

Transcription: BV023.16.17
Interview with Richard N. Liu
Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3
Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)
Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)
Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

1 INTVWR: Today is Monday, September 11th. This is the interviewer, Denise Fong, a researcher
2 at Burnaby Village Museum. I'm here with our interviewee, Richard N. Liu, who will be
3 speaking with us today about his experience of growing up and working in Burnaby. Today, we
4 are doing the interview at the Love Farmhouse at Burnaby Village Museum. Thank you,
5 Richard. It's really, really an honor to interview you today. Thank you so much for taking the
6 time to speak with us. We're really excited to learn more about your experiences around the
7 world through the interview. So, if you don't mind starting off, telling us your name in English
8 and Chinese.

9 RL: Sure. Thanks, Denise. It's great to be here. My English name is Richard N Liu. My Chinese
10 name is Liu-Nianzu in Mandarin. In Cantonese, it's Lau Nim Zou.

11 INTVWR: Thank **00:01:00** you. And when and where were you born?

12 RL: I was born on May 12th, 1970, in Toronto, Ontario.

13 INTVWR: And which hospital? Do you remember?

14 RL: Saint Michael's hospital, which is located near U of T where my father was doing research.

15 INTVWR: Oh, okay. That's great. Can you tell us the names of your parents?

16 RL: Sure. My mom, Elizabeth Liu. Well, her Chinese name is **[01:27 Wu Ming-de]** in
17 Mandarin. In Cantonese, it's **[inaudible 01:33]** Yeah.

18 INTVWR: And your father?

19 RL: My father is Liu Dun-ren for. Well, Richard Liu for English, so I'm junior, Liu Dun-ren in
20 Mandarin. But interesting he has another name, **[1:52 Liu Mei-yuan]**, which is very unusual to
21 say. **00:02:00** They, they, he was born in the Civil War in 1936 in Shanghai. During that time, he
22 had lost three older brothers, I believe. His parents, I believe, went to a fortune-teller and they
23 said, "You need to give him a female name to make sure, he'd be okay." So, he ended up getting
24 the Liu Mei-yuan name and I just remember growing up with it. I was wondering, it didn't sound
25 like a male name. I eventually figured that part out. He **00:03:00** grew up in Japanese occupied
26 Shanghai when there were the concessions during that time. He doesn't have too many fond
27 memories of that time. He shared some of that when we were growing up, he's spoken about
28 crossing a particular bridge. If they weren't bowing their head, the Japanese soldier would whack
29 him across the head. That was the first time I heard my dad speak about it. He said they would
30 just call you, smack you over the head, and say, "Baka", which is basically stupid. Then
31 **00:04:00** my father would also remember seeing his mom and sisters going out in search of food
32 and rice to keep everyone provided. I think they were rations, I believe, at the time because we're
33 talking about World War II and Shanghai was occupied by many different concessions. I can't
34 imagine what that would be like, but based on what he told me the family would eventually leave
35 Mainland China for Taiwan because my grandfather, his father, was a congressman for the
36 KMT, for the nationalist government. Where my father's uncle, the older brother to my
37 grandfather, was a high-level diplomat for the government. Trying **00:05:00** to remember now,
38 my dad had mentioned being thrown across to a boat on the dockside to get on a boat to leave.

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

39 The river was strewn with people's belongings, like suitcases and stuff like that. It was quite
40 graphic in my mind, like to hightail it out of there not knowing what would happen. Yeah, that
41 was my dad's tale in leaving China, Mainland China at the time. They ended up in Taiwan and
42 would live there. And sadly, three of my dad's older 00:06:00 sisters, that's right three sisters,
43 stay behind. They were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution because of the relationship to
44 the KMT. I think one had committed suicide because of it. Fortunately, enough, my dad was able
45 to reunite with one of them in the late '70s. We kept in touch all the way until she passed away
46 about 10 years ago, something like that. So, we're very fortunate to have that relationship. My
47 dad ended up just staying in Taiwan, majored in Spanish, which is very unusual because back in
48 those days everyone was learning American English because of the US relationship with the
49 nationalist government. 00:07:00

50 INTVWR: Did he ever explain why he chose Spanish?

51 RL: Yeah. It's a lesson I've always kept close to my heart because he always says, "Never take
52 the beaten path, make, charter your own way, and lead in that way as well." He had found that if
53 you went to learn English, you'd have 100 students for that one prof. When he took Spanish, it
54 was only him, he had one prof to himself. It was just that belief that he could just be able to do
55 something and excel in it, which he did, because he ended up getting a scholarship to go to
56 Madrid. He did his master's in classical Spanish literature in University of Madrid, and 00:08:00
57 he was telling me how lonely it was as a student, too. You have to imagine this is the 1950s
58 around there and how lonely it was to study abroad in a country which didn't have all the Asian
59 amenities that we're familiar with, so he would, but he succeeded. I mean, his Spanish is good
60 that one of my best friends from high school who is half Catalanian and half Mexican, he said,
61 "Your dad's Spanish is amazing. If I close my eyes, I would think he's a Spaniard." I'm like,
62 "That's a real good compliment. I never imagined because I can't tell." but if that's how good it
63 was or it is still. That's why I admired my dad in that respect because he was so keen on getting
64 that language down. He said 00:09:00 when he was in Taiwan, it was just coming back to me
65 right now, when he was in Taiwan he would, because the family was not well off and he didn't
66 really have a place to study, so he would go outside under the lamppost and study there. It was
67 just one of those memories, it just kind of surfaced up just now for me. Just like, "Oh yeah". He
68 had those moments of reflection and shared that with me and my brothers we were growing up,
69 lucky we were to study, we had a room to study, and all that. Yeah, he did his master's there and
70 after he finished his master's, he went to work for the Vatican, the Holy See's Press Office in
71 Rome. That's where he met my mom. My 00:10:00 mom's story is also equally interesting
72 because, like I said, he had, I think he was the only one in that classroom from the way he was
73 talking because there's really no competition for the scholarship then, but he excelled in it
74 because he wanted to go to Spain and wanted to make sure he was able to get to a very good
75 university. I just remember him telling me about, like, he'd be able, because... okay, so you got
76 to imagine back in the day there wasn't Duolingo or any of those electronics. You had to really
77 study from paper and books and everything right, those resources in front of you. Back in the
78 day, you had to learn Latin as your root language before you went into the romance languages of
79 French, Spanish, 00:11:00 Italian, right. So funny story about that is, and I think it was a bit

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

80 detrimental to me - I think about it now, but when you think about the travel time he had to go
81 from Taiwan to Europe was going to fly. I don't think they were - were they available back then?
82 If not, it was way too much. So when you're talking about an average person from Taiwan,
83 you're taking a boat and it's not first class, second class, you're in third class. My father shared a
84 story with me where this was a French liner, I believe, and the French sailors did not treat the
85 Asians very well. I remember him saying that there was like South Asians. The Indians were in
86 the ship with them, and the Chinese were there, and **00:12:00** the French sailors just did not treat
87 any of them well. On the last day of the voyage, they had all planned something. They said,
88 "Okay. When we get our last meal, we'll finish the meal, and then we'll open up the window and
89 throw out all the china, all the ivory as a way to protest or get back at the treatment that they
90 received." And it's kind of like, wow, that was quite, that was the rebel of my dad that I never
91 knew. And so, that, that I think that's sort of, effected hi, why he never went into French because
92 he could have excelled in it. He excelled in Spanish, he excelled in Italian, but I never heard him
93 speak French. And I'm always wondering whether that sort of effected his **00:13:00** path to
94 learning that other additional language. Because he spoke Mandarin, Shanghainese, Cantonese,
95 and I'm sure Minan because he was in Taiwan and English, Spanish, and Italian. So why not
96 French? I have a feeling like he never told me this specifically, but I have a feeling that particular
97 voyage affected his view of that particular language or that particular culture - I don't know.
98 Maybe because at his young age, you had to think he was from university, just graduated from
99 university and heading off to Madrid for his master's. So that probably had a direct impact on his
100 enthusiasm **00:14:00** to learn that additional European language because he would also learn
101 Arabian as well. So, I knew he was a very open-minded to learning and he was very absorbent.
102 He was absorbing everything when he was a young student. He worked for the Holly Press,
103 yeah, Holy See's Press Office and he told me a story where he interviewed Sean Connery, James
104 Bond, right because that's when they were, the time they were filming James Bond was always
105 in, was always in Europe, especially Italy. And the funny part, like the takeaway was, Sean
106 Connery always wore a toupee. He never had real hair; it was always a wig on his head. It was a
107 mop on there. You'd see him in later years, he'd always have that bald head but that's been there
108 for a long time. But the funny thing was that my dad interviewed **00:15:00** and he realized, "Oh,
109 he doesn't have real hair. It's a toupee." So he would interview, like, Anne, Margaret and all that
110 stuff but - yeah, he had quite an interesting time working in Europe.

