after that time.



Ah Lin and Ah Yau 1965

Soon after the war, Ellen's father was tricked into buying some questionable stocks and lost everything he owned. He moved in to live with his daughter and her family. A few years later, the widow of Ellen's brother and her three daughters also left China and moved into the flat. For a period of time, 30 Fort Street in North Point was more than a full house. In the years that followed, Ellen's father made a comeback and regained a strong financial foothold. After a short while, he bought a flat in Happy Valley. He moved his daughter-in-law and three grand daughters to the flat with him.

However, that was not the only time the family flat was full with family and guests. In 1949, Silvia Li (HY's third sister), her husband C.M. Li and their children escaped from the communist rule of China and moved into 30 Fort Street temporarily. They then moved to a flat on the same street some months later.

After the war ended in 1945, business started to revive and life gradually returned to some level of normalcy. But the heavy burdens on HY continued because of his father's paralysis and his responsibilities to support his growing family. On top of that, HY's second sister's family, with six members, also depended on him heavily for support because the husband just could not hold a job for any length of time. During the 1950's, HY and a couple of friends won the first prize in a horse race and received a large sum of money. However, none of the money found its way to sound investments. Due to HY's over-extended generosity and sympathetic heart, most of the money went to friends, relatives and some business ventures that never prevailed. Soon after, HY and his family found themselves in the same financial situation as before the cash windfall.



The Lo Family ~1951



HY ~ 1955

Under the heavy burden of supporting practically two families and a paralyzed father with just one income, stress began to take its toll on HY in the years that followed. HY appreciated fine food, fine liquor and the better things in life. Although most of the time he was strapped for cash, he spared no expense to hold holiday parties for relatives and friends. All these years he had been working for the Bank of East Asia where he had done extremely well. The CEO appreciated his work and HY was on his way to a top management level position. However, he then made the biggest mistake of his career, and this probably cost him years of his life as well.

Due to his trusting nature and willingness to help friends, he gave up his very promising future with the bank to help start a company with a friend by the name of Bing-Fun Fung. However, practically none of the promises made at the beginning of this new venture ever materialized. Under the heavy financial pressures, HY started to drink more and more. Towards the end of his life in the mid 1960's, one of this so-called friend's sons came into the picture and started to push HY out of the company that he had helped to establish and run with significant success. The stress and heavy drinking finally took its toll. In May of 1966, HY was diagnosed with terminal liver cancer. During the last few months of his life, Ellen took care of HY 24/7, napping only a few hours in between when she could. In the very brief moment that I was present in the last couple of weeks in September of 1966, I witnessed my father's suffering that was not to be wished upon one's foes. At that time in Hong Kong there was no palliative or hospice care to care for terminal patients with pains and sufferings. On October 2, 1966 HY died at the age of 55.

Upon the death of HY, the household was dissolved and Ellen went to stay with Dr. and Mrs. Morgan Lu. She was with the Lu's from 1966 to mid-1968. She then moved to California at the end of 1968. We owe much gratitude to Morgan and Barbara Lu for helping us when we needed them the most. Morgan was the physician tending to HY's

illness. Not only did he not get paid, but he actually took care of various hospital and medical expenses as well, with the exception of a few thousand dollars I paid to settle the final hospital bills. Their consideration and kindness shall never be forgotten.



Dr. and Mrs. Morgan and Barbara Lu 1991

When Ellen first came to the US in 1968, she was using a visiting visa. This type of visa expired within 6 months to a year. In order for her to stay in the United States, she had to wait for me to qualify to sponsor her to become a resident. She therefore applied for a student visa in the meantime to learn hair styling in Albany, CA. She finally got her resident status in the early 1970's and eventually became a citizen. She attempted to learn how to drive, but quickly quit after one session in the empty Albany race track parking lot, complaining the car was going too fast at about 15 mph! While she was living in El Cerrito, CA, she knitted sweaters by hand and sold them in a clothing store owned by Sarah's sister, Annie on Grant Ave. in San Francisco Chinatown.



Annie and Sarah in the Chinatown store

Sarah used to go to Chinatown to help run the store every weekend. Ellen had been an accomplished clothes and dress maker; she used to cut and sew pants, shirts, dresses and skirts for her children while they were in Hong Kong. She also made clothing for Tanya and Myron while she was living in El Cerrito.

