

Chinatown Storytelling Centre

Vancouver Chinatown Foundation

by **MIRANDA TA**

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Foundation

The Vancouver Chinatown Foundation received a B.C. | Canada 150 grant of \$75,000 to support the development of the Chinatown Storytelling Centre. The Centre is a purpose-built museum that houses and celebrates stories of the Chinese Canadian experience as told through the lens of Chinatown, Vancouver. Within the Centre are stories of men and women who first came to Canada with nothing and yet successfully built a life for themselves and their families. Until now these stories and struggles haven't had an institutional home, often remaining untold. In addition to powerful personal stories, the Centre also includes artifacts and cutting-edge technology to help visitors of all ages be educated and inspired by the powerful journey of Chinese Canadians and of Chinatown itself. The Centre seeks to channel the multitude of voices in the Chinese Canadian community with respect

and to develop a world-class cultural attraction to help carry forward Chinatown and its community into the future. The Chinatown Storytelling Centre will be opening Fall 2018.

Oftentimes, we think of the history of social justice as a narrative punctuated by great moments and legendary figures. However, this history can also be found in the overlooked stories of individuals and communities; a latticework of everyday people standing up for themselves in the face of adversity. Listening to community members recounting their history in and around Chinatown can transport you back in time to these moments of resistance. The goal of the Chinatown Storytelling Centre is to provide an accessible touchpoint and physical space to preserve and share in the neighbourhood's rich history of bravery and persistence. In doing so, the Storytelling Centre is actively making space for these stories to become a part of the narrative of what it means to be Canadian.



The Centre explores stories like that of Vivian Jung. Vivian's story opens hearts to the struggles endured in the past by Chinese Canadians. Vivian Jung was a mother, a dancer, and a passionate community member. She was also the first teacher of Chinese descent hired by the Vancouver School Board. To become a teacher, Vivian needed swimming certification. However, back in the early 1940s, non-whites weren't allowed access to public pools. Denied entry, her instructor and classmates protested in solidarity, refusing to enter the pool until Vivian could as well. Their collective act of courage represented the beginning of the



desegregation of public spaces in Vancouver and British Columbia. Vivian went on to teach at Tecumseh School for 35 years. Giving her story a voice at the Storytelling Centre is an act of community assertion, healing, and reconciliation. Having a platform to share stories like hers promotes human connection and empathy – the very things most necessary to build bridges across communities. The Storytelling Centre makes space and provides visibility for the legacy of Vivian Jung, thereby integrating the legacy of her community into the broader social inheritance of British Columbia.

The Chinatown Storytelling Centre will provide an active platform for dialogue around themes of immigration, racism, adversity, and community spirit with a focus on social justice, heritage, and our shared intercultural history. The Centre ensures that the legacy of Chinese Canadians lives on not only in the memories of the people of the community, but also in accessible spaces that that can be shared with all British Columbians.

WEBSITES: chinatownstorytellingcentre.org/ & www.chinatown-foundation.org/

TWITTER: @TheChinatownSC

Vivian Jung, the first teacher of Chinese descent hired by the Vancouver School Board.
Photo credit: Courtesy of Vancouver Chinatown Foundation

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