111 INTVWR: What did he do for his work?

112 RL: He was a reporter. He as a reporter. So, journalism, very early on for the Holy See Press
113 Office, Holy See's Press Office that's there in the Vatican. Interesting time was, I think, he was
114 supposed to be primed to be a diplomat with his language ability and everything there in his
115 worldly outlook. He had always communicated with his uncle who was by that point this is the
116 50s, so I think by that point, he is the ambassador in either the UN or Mexico by **00:16:00** that
117 point. He was always getting letters of encouragement and the like, but I think my father must
118 have foresaw the writing on the wall that the nationalist government in Taiwan was no longer
119 going to be as powerful as it once was. And so, I think he had to start figuring out. Again, he has
120 never told me this personally but more just my educated guess by the way things were going

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

121 what just wasn't happening, right. I mean, even would eventually after getting married, they
122 would go to Toronto and have me. Right so...

123 INTVWR: How did your mom end up in Spain?

124 RL: She ended up in Italy. So, here's the long story of my mom. So, she was born in **00:17:00**
125 January 1946 in Chongqing. Now, if anyone knows Chinese history, the civil war, had been
126 going on and you had World War II coming in. World War II finished in September, August '45,
127 1945. So, my educated guess is that her family had also moved from Guangdong to Chongqing
128 and stayed safe there for the duration. And just when my mom was born, the Civil War is starting
129 to continue again because everything was starting and there was a lot of friction growing
130 between the communists and the nationalists. So, my mom was born in January of '46 **00:18:00**
131 and her parents, I believe, left that same year to go to Italy. They went for a very unusual reason.
132 Every time I think about it, it just makes me chuckle and go, "What was the thinking behind it?"
133 But my grandparents wanted to go to Italy to learn Italian opera. You know like, Luciano
134 Pavarotti, that thing. And so, they went over there, they would take a boat because I remember
135 seeing pictures of them visiting Singapore. Why Singapore? It's because my grandma, my
136 maternal grandfather, his brother, was also a diplomat and he was the consul general for China in
137 Singapore. And so, they went and hung out with his wife and **00:19:00** brother, and they stayed
138 there for a while. And I just remember, this was during that wartime era photo 'black and white'
139 thing. And then he stayed there for a while, and eventually the boat would continue on to Italy.
140 Now, I still really don't know the back story to how he decided to do this kind of thing, but
141 because all my mom's family were all medical practitioners from my great grandfather to my
142 grandfather's brothers and sister, they were all in some medical practice. Of course, the one
143 brother who's a diplomat. But my grandfather was an artist – so kind of skipped all that,
144 (laughing) which is fascinating. They eventually went to Italy and settled down there. My
145 grandfather learned, my grandmother, grandfather learned under this **00:20:00** Italian tenor who
146 was like Luciano Pavarotti at the time in the late '40s or early '50s. His name was Beniamino
147 Gigli, I believe that's how you pronounce it. He has a plaza named after him. I have a picture of
148 him, I can show you later, but he was such a big name that hearing that my own grandfather and
149 grandmother were able to be in his presence I'm going, wow, it's like me if I went to Luciano
150 Pavarotti and said "Hey, can you teach me Italian opera?" That's a big deal. I'm like, "Wow."
151 And apparently, my grandfather was so good that he became very well-known in Hong Kong in
152 the '60s and early **00:21:00** '70s before he passed away. That's why it's like a bit surreal for me
153 when I think about it. And that's why, that goes back to your question is like, "Why did my mom
154 end up going there?" Is because by the time she was 16, this would have been, what year would
155 that be, my math is really bad, but I think it's like the '60s, early '60s by that point or late '50s,
156 early '60s. I remember a photo which I actually found of her arriving at the airport being greeted
157 by her parents. I was like, Wow. Okay, so she got to flew. You know, she got the flew, fly over
158 to Italy. **00:22:00** And, so what's interesting is that that point, see if I could backtrack a little bit
159 here, before she left for Italy, she was living in Guangdong because we had a family hospital that
160 was named after my great grandfather that died for serving. He was assassinated, right but
161 anyways, my great grandfather's wife, my mom's grandmother, became the matriarch. So she

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

162 took care of my mom and her sister, and all the other family members. And they left Chongqing
163 and moved to Guangzhou and all that. So that's kind of why they stayed there until the
164 communists kicked them out. So and this is a fascinating **00:23:00** part because I was lucky
165 enough to see this, my mom's reaction, I was there, we were at the old residence where they used
166 to live in Guangzhou and my mom had this sudden realization or this memory - she had moon
167 cakes and the communists were kicking them out and she wanted to run back to get her
168 mooncakes, but they wouldn't let her. So I know now the time frame of when they were
169 kicked out - it was around this time, September or October of whatever year it was. I'm sure it
170 was about the '50s because things were slower to move. We didn't have the internet back in the
171 '40s or '50s. So, as the communists were taking over northern China, they eventually moved
172 southwards. And of course, Guangzhou is one of the southern most part of China, they **00:24:00**
173 finally reached there by the '50s, mid '50s, I think either that or late 50s, and forced anyone who
174 wasn't, who were property owners, I guess, forced them, you know to get rid of, that's all now
175 part of the state. So, the family hospital was no longer going to be ours or her grandmother's. So,
176 they had no choice but to pack what they had and left. And I remember my mom, my mom just
177 saying that [inaudible] "I can see it still". And she's just kind of going like, excited her eyes were
178 like, "I remember that I had my year being my mooncakes, and I always wanted to go back and
179 get it yet, they wouldn't let me." So anyways, they would move to Hong Kong and that's
180 probably where she grew up for a good part of her, I guess, would say early teenage years until
181 16. As I said earlier, she flew and got to Rome **00:25:00** by 16, and then she grew up the rest of
182 her life in Italy and met my dad. They got married in Geneva in Switzerland and they've had over
183 50 years of marriage. They even went back on their 50th to the Geneva to where they got
184 married in the city hall there - a beautiful, beautiful thing to see when I saw the photos after. But
185 yeah, they, they, I still haven't asked them this question. Why did they come to Canada? I think
186 probably because at the time, it was this new country that was opening up and I was like going,
187 "Mom, I was this close to being Italian." I still talk with my hands, but I really would have liked
188 to have that part but my parents, after I was born in Saint Michael's, **00:26:00** they brought me
189 back to the Vatican for my baptism. That's cool too. I can add that Italian part in there. I've only
190 met maybe one other person that can say they were baptized in the Vatican during my lifetime. It
191 was a neat experience. And every time I go back to Rome, I always make it a point to visit the
192 Vatican and go back to the point of where it kind of all started. It's very unique in that respect.
193 That's the shortened version of my parents, I guess you can say. I'm not sure if I have anything
194 else I wanted to add there.

195 INTVWR: Okay. How did you guys end up coming to the West Coast and moving to Burnaby?

196 RL: Okay. Well, my parents moved my brother and I from Vancouver Island to **00:27:00**
197 Burnaby in 1984. My guess is educated here because my father was already starting to do travel
198 between Canada and China, and I think, he was finding the direct flights, not direct flights,
199 indirect flights a bit unbearable because he would have to go from China to Hong Kong, I think
200 it is, then fly to Vancouver then to Victoria. And so that's a bit exhausting. So he ended up
201 coming here, starting a new business - a travel agency, and I just remember how hard it was for
202 them to start because it was just a small little office out in Shaughnessy, actually. And what's