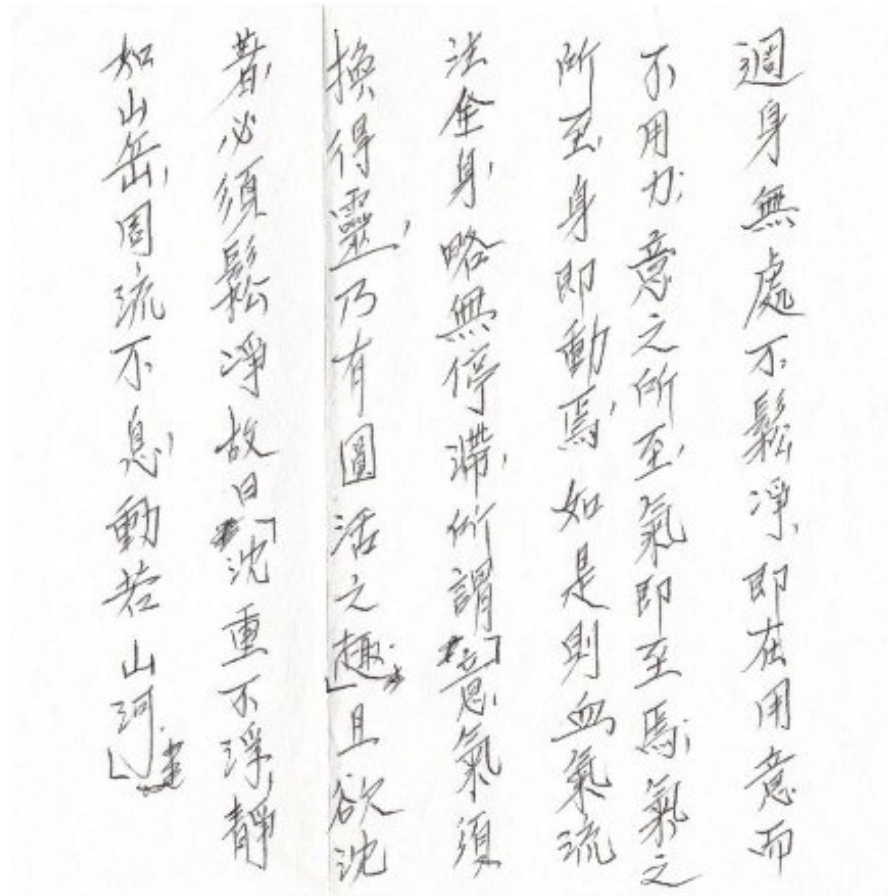
In 1975, Ellen's father had a stroke as he approached the age of 97. He probably had dementia as well. At times he could remember well and at times he could not. His ability to reason was gone. The maid he had hired long ago stayed with him until he died. It was thought that she became his virtual mistress, but whatever the situation was, she was very much appreciated by Ellen for taking care of him all through the years. Ellen went back to see her father and took care of him for a while. When Ellen was in Hong Kong, Barbara Lu accompanied her and provided her with all the support and help she needed to attend to legal and other business matters.

Ellen lived in El Cerrito, CA with or near CC and his family from 1968 to 1986. During that time, she helped to raise Tanya and Myron. When CC and Sarah moved out of their first El Cerrito house in 1980, Ellen took ownership of that house and lived there on her own until 1986. She then moved to Bethesda, Maryland to live near Tony and his family and helped to raise Francesca, Tony's daughter. During the late 1980's and early 1990's, the whole family would often gather in Bethesda during Christmas time to celebrate Ellen's birthday. Her house was always warm and inviting, and we had wonderful family reunions filled with good food and friendly tennis games. She moved back to California in 1997, at the age of 86, and insisted on living alone in a condo in Albany, CA. Since she lived across the street from a Chinese grocery store, she would often take her small cart and walk to the market to buy groceries. At the age of 87, she learned how to use the computer. Everyday she read Chinese newspapers on the computer for about two hours, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. She also communicated with her grandchildren via email and played Mah Jong on the computer.



Ellen at the computer February, 2006

She also had been practicing Tai Ji (太極) for over 50 years and claimed this was her secret to good health. The following is her hand written note on her Shen Quan (神拳) that might also be part of her Qi Gong (氣功) exercise.



Translation of her note:

The entire body should be totally relaxed. Use the mind but not physical strength. When the mind is in control Qi will come, when Qi comes the body will set in motion pushing blood through the entire body without any restriction. This is how Qi reaches its highest state. This also brings about a fluent lively experience! To keep serenity one must keep the mind relaxed and calm. As such, serenity remains and the being will be as stationary as the ever lasting mountain range but when it moves it moves like a river coming down the gorges.

She continued to live quite independently until 2006 when she fell and broke her hip. At the age of 95, she underwent hip replacement surgery and all the rehabilitation associated with it. It was a miraculous recovery!

In the years that followed, Ellen started to gradually lose her mobility, but she still insisted on living by herself for as long as she possibly could. She had a stroke in July 2010 (at age 98) which affected the left side of her body and finally agreed to move into a Residential Home Care facility in El Cerrito. She recovered somewhat, but her physical condition gradually declined over the last two and a half years. She passed away peacefully on December 23, 2012, just two days short of reaching her 101st birthday.

