

Read by his grandson, Rockland Leong

Introduction

We begin the eulogy for Walter Sing Leong with two words, ..."without prejudice " (ha, ha).

And we welcome you, Wally's family and close inner circle of friends, to celebrate his complex life.

In the messages from many of you, we heard loud and clear he was a "fascinating man," one of a kind. "Complicated but oh so kind." Yah, 89 years of complicated! It is only when we collect stories that we get to know a person fully. With Wally and the process of gathering stories, his life is amplified through all of you, exposing so many different facets of his life. Who knew he was a bit of a Jock, a baseball champ, a downhill skier, a skilled Chinese cook? And could darn socks using a light bulb! Or that he worked in a plywood factory, cleaning glue spreaders and as a peeler on cottonwood logs? And even was a petty thief in his youth, set on the right path by the Borstal Association, where would return to help troubled kids find their way. He built an intricate model boat, from scratch; he had shop skills from high school and was an all-round handy man. And of course he became a mechanical engineer, but spent most of his very lo-o-o-o-ong career as a land developer doing civil engineering work.

Wally had way more facets than most people. Like his son, Kerry said, "he's had the failures of 10 lives and the successes of 20."

He certainly "dared greatly."

The words of Theodore Roosevelt come to mind:

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

— from the "Citizenship in a Republic," Speech in Paris, 1910

Early years (childhood)

Walter... “Wally”... Sing Leong was born in Victoria to Chap Kwong Leong & Ellen Kate Nipp, he was the eldest son of the 7 siblings that grew up in Vancouver. Unbeknownst to Wally, there was also another family of his father’s in China, and we are lucky to have descendants of this family here today.

In the early years the family lived at the Corner of Gore & Pender in Vancouver where his mother taught at the Chinese School. They lived in a tiny 2 room apartment on the third floor, behind the Chinese school. The 2nd floor was a Chinese rooming house, for the many single Chinese men in those days. As a Canadian born Chinese woman, his Mother Kate was well known around the community as a translator and navigator of Canadian systems that were in constant flux. Their social network would serve them well from the beginnings, when his mother’s friends would bring up fish head from the docs at the end of Gore Ave. Wally remembers his mom cooking them the Chinese way, with black beans . He said, “The cheeks were really nice.”

Their tiny Vancouver apartment attached to the Chinese school was too small for their growing family, so the youngest stayed, and Wally spent some early years in Victoria with his Aunt Susie, as well as other siblings from time to time. She was a “tough cookie, “ Wally remembered.”She kicked us out the back door into alley,” like once when he didn’t want a haircut. “It was scary, like a dungeon, a dead end alley with garbage bins and metal fire escapes.” He also said, “Aunt Susie was pretty good to us really.” He also remembered following Uncle Fred around to the social club where the men would pay him a nickel to be a foot stool while they played Majong. ...just in fun really. The York Theatre was next door to Susie’s and he would pay that nickel, or sometimes go for free, to watch Hop-along Cassidy, The Lone Ranger, Buck Jones, or any of those old cowboy movies.

He returned to live in Vancouver when he started public school. He remembers playing marbles on the dirt Boulevard. And a version of battleship by drawing a grid in the dirt. Later, they used grid paper for learning to write Chinese *characters* to play battleship. Of course this was long before the plastic game came out. They used to play chestnuts, soak them and bake them to make them hard, drill a hole and tie a string. And they used a stack of Chinese coins, tied together thru the hole, as a weight and kick it, keep it up in the air, ...the original hacky-sack.

Wally would ride around Vancouver with his Uncle Bill delivering bread for the family business, the BC Bakery at Hastings and McLean. As he grew up, they played hard and worked hard in the various family businesses. And he would tag along with Uncle Bill, “he was a gambler,” Wally said. They would drop by the horse-races, beginning Wally’s obsession with horse racing. And there was an impressionable trip to San Francisco to see their Uncle Frank. Wally and his brother Ken went for the long drive with Uncle Bill in his brand new Oldsmobile ’98. Along the way, they visited race tracks, and an x-jockey, among other stops. Uncle Bill drank a whole bottle of whiskey for supper, ...every nite, a whole bottle, drank it straight! They were trying to fix the races and make good money off the bets.