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

203 funny enough **00:28:00** he didn't want to open up in Chinatown because I think the idea was if
204 you open in Chinatown, another one would open up across the street and you'd just be competing
205 with each other, and no one would make any profit. So, it would just be impossible. So again, my
206 father, with the way he thinks, take the unbeaten path with the Shaughnessy. I'm like, "But we're
207 living here in Burnaby. Why do you have to go all the way out there?" Right? And, and you
208 know, it was tough. My brother and I would help out, we were only in our early teens as well, so
209 we'd help out where we could and we saw the business slowly grow. It took a lot of time and a
210 lot of hard work. My parents had a lot of late nights, but the business thrived eventually. And
211 part **00:29:00** of that, I think was, again, the fact that my dad couldn't figure out, you know
212 living in Victoria, having to fly so many routes to get home. I think he said, "You know what?
213 I'm going to create a direct route." So, in September 1987, he arranged the first direct flight from
214 Beijing to Vancouver. So that's when we started getting direct flights, it was at the time, it was
215 with, and the acronym is only CAC. Don't ask me what it is because it's something to do with
216 China Avionics, something like that. And because he established that, is sort of, that's what
217 started a snowball **00:30:00** was the direct routing now to China. My brother and I were actually
218 on the first flight out to Beijing, so that was really cool. I didn't know how significant it was until
219 later in life because everyone started doing, "Oh, there's a first flight to China in this direction",
220 but I'm thinking like "Wait a second, didn't we do that already." Right so it was very, when you
221 think about it, it's not really that long ago. 1987 is not really that long ago. I mean, I'm not that
222 old. But you know, it's something that's not written in or documented, but I know a couple of
223 folks who remember that time and it's such a huge milestone because flying was such a
224 challenging thing for people who wanted to go to Asia. But yeah, I'm **00:31:00** proud of my dad
225 for having done that. I mean, it's one of his many achievements that he was able to do. I mean
226 before, even moving to Burnaby, he had also created the first twinning between Canada and
227 China in 1980 with Victoria and Suzhou, and that became the first twin sister city program for
228 Canada. And now, we have over 100 of those agreements signed. And Victoria Chinatown, I
229 remember, was a place where I hung out as a kid. That's my first taste of Chinese culture. And
230 you know, I could never figure out what was going on politically, but culturally, it was always
231 Chinese culture through films, through activities, through food. And when in **00:32:00** 1981,
232 when the Suzhou Revolutionary Committee was visiting, that was the municipal government at
233 the time, they came in and they brought the two stone lions that are now sitting in front of the
234 Victoria Chinatown. And so, the mayor of Victoria, Bill Tindall, William Tindall, and whoever
235 was taking the lead of the Chinese delegation dotted the I's there, I remember watching that from
236 afar. So that was kind of cool seeing that historical moment. But again, as a kid, you just never
237 really realize how significant things are until later on. Those are probably the two highlights I
238 can think of that brings me pride and joy every time I think about the work my dad has done in
239 bridge building. I mean, for the most part, my brother and I had a more **00:33:00** or less normal
240 upbringing in Burnaby. We went to high school here and Saint Thomas More. Funny enough, we
241 actually were supposed to go to Vancouver College, but we had not a pleasant experience, I'll
242 just leave it at that. It was more, just wasn't to our liking. I mean, it's a great school but it's just
243 the feel of it didn't match my brother and I's characters. And so, as soon as I, we told our parents,
244 my parents put us to STM and it was actually much closer to our home because we used to live

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

245 on just down here, Canada Way and Burris nearby there on Allman Street there. So we could just
246 take the bus up to STM on 12th and that was easy, right. In a way, I knew it was meant to be
247 because by the time **00:34:00** I got to my first class, my homeroom teacher, Mr. [Colomb] opens
248 the door and welcomes me to class. It was very pleasant. And he calls out this guy's name who I
249 couldn't figure out what his name was because it was such a foreign name and he says, he starts
250 taking me around. I started getting to know him I said, "What's your name again?" He says, "It's
251 Gee-frey." "Gee-frey? What's Gee-frey? I've never heard of that name." He says, "Oh, it's Jeff in
252 Spanish." And I said, "Okay." We try to get to know each other. For some reason I don't know
253 why I said, "Where were you born?" He said, I was born in Toronto. And I said, "So was I."
254 Which hospital were you born in? "Saint Mike's", "So was I." We've been best friends for almost
255 40 years now because of that moment and he's the same guy who commented on my dad's
256 Spanish. (laughing) And so it's just **00:35:00** like I knew in a way STM was meant for my future
257 education. So, I'm really glad that it all worked out that way. Yeah, crazy when you think about
258 it.

259 INTVWR: Where else did you attend school in Canada?

260 RL: I went to UBC. But if I tell about UBC, I have to go back to why and how I ended up there.
261 It's a bit of a crazy journey how I ended up at UBC because right after graduating from high
262 school, like any kid, you're lost. So, you know, I was talking to my dad. I said, "I have no idea."
263 Because you got to remember, this is like 1988 when **00:36:00** I graduated from high school 35
264 years ago. Now, 35 years ago, now 35 years ago from today, it's crazy because there's no
265 internet. So, we didn't have any resource or anything other than our counselor. The counselor
266 was always saying, "Yeah, you should go into math, you should go to business." "This guy?
267 Really?" So, Dad said, "Look, let me take a look and see what opportunities I could offer you."
268 and he found Peking University was a place that he could maybe open the door for me because
269 he had originally done something there a few years ago. He reached out and the director said,
270 "Sure, why don't you just send the application, and we'll get your kid in and hopefully he likes it"
271 because it was back in the day where western amenities were not really present in China. I think
272 the director was afraid that **00:37:00** I would not enjoy my time there, because as a Western born
273 kid. For the most part, it was a pretty easy submission, application, and everything, but I don't
274 think I was mentally ready. I was still a teenager born and raised in Canada. I've been to China a
275 couple of times, but I don't think I was ready for the long-extended stay. Tourists are there for a
276 week or two, then you're back here, but there I was going to be there for a year or longer. When
277 my dad took me, well actually, my buddies took me to the airport - I was actually having a
278 conversation with my friends last week about it, they're going and it's Jeffrey who told me, he
279 says, "Rich, I remember **00:38:00** you were so disorganized when you were leaving, and you
280 were so late." We got to the airport late and when I boarded, his car getting in the airport, I was
281 looking at my feet. I'm going, "Oh, damn. I forgot my shoes." I was wearing my kung fu slippers.
282 That's all I had on. Going to China was my whatever I packed and my kung fu slippers with no
283 socks. You got to remember, this is like the 1980s whereas Miami Vice, wearing no socks was
284 the in thing. I kind of felt, "All right, that's alright, I look cool but with kung fu slippers." It was
285 the weirdest thing. But all my friends came out, my then girlfriend came out - this was also

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

286 heartbreaking for me because we just started dating, she was like my first girlfriend. I was like,
287 and so I was like "Oh, no. You know, I'm leaving her. This is going to be so sad." And all my
288 buddies, my friends, **00:39:00** my family, and my dad accompanied me on the plane to go to
289 China. And I just remember looking outside the window as the plane was moving along the
290 tarmac and I'm bawling my eyes out. Or just kind of, not like, "Wah, wah, wah", but just more
291 like tears were just streaming because this was it. I'm leaving, I'm really leaving Canada. I'm
292 leaving everything I've been used to and I'm heading out in a direction which I have zero idea.
293 But hindsight I'm going, "Boy, I was about to embark on the most incredible journey of my life."
294 But I have no idea right, what it was at the time, I was just a young 18-year-old heading out on
295 something. I remember my dad taking **00:40:00** me to the Kunlun Hotel in Beijing and we were
296 having dinner, I'm still crying. I was like, that's how sad I was right, that's how sad I was, I'm
297 going, "Do I really want to be here?" I was like, that's how bad it was. But the next day, we're on
298 a plane going to North Korea because it was September 1988 and the North Koreans were
299 celebrating the 35th, no 40th of their national day. Why North Korea is very unusual again, very,
300 very strange story on that one. One that you would, can never even imagine, but it curtails back
301 to that taking the uncharted path. But also, how language **00:41:00** opens doors. And so if you're
302 asking, "Why North Korea?" My father was trying to build a business in tourism and so he was
303 always looking at different unique opportunities that he could build. Of course, the first one was
304 with China and that was a communist state, no one would ever think about China as a place to
305 go. But believe it or not, people started going there. And he was right. He had the same idea with
306 North Korea, but he's not Korean or doesn't speak the language, which is strange at the same
307 time. But anyway, that's what happened. He gets us to North Korea one year or two before I go
308 and his translators with him, they're doing their thing. But my father, like I said, he's a very
309 **00:42:00** serious guy and I think his patience was wearing thin with this translator because his
310 English was horrible. He goes to the translator, "Do you speak any other language?" And the
311 translator goes, "Yeah, Spanish." (laughing) And so, I always laugh at that one story because I'm
312 going, "My gosh, what are the chances that a North Korean speaks Spanish?" But there it was,
313 my dad had been paired with the translator thinking, "As a Canadian you have an English" but
314 no. The guy, actually, his first second language other than Korean was Spanish. The next thing
315 you know, he's got his contract signed and my father, the travel agency, became the only travel
316 agency in all of North America that was allowed to give visas to North Korea. So much attention
317 was given to that **00:43:00** that two funny stories came out of that. Actually, interesting stories,
318 not funny. But interesting is that the South Korean government got wind of it. So the consulate,
319 the Korean consulate here in Vancouver knew of this visa arrangement, and when the president
320 of South Korea visited, they invited my dad to the dinner of the visit. I can't remember which
321 president was, I think it was during the APEC. This is like the 1990s, I believe, or late '80s
322 whatever that time frame is. They not only invited him to the dinner, they sat him beside the
323 president. That's the impact that this arrangement had made. But see, the thing is, my dad's a
324 businessman. He has nothing to do with politics. He would just try to do this that he could build
325 a better life for **00:44:00** the family and make, build a bridge at the same time. And when I say
326 the bridge part, that part came true when I became a UBC student, I'll go back to how I ended up
327 at UBC after, but this part is related to this story. Is when I was in Asian Studies in my second