Ellen is survived by her 4 children, 7 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren:

Tony (first son) and his wife Theresa currently live in Seattle, WA.

CC (second son) and his wife Sarah live in El Cerrito, CA.

Milly (first daughter) and her husband Monty live in Virginia.

Maple (second daughter) lives in Ossining, New York. Maple's husband, Carlos passed away in January of 2006 of a brain tumor.

2 grandsons: Myron Lo, Charlie Tiu

5 granddaughters: Tanya Lo, Francesca Lo, Karen Wong, Lana Wong and Melissa Tiu.

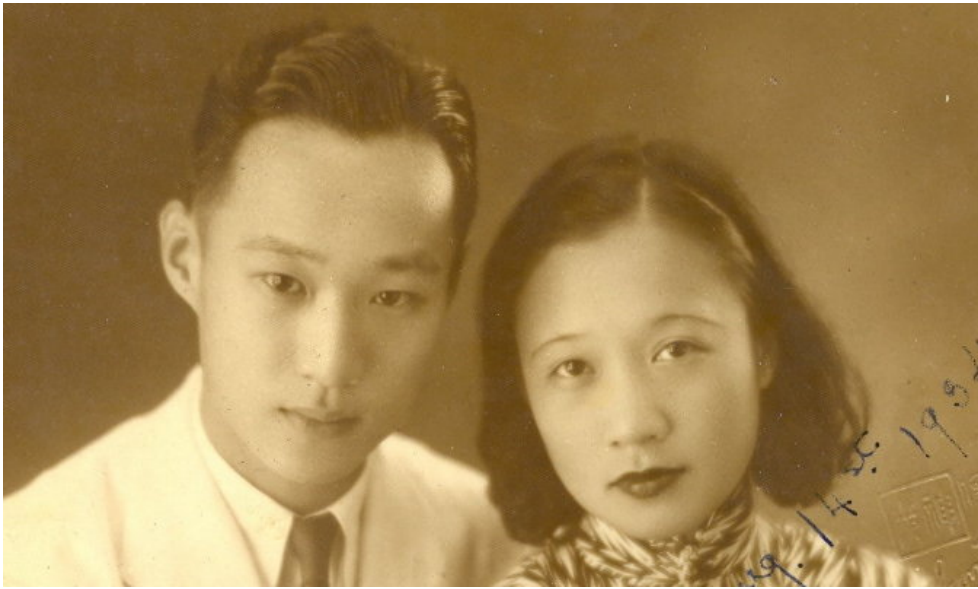
7 great-grandsons: Ryan Lo, Kyle Chuang, Jaden Chuang, Jett Bisset, Jaz Bisset, Kaiden Birdsall, Kellan Birdsall

1 great-granddaughter: Lyla Lin

Acknowledgement

Appreciation goes to Tanya, Sandy and Myron for doing the proof reading and editing.

Photo Gallery



Hong Yuen and Ellen 1934



Tony, Chu Shek 1938



HY and Ellen 1937



Ellen floating in Hong Kong Harbor



Her father



Her mother



HY, Grandma 2, Grandma 1, Ellen

Two grandmas, wife 2 and wife 1 of her mother's father, took care of her after she lost her mother at the age of seven in the race track fire in 1918



Sitting at the center: Ellen's paternal grandmother



Her brother



HY and Ellen



Ellen in the garden of her father's house



Ellen's relatives and friends



1964
Hong-Yuen Lo
July 12, 1912 - October 2, 1966



2009
Miu-Ling Lo
December 25, 1911 - December 23, 2012



El Cerrito, 1969



Tony and Theresa Wedding, El Cerrito, 1969



CC and Sarah Wedding, Berkeley, 1965



Milly and Monty Wedding 1965



Maple and Carlos 1973



Ellen and children and grandchildren ~1974



Ellen and her children and grandchildren on her 80th Birthday in Bethesda, Maryland 1991

**Ellen's 90th Birthday Celebration, 2001
Albany, California.**





Milly/Monty and family 2004



Ellen's grandson Myron's Wedding May 1st 2004



Lafayette, CA 2008



Albany, CA 2009



El Cerrito, CA 2010



Moraga, CA 2011



El Cerrito, CA 2011



El Cerrito, CA 2011



Ellen's 100th Birthday cake

El Cerrito, CA
December 25, 2011

The Seven Great-Grandsons



Kyle 2012



Jaden 2012



Ryan 2012



Jazz and Jet 2012



Kaiden and Kellan 2011

One Great-Granddaughter



Lyla 2012