15th Ave house

1942 moved up to 15th Ave. when he was about 8 years old. Nobody lived behind there, it was all black berry bushes in those days. Wally remembers climbing the tree in the back yard and picking cherries. Simon Fraser Elementary was across the street. And he took the 16th and Main street-car downtown to Chinese school every day, 4:30 to 6:30 and Saturdays 9 am to noon, until high-school, when he rebelled and went with all his friends to play sports. Or to Kits Beach with his buddies, a big group of them all together. They stuck together. They were “the good guys,.. the boy scouts.” They’d all hang out together and the gangs of bullies would leave them alone because they were a big group. Wally attended the first Canadian Boy Scout Jamboree in 1949. They travelled by train, to Ottawa picking up Boy Scouts as they went across Canada. He was the only Asian-Canadian at the Jamboree.

From 15th Avenue, they’d ride their bikes around, to play and to deliver groceries for the family grocery store, Western Produce at 25th and Main. Especially he and his friend Jimmy, as they would get tips from the customers.

And yes, he was a bit of jock. He and his buddies played football, soccer, baseball. And they went to church because that was the only place they could play basketball. His brother, Ken remembered Wally building hurdles, setting them up on 15th Avenue in front of their house, trying to make the King Edward High School track team.

Lillian / high school - UBC

Wally was “very popular, so good looking, idolized by the younger ones, star of the school,” his sister Joan recalls.

All the girls were in love with Wally. After his girlfriend Audrey, he dated Lillian Lindroth in high school. And all the boys were in love with Lillian, but she went to prom with Wally.

After high school he worked for Western Plywood. “Geeze that was hard work,” Wally recalled. After 2 years, “to hell with that,... too hard work,” he said. Having completed grade 13 by correspondence, he entered UBC directly into 1st year engineering. Lillian went to UBC as well, to be a teacher. Money was tight but they managed with bursaries, summer work, family help, and Lillian’s practicums in teacher training.

Wally eloped with Lillian in 1957 while at UBC. They lived in an attic apartment near UBC. His buddy, Bruce says, “It was a tiny place and you could not stand up straight.” They used to play bridge.

Wally graduated as a mechanical engineer in 1960. The same year his first son, Kerry, was born. He had two more children with Lillian, a daughter, Leslie in 1962 and son Shane in 1963. He enjoyed little kids immensely.

Early work life

After graduating, he worked for BC Electric (a.k.a. BC Hydro) as a continuation of his summer jobs. Sometime in there he created Vector Mechanical doing mechanical work on a plant in Victoria, probably for sister company, BC Gas.

Afterwards he worked for H&R Block, becoming skilled at squeezing more lots out of subdivisions, increasing the revenue of his employer. He then questioned the costs of construction for these subdivisions, suggesting they paid too much. His employer said something like, "ok smarty pants, let's see you manage it." Always up for a challenge, he did and saved them money. He also worked for land developers, the Wall brothers at some point. He always had ideas, and liked to think a little further on projects.

He acquired a house at the edge of the development in North Vancouver, 2611 Standish Drive, and his younger brothers came to live with their young family.

Lillian, with her best friend and teaching colleague, Wilda Burbidge, discovered a fishing lodge on a nice lake in the backroads of BC. Osprey Lake became Wally's first subdivision created on his own, ...well, with Al Reid, the fishing lodge & property owner. Wally subdivided, put in access roads, and such. He and Al shared the profits. He bought the adjoining property down the lake and expanded the subdivision. He created two companies for land development, Vector Engineering (which may have morphed from Vector Mechanical), and Arthon Construction, both with partners. And so began his foray into the Okanagan and independent land development. Through subdivision development, Wally excelled. One example, In the words of Bonnie Thom, "Wally made 3 very wealthy widows." But it was not without strife along the way.

Lea

Back in 1964, Wally left BC Hydro. He met Lea Binet, at BC Hydro, who became another wife. With the arrival of Daughter Michelle in 1968, he created a second family with Lea down in Santa Monica, California. They returned to Kelowna with the arrival of Suzanne in 1970. As most of you know, Wally made things complicated, there were two Mrs. Leongs, and much chaos, creating challenging situations, that were confusing for all, as well as confounding. That's probably why he spent most of his time away. Lea separated in the early 1980's, leaving Wally to live in a trailer on the Mission Creek Farm property, which we will get to later.

Business

It wasn't just complicated in family matters, he also created complexity in business. He had no choice in order to recover financially. The recession in the early 1980's combined with the unpredictable failure of a start-up chemical business brought his financial house down. It was an

unfortunate turn of events, and sad that the production of the inflammable plastic was not realized. As his friend Denis said, “a remarkable product that would change the world.”