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

328 year of college attending Asian Studies 101, and Professor Donald Baker was teaching the
329 Korean component, and he starts talking about North Korea and all this. And at the very end he
330 goes, "If you are planning to go to North Korea, go to this travel agency on 41st and Granville
331 because that's the only one you're going to be able to get it from." I'm laughing my head off. I
332 mean, not out loud, but I'm going, "Oh, my gosh. This is crazy." I'm sitting in the back of the
333 classroom. Did he just do a promo for my parents? I went down and met Doctor Baker and I
334 said, "Thank you much for that, that's actually my parents travel agency." And he goes, "Oh,
335 that's an **00:45:00** amazing thing that your folks have done because it's unusual, but it opens
336 doors and gives people an opportunity to see a country that people never really - the hermit
337 kingdom in the news." He was like, "the hermit kingdom." So, it's quite fascinating. Now, every
338 time I see Doctor Baker, I came back, and I first saw him. I said, "Do you remember me? I'm the
339 student, my parents with the travel agency in North Korea?" And he said, "Oh, yeah, yeah,
340 yeah." So, it's just one of those things where you just never know where life will take you, but
341 those languages, you know the languages' part, I, I think is so important. And that sort of rang
342 true with my dad's work with North Korea. I never thought I'd ever end up in North Korea as a
343 kid. It was funny, last week, was my, like the Facebook memories popped up and it was 35 years
344 ago. So, what I did, a little math. My math is not **00:46:00** that bad and I realized, "Oh, this
345 year's 75 years for the nation." So, they're celebrating 75 years of being the North Korean hermit
346 kingdom. But it was really fascinating looking at the photos because I was there, it is in quotes.
347 I'm not saying he is, but this was in quotes. Kim Il-Sung was the great leader and so I actually
348 had a chance to see him, like in person. It was very unusual that a westerner could see a North
349 Korean leader of the time, especially the first one. Everyone now knows Kim Jong Un, which is
350 the grandson, but I actually saw the grandfather – the quote, unquote "great leader" that he's
351 known for which is very surreal when you think about it because I was in Pyongyang, which is
352 the capital of North Korea, and they have something similar in Beijing with Tiananmen Square.
353 They have their own square in Pyongyang. And because **00:47:00** my father and I were the
354 Canadian delegation for this visit, we were allowed to be in the VIP section. So if you noticed
355 Tiananmen Square, you know how the Mao would come out of that area and would wave and
356 you got people, same thing in Pyongyang. But here, you got millions of people, literally millions
357 of people. And to this day, I have never experienced that. Yeah, I can call exhilarating because
358 you'd have a million people facing one direction. You have Kim Il-sung up in a balcony up there.
359 As soon as he waves, everyone's cheering in that one direction. So, I guess you can say that I felt
360 like Sidney Crosby or Wayne Gretzky when I shot the golden goal because you feel a million
361 voices hitting your chest. It's sort of I guess you say it's a rare occurrence for a westerner to feel
362 because then **00:48:00** you kind of feel like, "Oh, that's how those leaders, dictators, those
363 emperors, and like Julius Caesar or Napoleon." You know, when you think about how they felt
364 when they would go, "long live, the King" in that one direction. It's a very surreal feel. It's hard
365 to explain, you have to be there to feel it. So, I remember just sitting there going, "This is weird."
366 I can feel the waves after waves of them going, "Wansui!" How do you say it in Korean now?
367 "Long live." It was just such an exhilarating feeling for me as a young teen going, "Whoa, that's
368 a million voices hitting me." Like, literally - a million. And then you see the goose-stepping
369 military marching across, but for me, that part was just the average citizen just standing there and

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

370 cheering in that one direction to their quote, unquote "great leader" and **00:49:00** just over and
371 over again. Quite something else, I'll just tell you. And those in Asian studies would appreciate
372 this even more if they saw the photos. And I actually saw some video from YouTube that
373 actually shows from that time from 40, 35 years ago. And looking at it, as an 18-year-old you're
374 like, "What is this place?" This is crazy. But here I am in my Miami Vice short, rolled up pants,
375 kung fu slippers, and no socks in the middle of the capital of North Korea.

376 INTVWR: This was before you started school in Beijing?

377 RL: Just before, just before. So, my dad had just figured out when the school was supposed to
378 start. I was going to, I dropped my bags off at my dorm then we went to North Korea for 3 days,
379 **00:50:00** then went back to Beijing to Peking University where I was going to spend some time.
380 And that's where I met my roommate - oh the director was so kind. He says, "Look, I'm going to
381 find a Canadian roommate for you so that at least you would find some kind of comfort." I don't
382 think it was a good idea because he was like 10 years my senior. You know how it is when
383 you're bunking with someone who's older than you, you have different ways of thinking. He was
384 a generation older. He's a nice guy. Now, we get each other, now that we're both mature guys.
385 But for me, I was a new teen out. I had my rebellious nature. I'm not going to bed early and he's
386 had to go to bed early. So, it was such a weird arrangement when I think about it now but we
387 actually still keep in touch, which is great. Don is from Toronto. But yeah, there was only a
388 handful of Canadians back then. One **00:51:00** became the most famous Canadian. Not sure if
389 you're familiar with Dashan Mark Rowswell. He was also a schoolmate at the time. Yeah, I can
390 literally count all the Canadians in one hand that were there. So, we had a little contingent of
391 Canadians over there. But again, back in the day, late '80s, there weren't that many expats. China
392 wasn't on the radar for most people. My dad did a lot of that work to try and build that up for
393 Canada but got lucky. I'm glad that I went when I did. So, my journey with UBC would begin
394 right after June 4th. The spring of 1989 was interesting one because it started out with the death
395 of Hu Yaobang, who **00:52:00** was likely from what I recall, he was like the voice of the
396 students in the central government. When he died, all the students were all in mourning. Like, it
397 was the most surreal experience. April 17th, '89, I was sitting in a dorm with some American
398 schoolmates, and we were just hearing this cheering, shouting, or something - a commotion that's
399 on the campus and we're like, "What is going on?" It was really loud. It wasn't really like a
400 soccer game cheering. It was something else was going on. And so we ended up going out to see
401 what was happening, all these students were out there and they got these banners. And the next
402 thing we know, we're on our way to Tiananmen Square. This is April of '89. This would be the
403 start of the student demonstrations of the spring of '89. It was peaceful. **00:53:00** It was my first
404 ever bike ride to Tiananmen Square. I had saddle sore after that because it was such a long ride.
405 Funny - so back to North Korea, before I forget, I met the bureau chief of CTV - Jim Munson.
406 Having met Jim that September then fast forward back to April, that night, I saw Jim in his CTV
407 vehicle whichever that - I think it was a mustang, I can't remember. I was riding my bike and I
408 was, "Hey, Jim! How are you doing?" He goes, "Hey, Richard. Come here. Can you help us
409 scout ahead for any (PSB) public security police people?" I said, "All right, that's easy." I'm a
410 student, I got energy. So, I would just go up and back and just let them know if there was

