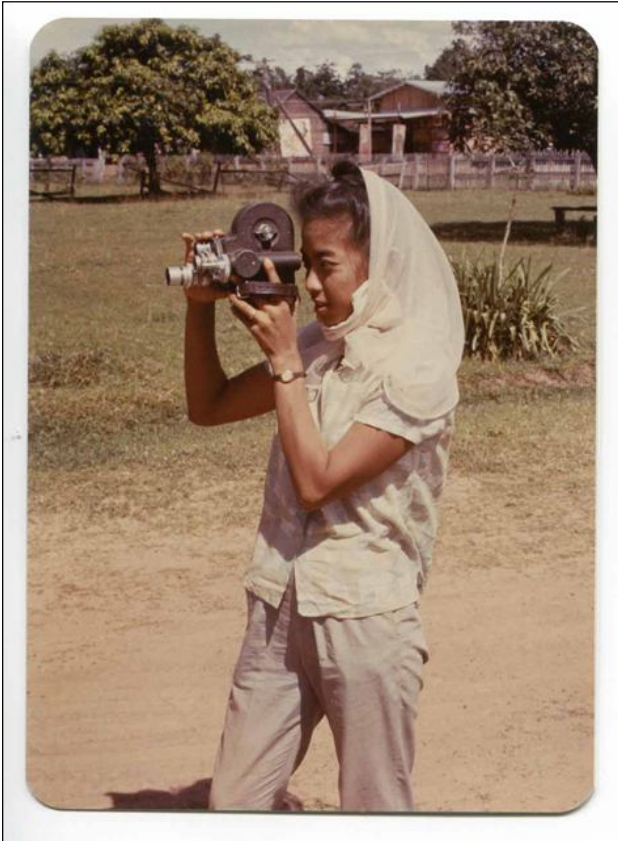


Civil Rights Activism

Ruth Lor Malloy



Ruth Lor Malloy, working as a photojournalist, c. 1960s

Name: Ruth Lor Malloy

Date of Birth: 1932

Place of Birth: Brockville, Ontario

Profession: Social worker, photojournalist and author

WHY did she get involved? After Ruth graduated from university in 1954, she wanted to find a way to combine her desire to travel and her passion for helping others. As a visible minority growing up in the town of Brockville, Ontario, she was keenly interested in the mounting civil rights movement, taking place in the United States and Canada at the time. She was also upset by the racial dimension of Canada's immigration policies prior to 1967, and the effects of these laws on Chinese Canadian families and communities.

HOW did she get involved? Ruth attended a pacifist conference in Washington, D.C. in 1954, and was exposed to the idea of non-violent racial integration. She and a team of other activists in Baltimore, Maryland visited local restaurants, swimming pools, and other public sites, to ensure that access was being granted to all, regardless of race. She was shocked by the racism she encountered. She continued this work in Dresden, Ontario. She also joined groups petitioning the federal government for more equitable immigration laws.

What EFFECT did her involvement have? Through the work of Ruth, and others like her, integration laws in Canada and the United States were enforced, and the federal government revised Canadian immigration law in 1967, removing race as a relevant factor. On a personal level, her community involvement made her aware of the power that individuals have to change the world, and the importance of getting government support for your cause.

In her own words...

Ruth Lor Malloy, reflecting on successfully petitioning the Canadian government for less discriminatory immigration policy:

"I never thought about rights... [It] wasn't until this [success] happened that I realized that we did have rights. And we had power. That was great."

Community Planning and Development Shirley Chan



Sod-turning for the Mao Dan co-operative, built by S.P.O.T.A. (Shirley Chan's mother Marv Lee Chan on left). c. 1970s

Name: Shirley Chan

Date of Birth: 1947

Place of Birth: Vancouver, British Columbia

Profession: Chief Executive Officer of a community development organization

WHY did she get involved? Shirley learned of plans to expropriate and demolish houses in Vancouver, B.C.'s Strathcona neighbourhood in order to build a highway. Strathcona was a popular neighbourhood for Chinese Canadians because of its proximity to Chinatown. Shirley believed that this expropriation would devastate her parents and her neighbours, because many families did not have the resources to relocate.