As we heard earlier, the failures of 10 lives and the triumphs of 20; Wally crawled back out the financial hole, a big hole, with “clever intrigue” - pun intended. He was very creative, thinking about how he can regain some of his lost property, horses, and anything he could. He did manage to achieve this legally, but just barely, as there were law suits, even against The Crown. And rules were changed as a result. Although accountants may cringe, he was proud that he had won a long and difficult fight, and today, the Canadian Tax act references his company.

He had a tendency to hover in the grey area of legality. Some of us wonder, “what legal document will my name show up on?”

In response to Wally’s question, “I don’t wanna report that; do I have to report that?” An accountant once said, “I don’t even wanna say I heard that.”

Two key aspects of Wally were his workaholic drive and his belief that *time was of the essence*. They go hand in hand. His friend Denis only played golf with him once. Denis explained, “so we get nine holes done, and we go up to the shack, where most golf courses serve you a drink or some food. And your dad looked at me and he says, 'We're not going to play another nine holes, are we?' He said, 'We've already spent two hours out here just hitting a goddamn little white ball for no goddamn reason.' I said, “Take it easy.” He couldn't take it. The next two hours were more stressful on him than if he had gone home.”

His phone calls (at least with family) were not much of a conversation. You’re talking, or trying to talk, and he’s on to the next thing outside of the phone call, “Yup, yup, okay, …” and you know he’s already gone anyway.

Once he drove 2301 km to pick up a truck from his daughter in Whitehorse, intending to turn around drive back the same day, hauling the vehicle home another 2301 km. Time is of the essence.

“Waste not want not” is another of his mantras, I guess that includes time!

He saw opportunity everywhere he looked, whether it was creating subdivisions maximizing the number of lots, piles of waste metal that could be collected, a clever way to clean up an oil slick on water, or even in the horse-racing industry.

Horse racing & breeding

From those early years with his uncle Bill, he carried on with horse racing as a hobby. His famous advice was “Get a horse and get in the game!!” He was also heard saying, “I’m not superstitious, but I never bet on my own horse.”

When he discovered that BC breeders receive a portion of a horse’s winnings, even when they

don't own it, he just had to take up this opportunity. Wally garnered investors and turned his hobby into a business venture inspired by BC's thoroughbred breeding incentive programs. They brought some good bloodlines, including Golden Reserve's, to British Columbia's thoroughbred stock. Friends enjoyed the practice of naming Horses after members of their families.

One of his creative financial endeavours included a race horse syndicate. Wally put a syndicate together to buy back a valuable horse from the bank. It may have involved "paper" partners. Later this horse made substantial income from breeding rights. Fortunately, breeding rights follow ownership in the horse breeding industry, which was unbeknownst to the bank at the time.

He seldom attended the races at the track, he always listened to the races on the radio, and then watched them on TV as the media industry changed. His friend Denis told us, "if anyone slept with Wally in the same room, you get up in the middle of the night to relieve yourself. You open up the bathroom door, and you'd find Wally sitting on the toilet reading the racing form. It did seem like he was always reading the Racing Form.

In the fall of 2011, Wally and Ralph were hauling 6 yearlings to Langley for their introduction to racetrack life and he said, "Ralph I need a big horse." Back in the trailer was a yearling colt out of a Danzig mare, by the American Champion English Channel, barn name: "Duncan". Wally didn't know it at the time but he and Terry had the "Biggest Horse to come out of Western Canada" in that trailer that afternoon. Duncan's racing name was *Strait of Dover* and he would make history winning the Queen's Plate, "running on the engine" and break the track record doing it!

Terry

And this brings us to Terry. Wally met Terry Winnick in 1984, where she worked at the car rental counter in Kelowna airport. It turned out she was just what he needed. She could be found on the farm with her hand all the way up inside a mare, right to the shoulder, feeling around in there. And Wally says, "well, that's Terry." She was just the right mix for Wally. Somebody that could love horses as much as he loved horses.

She came as a package deal with children, Craig at age 14 and Serena 9. Terry moved onto Mission Creek Farm with Wally. Shortly after, Mission Creek Farm went into receivership, so they moved in with his high school friend, Bruce Eagle and his wife.