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

411 anything going on. Yeah, nothing it was peaceful. I would eventually just go down to the square
412 and just like notice how **00:54:00** disorganized it was because they were just kind of like doing
413 this out of respect for their representative in government, right. That was really what they were
414 doing. I can remember them going, "What should we do next? What's next after this?" Well, we
415 all knew what was going to happen next. Everyone just became a nationwide movement, studies
416 were completely disrupted for the rest of the month, rest of the two months, two and a half
417 months. My friends would eventually do internships with CNN, CBS, ABC, NBC, and all those
418 news outlets. They would come back and report to us as fellow students because we didn't really
419 get much news. So, it was fascinating to be in that whole you know, time. Martial law was
420 declared in the end of May, so things **00:55:00** got serious right after that. I remember being in a
421 classroom, and the rotation thud of the helicopter rotating over the classroom, right over the
422 window. We ran outside the window, looked outside, saw the helicopter banking left. The back
423 door was open and one of the Air Force guys out there was throwing leaflets out, propaganda
424 leaflets informing folks you know, "This is martial law. Make sure you're not doing this, not
425 doing that." We all got copies of it and quite, quite, kind of, you realize how serious things were
426 getting. Mark and I, Dashan, and I would ride out to, to the summer Palace area and students
427 would recognize him. Hey, there's Dashan. They don't know who I am, I look like a Chinese kid,
428 right, so, no one cares. But there's the white, blond-haired, and blue-eyed guy, and you know
429 we'd see all the students **00:56:00** and everything. It was such a surreal moment, but you know,
430 the only craziness, the violence, not violence, but the action I would call that I saw was on May
431 4th to celebrate the, oh which one was that now, was it the 70th? the May 4th movement, I think it
432 was. So, all the students that morning - May 4th is like also the university anniversary at the
433 same time, so banners are all lined up outside the main gate, the south gate there at Peking
434 University. Everyone started flowing out and I can tell how young I was because I, there's a
435 building, right across, like a five-story building right across the main gate. I made a beeline to it
436 and ran all the way up to the rooftop and got a bird's eye view of all the marching out. And I
437 **00:57:00** got these awesome photos of students pouring out of that campus. I mean, I wish I had
438 a video camera back then. It would have been incredible. Like, if you had one of these mobile
439 phones. Can you imagine? But there it was, they were all flowing out there. We were in Haidian
440 going down the main avenue for a while. I came upon this part where there was this barricade of
441 - police or police cadets. It was hard to tell, they're all gray and green back in the day. You can
442 never tell between any of the police officials back then. There were three layers of them all
443 linking arms, right. So, I was like going, "Oh, there's something going to happen here." So I was
444 right, so I ran, again my youth was dictating how I could do things. I ran to a bus stop, climbed
445 on top of the roof of the bus stop. So, I had this nice angle where I could see the entire police
446 **00:58:00** force lined up across that street in three lines and you can see the student
447 demonstrations and their banners approaching. And I was taking photos, right. I didn't have a
448 video camera, so I'm taking photos. I'm taking frame by frame with whatever. You have to
449 remember, rolls of film were not cheap and you had to carry these things around. It was crazy.
450 Anyways, so here I am watching this unfold and I just remember the frame by frame of them
451 breaking through that and them cheering, "We beat. We made it. We got through the barrier and
452 now we can get all the way to Tiananmen Square". This is May 4th of '89 already. A month

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

453 before June's tragic event unfolded, but this was the most peaceful I saw, but the most action I
454 saw. Eventually went down to the square and that's where we saw all the stuff happening. But
455 fast forward to end of May, Martial law is **00:59:00** declared. Nothing's happening. My friends
456 are coming back and telling us there's no news, nothing's happening. This is June 1st or 2nd
457 around there and they say, "What should we do"? And we started racking our brains, "Let's take
458 a trip. Let's go out somewhere." And someone decided, "Let's go to Inner Mongolia." "Inner
459 Mongolia? Okay, I've never been." On the evening of June 2nd midnight, somewhere around
460 there, we flew out. About 24 hours before June 4th happened, we flew out. We missed
461 everything. Blessing in disguise, namely because I think if I had decided not to go, I would have
462 ended up in Tiananmen Square that **01:00:00** night. So, I call it a blessing in many ways. I ended
463 up traveling for a couple of nights with one Japanese guy and two American girls. We had the
464 best time. I mean, it was awesome. I looked at the photos and it was such a beautiful time. We
465 were just out in the grasslands, living in yurts, and having a fun time without even realizing what
466 was going on until we started getting hints. Like, the night, no the morning we were supposed to
467 leave at the airport. We couldn't. They said, "No flights are flying out." We're like, "What's going
468 on? Train station's, okay?" "Sure, okay." So, we take the train back to Beijing but on the way to
469 Beijing, we stop, we make one stop in Datong which is known for its Tang Dynasty grotto.
470 **01:00:50 [blank section recording – audio seems to be muted] 01:01:35** Such a beautiful
471 place to visit, I'm glad we did. Because if we had not stopped, we would have arrived on June
472 5th evening when the firefighting was still continuing, that would have been a nightmare.
473 Because if you know Beijing, the train station is right a block or so away from east of the square.
474 So we would have been in the midst of it. Instead, we arrived June **01:02:00** 6th morning and we
475 missed everything. So, I can talk about this part for a long hour, So I'll skip through that because
476 that takes another 2 hours to tell. But I was evacuated from the university by the US embassy
477 because I missed the Canadian one the day before. All our allies were all helping each other. The
478 US embassy was picking up any stragglers — I was like the straggler, and we were at the US
479 embassy. It was such a blur. I mean, I was 19 by that point. It's a bit of a blur and also traumatic
480 when I think about it because I remember not knowing what was going to happen. It was such a,
481 each, living each moment by moment, right. By the time I was **01:03:00** leaving, I was finally at
482 the Canadian Embassy that June 7th morning, I think that's correct, yeah June 7th morning. As
483 my car, like someone, one of my parents, one my friends, no sorry, let me rephrase that again.
484 One of the friends of my parents' friends came to get me and he managed to get a cab or some
485 vehicle to take me to the Canadian embassy. As soon as I get to the Canadian Embassy, their
486 convoy is leaving. So, I missed that convoy completely. So, I'm kind of going, "Oh, no. I think
487 I'm screwed. I'm stuck here." But luckily enough, I see the ambassador leaving. That's why I was
488 freaking out because I saw Earl Drake leaving and I'm like, "Oh, no. If the ambassador is
489 leaving, I'm in trouble." You, I kind of knew right away that's the head of our, you know
490 diplomatic **01:04:00** mission there. But the next thing I know, minute later, some guy comes in
491 in his jeans and plaid shirt. He's Canadian. He goes, "Oh, I got a car outside. If anyone wants to
492 go, I'm heading to the airport now." I said, "Perfect." I took the front seat because I knew that if I
493 took the back seat, I'd be sitting with everyone else that wanted to leave. It was a South Asian
494 family that was leaving too. So I had my own seat in front. I had a long 24-hours. Like, I need to