HOW did she get involved? Shirley, her mother Mary Lee Chan, and other concerned residents formed S.P.O.T.A. (Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association). They roused their neighbours, going door-to-door and informing the public of the city's plans. Shirley was made S.P.O.T.A.'s spokesperson in the English-language media.

What EFFECT did her involvement have? Although S.P.O.T.A. faced some early defeats, in the end they were successful, and many Strathcona houses, including the house belonging to Shirley's parents, were saved.

In her own words...

Shirley Chan, describing her first time speaking at a community meeting:

"I finally stood up and said what they were doing was fundamentally wrong. Listening to my neighbours, listening to my parents at home, [I concluded] that to take people's homes away from them and they couldn't get another mortgage because a lot of them were old and no longer working [was wrong]."

Political Engagement

Jan Mah



Jan Mah (on right) at the campaign office for candidate Steven Yu, c. 1993

Name: Jan Mah

Date of Birth: 1944

Place of Birth: Calgary, Alberta

Profession: Executive Recruiter – Human Resources

WHY did she get involved? In the 1960s, Jan met a municipal candidate whose campaign she supported. After his election, Jan came to appreciate the value of having elected representatives who are trustworthy, and who reflect one's beliefs. Her first-hand involvement in election campaigns made her appreciate the importance of campaign staff and volunteers.

HOW did she get involved? Jan has been involved in election campaigns at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, from the 1960s to the present day. She has taken on a variety of roles, including campaign chairperson. Jan has earned a reputation as a hard worker, and is regularly approached by political candidates inside and outside of Calgary's Chinese Canadian community.

What EFFECT did her involvement have? Through her hard work, Jan has helped people get elected to office at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. On a personal level, her involvement has left her with an appreciation of Canadian democracy and the democratic process, and a recognition of the value of effective politicians.

In her own words...

Jan Mah, describing her reasons for getting involved in politics:

"[The candidate that I supported] stood up and said what he was going to do, and he did it. I thought that was really important. It made me really think that there were people you could count on... I think that really started the political part of my life."

Youth Engagement

Alice Yeh



Alice Yeh, celebrating a wartime victory, 1944

Name: Alice Yeh

Date of Birth: 1919

Place of Birth: Victoria, British Columbia

Profession: Social worker

WHY did she get involved? In 1938, Japan and China were at war. Alice and her friends, all recent high school graduates, were outraged that Canada was supporting Japan's war by exporting scrap metal to Japan. They wanted to take action to stop this. At the same time, they recognized that the average person living in Victoria at that time had a very distorted view of China and Chinese culture, based on stereotypes and racist film depictions.

HOW did she get involved? Alice and her friends formed a youth group with a goal of raising awareness of Chinese culture among influential people in Victoria, and thereby winning their support for China. The young Chinese Canadians met regularly to learn about Chinese culture from their elders, and to write plays. They performed the plays for large audiences that included many powerful people in Victoria.

What EFFECT did her involvement have? The cultural performances put on by Alice and her friends in the 1930s likely introduced many white people in Victoria to Chinese culture. By 1941, the war between China and Japan became part of World War Two: Canada became an ally of China, and Japan was a wartime enemy. On a personal level, Alice believes that her work with the youth group taught her to be humble and approachable – traits that helped her throughout her life.

In her own words...

Alice Yeh, explaining her youth group's activities:

"We decided to form a youth organization and to bring Chinese culture so that [Victoria's white community] will understand and get to know us better. We had a wonderful time doing it because we learned as a result. We met once a week at my home. There's ten of us. We deliberated and we decided to learn from the older people. We asked the older people to tell us about Chinese culture... And we decided we would write plays and present them as a drama on stage for the entertainment of the Caucasian audience so they will come and know us and not be fearful of us."