Wally managed to buy a piece of undeveloped land back from the receiver. In 1986, they created Canyon Farms in this once idyllic spot with the creek running through it. Canyon Farms is not your typical high-brow operation and Terry and Wally weren't stereotypical owner/breeders of famous racehorses. Terry can still be found daily with shovels, buckets and hay in-hand. And Wally, would run the tractor, tackling a never-ending list of repairs, or be hunched over mounds of paper work. Sounds terrible, eh? So what drove them? The love of horses, the thrill of racing, and the possibility that this horse might be "*the one*." And we are happy to say they did have "*the one*," that once-in-a-lifetime horse.

Snippets & Quirky things:

He was a fortunate man, but mostly it was a drive that made it all happen. He was lucky to have a close group of friends from high school and elementary school. They stuck together, helped each other throughout life, with a trusting bond amongst them, collectively using their individual skills to prosper.

Despite the wide knowledge he accumulated, there was still this small piece of innocence that lingered. Denis Gates recalls a US airport security incident, where Wally yelled to Stu, 'Have you got the Coke?' Another time, he was talking to a real estate agent about the "condoms" at Hemlock Valley, considering a condominium purchase at the ski resort. He had a surprising kid-like side, being excited about finding ghost stickers that smelled like vanilla with the word "Boo" matching his daughter's licence plate.

And he loved toddlers. perhaps it was the innocence they expressed. Wally enjoyed his 18 grandkids, and his 7 great grandkids.

He also loved his deals, if you mentioned you needed anything, he would comb the classifieds for the perfect deal. He would search consumer reports. On the hunt for the best price for best product. And boy did he love Princess Auto; you could never have enough tarps!

He would seek out the most authentic Chinese food and, of course, at the best price. He loved his Chinese Kau-Yuk, hot-pot pork belly. He would order in Cantonese out of habit. When his friend Denis was asked to "order the usual" for a group. He had no idea how to do that. "You know, order the regular," Wally said. but Denis doesn't speak Cantonese.

Wally could not imagine a household without the staple of a kitchen, like Chinese sausage, tubs of hoisin sauce, oyster sauce, and vats of soya sauce, both dark and light varieties. Consequently, he was known to distribute these necessities among his various families.

He was often found asleep in the living room recliner, after saying, "Yup, yup, just gotta shut my eyes for a minute."

He had a strong aversion to hospitals after injuries and incidents. His daughter came in one day to find him in that recliner holding a cloth on his forehead. "Ah, it's nothing, just gotta rest here." he said. A horse had kicked him. Looking at the gash on his head revealed the sight of his skull through the hole in his skin. The doctor confirmed, "yes, you needed to come in," while he stitched up the wound"

Some of you may remember his grapefruit phase in the 1980s. And he always loved old movies, mayonnaise and, of course, Ice-cream! He always had the radio on, listening to sports, racing, whatever was on. Then the TV as times changed.

Most years, he went to Hawaii for his annual break from it all. He wasn't much of a world traveler, he just wanted to get away and rest, but it was common for him to create a project, changing this or that in one of the units. It was hard for him NOT to see what could be done. He did go on a trip to China, and fishing trips with the guys, his friends and sons

The Ending

After being kicked and injured by horses over the years his body was a bit beat up. It slowed him down as he dealt with pain. Eventually his body gave up. And now our family's safety blanket is gone. Even if you never put it on, it was always there just in case. That was the comfort he created. Maybe that's what made it easier for us to try stuff and take risks, exploring many different things in our lives.

Now our safety blanket is not there anymore, but he was a planner, he's still taking care of us in the legacy of his long life of hard work. He also planned for his departure, he said wanted, "no bugs or worms chewing on me," so his ashes now sit in a Chinese clay cooking vessel that Terry found in piles of stuff, likely hoarded from his childhood era. But really, he probably would have wanted to be put in a ziplock bag, ...double bagged.

Wally is survived by wife Terry, children; Kerry, Leslie, Michelle, Suzanne, Craig & Serena, 18 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren. He is predeceased by his son Shane and his previous wives, Lea and Lillian.

Wally will be forever remembered for his love of horses and the legacy he leaves in the thoroughbred racing industry in BC & Canada. It's the sport of Kings, and Wally was a King, ...of a different kind.

As an engineer and land developer, Wally's contributions to the Okanagan will continue to flourish. He will be deeply missed by his family, friends & colleagues. And he will be fondly remembered for his brilliant ingenuity and generosity.

After his fast & furious (as well as long) life, we wish him a fond farewell fit for a king, and may he finally rest in peace.