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

495 have a little bit of comfort, and this was a Mercedes-Benz leaving, so I knew that this would be a
496 good ride out. Got to the air-, got out and it was like one of those movies, you see smouldering
497 things along the way. You know, you've been in areas of conflict, it just goes by and you're like,
498 "This is not happening, is it? It's happening. It really is happening." You get to the airport; it's
499 overrun by foreigners trying to leave. So, I **01:05:00** get to, I see schoolmates, they're all getting
500 their flights out with the US embassy. The Canadian embassy looks at me, looks at my Air China
501 ticket, and doesn't recognize it. And so, they say, "You're going to have to get a Canadian
502 Airlines flight out because we've got a special charter heading to Tokyo." But you have to sign
503 on this dotted line to Her Majesty the Queen that you'll return all the money afterwards. Like,
504 "Gosh, darn it. Are you serious?" We're trying to leave with whatever we have, and you want me
505 to sign this, so that you guys, so I have, or my parents have to repay? Wow, okay. Well, I have
506 no choice, do I, you know? It's do that or stay." Signed it, waited, saw my classmate who was
507 working for NBC news, said he had some videotapes that he needs to get to Tokyo because he
508 knew I was going to Tokyo. **01:06:00** He said, "Would you be willing to smuggle it to Tokyo to
509 our NHK affiliate and you'll get some money?" Money rang in my head. I'm like, "It's a business,
510 okay." Right, was it a risk? Yes, because, but I didn't know what the ramifications were. This is
511 my gullible 19-year-old self thinking right. Get on the plane and have my bag up in there with
512 the videotape. Customs come up, obviously, they normally don't do this but because we're on a
513 charter from the Canadian government, we didn't have to go through the normal customs, but
514 each seat was checked by a customs officer, Chinese customs officer. That's when I got nervous.
515 Because who knows? Maybe they want to check your bags right, but they didn't. All it was was
516 they wanted to see my ID, they found, I showed them my, because this is back in the day,
517 **01:07:00** you had the green one for your ID and red one for your student card. Right so it
518 showed that you were a student. And they said, "Were you planning to come back?" I said,
519 "Yeah.". The magic word, I said, "Yes, I'm coming back." They said, "Okay, we'll let you go."
520 Get to Tokyo, I find the NHK representative, whatever. I pass the tapes over, he says, "Thank
521 you" and turns around and leave. And I'm like, (laughing) "I just did something that was very
522 risky, and it was not even money offered". But by the time I realized this, because I was so tired,
523 the reaction was instantaneous at the moment, but it was slow for me. It was too late, that guys
524 gone. I was like, "Okay, whatever." Like hindsight I'm going, "NBC and NHK, you guys still
525 owe me some money." That time, I risked my life for that. **01:08:00** But you know the experience
526 of coming back home was even more interesting because I landed and my parents had received a
527 call from the news outlets, because my parents - they knew they were doing a lot of China work
528 now, the agency, right. So, China flights, I mean. And so, they called them and said, "Do anyone
529 in China?" And they said, "Well, yeah. Our son." So, they sent reporters over to visit my parents
530 and then they found out that I was coming back. And I remember watching a video of my mom,
531 on, I think it must have been CBC, I think it was or something like that. They had, the camera
532 guy was there capturing this conversation between my mom and I and she said something that
533 was so embarrassing for me. Because when I watched it with mom, "You did not say that. I can't
534 believe you said that on national TV". She goes **01:09:00**... Mom's being mom, hindsight, I look
535 at it now, my mom was being herself and worried for her son. And kind of going, "Richard,
536 when you run, when you get to the Canadian embassy, don't walk slowly like you usually do."

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

537 Like going, I was like, my mom just embarrassed me on national television. This is the teenager
538 that I was thinking back to, like I said, this is my mom thinking, you know like a mom. And
539 yeah, it was really surreal when I think about it. But when I got back here, this is the old
540 Vancouver Airport International section. It was a domestic now. I'm coming out - here, I'll paint
541 this picture for you. I'm wearing this acid wash blue jean jacket, wearing shorts, and a Mao cap.
542 And I got my green bag, knapsack, whatever you call it and I'm pushing the cart out **01:10:00**
543 and I look up, I look in the distance and I see my parents. I'm like, "Oh, there they are." They're
544 speaking to reporters and everything. Okay, this is great. I'm home. Right, and then I look back
545 up again, and I see a couple of friends, one was like 6 foot tall. He goes, "There he is!" Right,
546 and I'm going, "Oh, crap" because all the reporters are there. He's just announced my arrival. So,
547 all the lights and cameras now face me. And they're all running to me. Like throngs of
548 microphones, lights, and everything in your face. You're talking about, one, a 19-year-old who's
549 never had to deal with this before, who's exhausted from not sleeping properly for 48 hours or so,
550 whenever that all occurred, and I was in no real mood to talk to anyone. I just was, I just wanted
551 to be at home. I mean, to see my folks. They **01:11:00** saw me, they were tearing up, right, I
552 mean, it's just so emotional to see me alive because they thought I was actually dead for 3 days.
553 Because when June 4th happened, my dad was in, he was in New York on business. And so, he
554 saw the news, called my mom, flew back to be with her, and they were wondering where the
555 heck I was. Because, when I went to, here's the thing - when I went to Inner Mongolia, I only
556 wrote a note to my roommate, I told no one else. So my parents didn't even know where I was. I
557 forgot to tell, you know teenagers, ah, you know. When my, when my mom was answering that
558 phone call, that the one I was telling you about earlier of the, of the TV interview, that was
559 actually the first call, the first contact that I made with my mom 3 days after June 4th had
560 happened. They thought I was dead because I had been going to the square so often that they
561 thought it was natural for me to kind of go **01:02:00** because I was always curious, I love
562 adventure, you know. I just go out there, explore, and see what was happening. So that was sort
563 of the, you know, seeing my parents tearing up and overjoyed to see me, it kind of reminded me
564 of how, how precious that moment was. And it's funny at the same time. As a side story, when
565 my buddies took me home, my parents had to go back to work. So now that I was home, they can
566 go back - such a typical Chinese family in a way. Focus on family, but then go back and focus on
567 work. They went back to work. They have to take care of the business, so they're very focused on
568 that, very hard-working parents. And my buddies would take me home. Get to my home, the
569 house behind my neighbor's house is burning down. (laughing) So I'm like going, this is too
570 weird, you know. And as soon as I get in the house, we hear **01:13:00** a crash and a bang outside
571 - the same neighbors, the son forgot to put a handbrake on his truck, rolled down and smashed
572 into my friend's car. I was going to my friend's like, "Okay, you guys deal with it. I'm going to go
573 to sleep because it's been such a hard time to, to come back." All this craziness still followed me
574 - house burning down and car accident around my house." So, it's just those weird little
575 memories that came back and I was like, "Okay." And then that night, a Vancouver Sun reporter
576 came in and took a beautiful photo of me and my parents with all my little collection of stuff that
577 I had brought back from that time and ended up on the front page of the Vancouver Sun and the
578 Province, and the 6 o'clock news. And so that was my, you know, my 5 seconds of fame.

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

579 **01:14:00** But I realized, I needed to go to college still. So, I had to figure out what to do because
580 it was already June. So as you know, universities, they have a certain schedule to keep. So, I
581 wanted to continue studying, so I ended up going to Douglas for a year. Was so into getting to
582 UBC, that I studied my tail off, got on the Dean's list and was able to transfer in my second year.
583 And so that's what I mean by a long story short. You know being able to go from China, back
584 here, and then going to UBC. My focus, what was interesting was my focus was always going to
585 be Asian studies, only after, after that one year in China. The reason why, as I said, I didn't know
586 what I wanted to do. But when I **01:15:00** went to Beida, to Peking University, I met all these
587 international students who were doing Asian studies and that's what shone a light for me. I didn't
588 know that type of you know, focus of study existed because back then we didn't have internet,
589 right. And so, I knew right away I wanted to start my career, my university career in that area
590 and so got lucky. I got into UBC and never looked back, and ended up there for, did my degree
591 and graduated in '93. And it's funny when I think about this because I go back to UBC every year
592 and I talk to the students there. And I always think back, Boy, if I had this kind of career night at
593 UBC, I would have stayed in Canada a little longer. And I would have said to myself, "Stay and
594 **01:16:00** get an education degree." Because I found that I really enjoyed talking to younger
595 people, I love working in the international school that I did back in the day, and I would have
596 done international education because it's a great career. You know financial reward aside; it does
597 have that. I think I would have been able to do a couple of things. One is teaching young people,
598 two I get to travel, and three - yes, and make a good income that I get to save. Because I have a
599 lot of friends who do that and their, they have this really innate reward. You know and you
600 know, I, I, that would have been my, that's now my adult sides' speaking of hindsight, if I have
601 had someone, you know, advising me to do that, and I probably would. But again, hindsight, I
602 have no regrets **01:17:00** for my life that I've had. It's been such an incredible experience
603 because if I didn't leave in '93 to come to Beijing, go back to Beijing, return back to Peking
604 University to continue my studies there, I wouldn't have bumped into my friends that I knew
605 from '88, '89, one of them was Mark Rowswell. He and I reunited on campus because he came,
606 we were, I was eating lunch in a cafeteria, having my bowl of noodles, whatever it was. And I
607 look up, he looks at me, I'm going, "Wait a second, you're back?" And he goes, "I've been here, I
608 haven't left." I'm like, "Fantastic, what are you doing now?" "I work at the Canadian Embassy in
609 the cultural section." So, we kept in touch. Next thing I know, he's calling me, and he goes,
610 "Richard, do you want to work for the Prime Minister?" "What?" Yeah. Because at **01:18:00** that
611 time, at the time, I wanted to get into, get into foreign affairs because I had been inspired by my
612 great uncle who was the ambassador. And so I had been thinking about foreign affairs, what that
613 was all about and what that would entail, and Mark knew. And so, he said, you know, "Why
614 don't we have a meeting. And come down and see if there's something you want to do." And so,
615 ended up meeting with him and another gentleman who is Phil Calvert who's from Victoria, I
616 believe, and he was, oh gosh what was his role back in the day, he was, he was responsible for
617 the media side at the time, but he was a diplomat dealing with trade, I think, at the time. And but,
618 they got me on board to be the media office manager for Jean Chrétien's very first Team Canada
619 trade **01:19:00** mission to China, which was at the time the largest trade mission. It was a proud
620 moment for me because my dad was going to be on that trade mission too. So, it was like the

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

connector for me and my dad. I was kind of “maturing”, I did it in quotes because I wasn't really mature at the time, but it was my start of my journey to learning about foreign affairs, diplomacy, the media, large delegations, meeting the prime minister. I would serve him, the Prime Minister, Jean Chrétien, another two times. Three times, I worked on PM visits, I did three of them. Two Team Canadas and one PM visit. The Team Canada in '94, PM visit in '98 and 2001 for Team Canada, which was ended up being the largest trade mission Canada has ever had. Like, 700 delegates or something like that. It was crazy.

INTVWR: **01:20:00** So by that time, you already had been settling in Beijing for a while?

RL: Yes, yeah, I had started a family too by that point. And so I had, the career path had started to develop and I was looking at, wanting to get into that. So here's a funny part for, for, related to this. And again, as I mentioned before, you know language opens doors. Well, this one shut on me. So, one of the visits, one of the three visits, I remember someone high up from the Prime Minister's office from the PMO had approached me during a reception and knew how active I was, I guess you could say. And he said, "Hey, Richard. Your English is amazing, your Chinese is great. How's your French?" And I'm a pretty honest guy and I'm not going to beat around the bush. Having been raised on the West **01:21:00** Coast, I said, "Look, it's not really that great. I went through grade 11 and 12 high school French. I could read off a milk carton, that's about it", you know, unfortunately I mean, in my mind, I was like, that's unfortunate but I thought, okay, maybe I can get a pass now, but the PMO official just finished the conversation and went on to turn it on someone else. But I knew where he was going because I could see that door creaking open you know because no one's going to talk to you about something unless there's something behind it. That door, I knew there was something to do with potential opportunities, but that door opened and shut. So, I always use that example when I get a chance to talk to young people and say, "Look. As a Canadian, you have to remember, you need to learn French. Otherwise, you are going to **01:22:00** miss out on a load of opportunities." And I've seen this happen over and over again. All of us here on the West Coast, we lose out on opportunities. So, the key takeaway for them is always learn your French and learn your other languages too. Because I saw my dad and he had multiple languages and you know that opened a ton of crazy doors, but very good doors too at the same time. So, I mean, I'm lucky in a way that it kind of, that moment bonked on my head. And I still try to learn French, even at my age now. I still try to learn, I still practice where I can, and I am in touch with, because of that experience I've translated that to my other work now across the country. Because as a nation, you kind of look at the way people work and you realize that you know from the Olympics and to my work with Saint John, I've dealt with folks in Ottawa. And when you deal with **01:23:00** folks in Ottawa, they're bilingual - most of them, and poor us over here on the West Coast. You're bilingual to some degree, right, but not very bilingual in the Canadian sense. So, we need to have that urgency as much as possible because we're, we're missing the boat. Right. And that's what I felt for many years, and, especially after that talk with that PMO official. I'll never forget it. I won't share his name because I still remember his name and I knew he where he is now too so I won't so. It's just, for me, because he was just being realistic which I appreciate anyways. And you know, you're not going to hire a guy who doesn't speak the language, right. So, a lot of my, you know, like I said earlier, you

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

662 don't really know your country until you've left, until you left it, right. And so, I **01:24:00** met
663 my first Quebecers while living in China, folks from Quebec. And you know and this sort of
664 appreciated, I appreciated Canada as a nation just living in that country over there, like meeting
665 people from New Brunswick. I never met anyone from New Brunswick on this side of the world.
666 Right? And if I did, they never told me. But did you know that New Brunswick is the most
667 bilingual province in Canada? No one, I didn't know. Right so, well it's kind of like, if people in
668 New Brunswick can do that, we should be able to do that here, right. So that's where, kind of,
669 you know my frustrating point is, like okay, you know we, we forget, we take it for granted and
670 that we live in such a beautiful country, right, but we also forget that we live in a bilingual
671 country, right. And so, what I've noticed is that a lot of these great jobs that we have from the,
672 from the national or federal level where it requires bilingualism, **01:25:00** we lose them to the
673 other people who can speak it from New Brunswick or from Quebec, or from Ontario, right. And
674 you'll see that with a lot of the major organizations here - you ask them, "Where are you from?"
675 Most of them are not from here, they just manage to be. They're young, they can move, and they
676 speak the languages, right. I mean, a good example, I'll give it to you. Very recently, a few, a
677 couple of years ago, the Canadian Olympic Committee was looking for an executive assistant,
678 right. It's just an EA but required bilingualism, right. That person needed to be able to go from
679 English to French and back and forth, right. But – yeah, I was just telling, just a reminder that we
680 live in that, kind of state of mind. And I think our job part of it is, you know our community,
681 leaders need to remind folks, young folks to focus on your French. As, as boring as it sounds like
682 when we were in high school, you know, and when we were in high school, we were like "Oh,
683 French. Oh, boring" **01:26:00** right. But the benefit at the end will play out right, and it's
684 important to have that so. I hope I'm not rambling on too much here, but that's sort of the -

685 INTVWR: It's really interesting. Like, to see all the influences you've had in your life in shaping
686 your perspective of the world. And I think a theme that kind of see throughout your life and also
687 your major influences is the idea of like building bridges. And I do see that a lot in the work that
688 you do now, whether it's volunteer in the community or serving in different committees, So I'd
689 really like to spend some time talking a bit about that. Because I know in 2008, you served on
690 the Canadian Paralympic Committee. **01:27:00**

691 RL: Yep.

692 INTVWR: Can you tell us a bit more about that experience? What was your role? What did you
693 do? What was that experience like?

694 RL: Yeah, sure, I have the, I mean, the definition, I guess, you can say of the role because it was,
695 it was formally given to me in a year before the Paralympics took place. I mean, obviously, for
696 me, it was an unforgettable life experience. I mean, I'll never forget it. I mean, it was a full, a full
697 year commitment. And actually, what's interesting, it's 15 years ago this month that it took place,
698 right. And so, it's, I have very fond memories, but I'll read to you the, the definition of what they
699 gave me, is a **01:28:00** "As a key member of the Canadian Delegation for the 2008 Paralympic
700 Summer Games in Beijing, to facilitate cooperation between the Canadian Paralympic
701 Committee (CPC), and the various local groups and individuals who assisted with Canadian team

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

702 operations at the games." I was also invited to speak, provide insight on the culture and life in
703 China. Again, to try and build bridges, as well as introducing Canada-China relations to Team
704 Canada's coaches, athletes, team leaders, and games mission staff in Canada. It was, like I said, it
705 was unforgettable because I was involved with both - not only the Paralympics, but also with the
706 Olympic team because my location on site was because, I ran the Canadians in China network, I
707 ran the Canadian Alumni network. So, anything **01:29:00** Canada, they all turn to me because I
708 can help them with volunteers, I can try and drum up interest within the Canadian community
709 with Team Canada, get to know, buy tickets, or whatever. That kind of thing. We had the B.C.
710 Government set up the B.C. Canada Pavilion, I believe it was called, and that was some kind of
711 project that the B.C. Government wanted to promote Vancouver 2010, right. It was going to
712 come up in two years after that. And so, they had spent an exuberant amount of money on this. I
713 forget how many millions they spent on, but they built it. It was a beautiful structure and
714 managed to get a whole bunch of volunteers going to that one too, as well. But that would also
715 be a place where we would host Canadian Olympic and Paralympic receptions there as well, and
716 so it was really an incredible venue and incredible **01:30:00** space. They brought B.C. Wood
717 over there to build the facade outside. It was crazy. The amount of stuff that they put over there
718 was insane, it was intense, but they had a jade bar or something like that. It was, it was quite a
719 time. I mean, we had the B.C. Canada Pavilion we had, we had stuff going on at the on-site at the
720 Olympic and Paralympic areas when the games were going on. I would have a chance to see the
721 lead-up to the games with, because I love baseball. Right so. The Major League Baseball, they
722 brought the San Jose Padres and the LA Dodgers to play an exhibition game. And Jet Li, Li
723 Lianjie, threw the first pitch. That was pretty cool. I mean, for me, to be there with my girls to
724 **01:31:00** watch that, I mean it was unforgettable, I mean it was once-in-a-lifetime experience.
725 And it was in a temporary baseball diamond that that the Olympic Committee had, the
726 organizing committee had put down, put down there. But yeah, my oldest daughter would
727 eventually, would be in the, where was she, she was in the closing ceremonies, I think, of the
728 Olympic Games because she sang in the choir. So, she had that experience. So that was very
729 sweet when I think about it too because we're so proud of her, we still are, but it's like that
730 moment. It's kind of like, you know, again, once-in-a-lifetime. And our whole family was in the
731 stadium for the opening ceremonies for the Paralympics, that was very exciting as well. But
732 yeah, I mean, just the chance to be that proud Canadian in, in a foreign country and hopefully
733 instill some of that Canadian pride in your **01:32:00** kids so that they feel what you're feeling.
734 Even though they were born outside of Canada, they're third-culture kids because you know,
735 they've got one parent who's Canadian and one parent who's Korean. My wife is Korean, right,
736 but living in, you know, a third country. Right so, it was kind of an interesting experience raising
737 them there, but I think they got the best of both worlds. And we were even interviewed by CBC,
738 which was really funny. The day, no, the week before the Olympics opened, Patrick Brown, the
739 journalist, called me up and said, "Richard, do you know any people around the Canadian
740 community that we could interview?" I said, "Sure, yeah. I know these people, this story, that
741 story and I gave him a whole bunch. And then I said, "If you're interested, this is my story, you
742 know. I'm the, you know the team attaché for the Canadian Paralympic Committee and my
743 daughter's singing **01:33:00** in the closing ceremonies of the main games." "Okay" he said. I

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

744 was like, he said it was a small story. So, I'm like, "Okay. Small, that's fine. I don't want the big,
745 you know thing, right." So, the, he gives me a call back the day later and says, "The producers
746 like your story the best." I'm like, "Okay, alright, so what is going to happen?" He says, "Okay.
747 Like I said, it's a small story. We're just going to come over, shoot your day-to-day, whatever
748 that looks like." So, we were at my, my apartment, it was such a mess to clean up too, when I
749 think about it, because you got two kids, right. But we had this video game, the Wii, and so my
750 two girls are playing the Olympic Games with Sonic and all those other, Mario Brothers, Mario
751 Karts, and they're playing the Wii. So, they shot a couple of shots of that, and then we went
752 down to the Canada-China, Canada, B.C. **01:34:00** Canada Pavilion in Beijing, did a couple of
753 shots there, and we went to the Bird's Nest, the main stadium there and got a shot outside there
754 and we went... Because it was really late in the day, so we went back to Patrick's apartment to
755 pretend it was going to be my apartment to pretend that I was working on my computer, right.
756 And then they said, "Okay, that's a wrap. Thanks for everything." And I said, "Okay, good.
757 When do you think I'll see this." And they said, "Oh, in a couple of days we'll let you know." So,
758 I'm at my, I'm back at my workstation a couple of days later, in you know, this is, August 8th, so
759 the night, the day that the official games were going to open, I think it is. And of course, it's
760 nighttime here. So suddenly, I'm getting these messages from the East Coast of Canada, and this
761 message would go according to time zone, pop from East **01:35:00** Coast, to Ontario, to Quebec,
762 or whatever, and then back to B.C. I go, "What is going on here?" And I find out that this little
763 program is Peter Mansbridge's The National - and it's not just like 30 seconds, this is like a 3-
764 minute thing, -piece that they've done on what I was taking them. I'm like, "This is crazy". Like,
765 I couldn't believe it. When I saw it later on, I just fell off my chair. I was like, "It's, it's Peter
766 Mansbridge saying my name". And, and everything that we had shot, they put it. It's a beautiful
767 piece, to be very honest. Like it was really well done. My kids look sweet and they're so cute
768 back then. And it was just, it's my favorite moment, I think, when I see it. Because just sort of,
769 and I know about branding. So, I wore my, my Team Canada jacket that has all the logos of all
770 the **01:36:00** sponsors. And so, my team manager came back and said, "Richard, we cannot
771 thank you enough because you did so much for the return of our sponsors by just wearing that
772 jacket alone because it went across Canada." So, the viewership of the National, I wasn't thinking
773 that. I was like going, I'm feeling like I'm the team, I need to wear the team jacket and
774 everything. And I was like, "Oh, gosh. That's awesome." I mean, I'm so glad I was able to help
775 the team in that respect, you know because I know you get the sponsorship, but you always have
776 to give the return. And so, when you see a logo on that screen for like 3-minutes, that's you
777 know, that's golden, gold for them, right. So, I was so, you know, when I heard that, I was like, I
778 felt so proud. I was like, "Okay. I'm glad I gave something back to the team for that." It was
779 very, very, meaningful. And but for me, like the whole video though, **01:37:00** was such a - I
780 still have a copy of it. So, I kind of, I look back at it and I chuckle every time I see my little kids.
781 They were so small, oh and, another, at the time they were holding my hands like this as they
782 were walking, and Patrick Graham was leaning on one of their heads because that's how short
783 they were at the time. And you get to see the Canada, B.C. Canada Pavilion too and it's all glory
784 at the time and you know, just a special, special moment. You know, I felt very proud to be
785 Canadian. I still am, right, but it's just like that moment it's like, "Wow. That pride, the swelling

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

786 and the joy, and being able to feel that - yeah, I'm a proud Chinese Canadian." And being able to
787 talk about what Canadians are doing in China, and the good that we're doing, to build that bridge,
788 you know and, and bring some of that culture to, to China and let the Chinese people appreciate
789 Canada, so you know, that was part of, you know, that experience. And you know, bringing my
790 kids to watch the games too, as well, like, you not **01:38:00** only just baseball, we went to also
791 watched softball. They went to see the, what was it now, taekwondo - I think it was, because my
792 wife is Korean. So, they had to watch taekwondo. And so, I watched wheelchair racing,
793 wheelchair basketball, it was just incredible. Lots of incredible sports, moments, high-
794 performance experience. We were in that bird's nest there. I just remember how massive it was
795 when we did the closing ceremonies. I mean, I had a chance to march into the stadium and the
796 closing ceremonies. And the 80,000, was it 80,000, I think, was in that stadium - some crazy
797 number, you know, you never think about numbers like that here in Canada because we're such a
798 small country. So, when you walk into the stadium, you're like, "This is massive." Right, but it
799 was the closing, and realizing that this moment was coming, coming to a close **01:39:00** and that
800 was like, "Okay, we did a good job." But I was so glad that I was with the Paralympics because
801 that led to working with Rick Hansen because of my appreciation for accessibility, knowing
802 what Paralympians require and all that. So, I met Rick Hansen in February 2010 while I was
803 volunteering with Team Canada and he was, I had just met Sandra Oh, she was just, but I
804 remember her as a young actress in the 1990s doing a small film. And I was always captivated
805 by her for some strange reason, I don't know why I was. She was such a great actress at the time
806 and still now is, right. But I knew I wanted to go say hi to her and I did because she was a host at
807 **01:40:00** in the village, and they were just finishing up something. So, I said, "Can I get a picture
808 with you?" and we did. And my buddy was going to come around, turn now, she was gone. I
809 said, "Okay. All right, no big deal." I wasn't like, how would you say, star, what's that word,
810 starstruck, I wasn't starstruck right. I was just like, Sandra Oh, she's a great actress, I want to
811 meet her. That was it, right. We go into the security area; Rick Hansen rolls up. I'm 125%
812 starstruck. Like I am so blown away. He's rolling up. I was on a phone with someone. I can't
813 remember who that person was anymore. That's how my mind was like, "That's Rick Hansen."
814 And so, and he's such a nice guy, it's like he's such an easy-going guy. And I go up and **01:41:00**
815 I say, "Hi, nice to meet you." You know, "Here's my card. If you're ever coming to China, let me
816 know." That's because I was working at Western Academy of Beijing at the time, International
817 School, so I gave him my card. I said, "This is where I'm working. If you need any help, let me
818 know." And he goes, "As a matter of fact, I'm going to China next year." Like, "What? Why?"
819 He goes, "Well, 2011 is going to be the 25th anniversary of my Man in Motion World Tour." I'm
820 like, "Oh, my gosh." Because he's speaking to my generation who watched him do the actual
821 Man in Motion world tour on the 6:00 news. I followed that when I was a kid. And now, he's
822 saying he's going to be in charge. Like, "Okay, whatever you want. If you want me to carry your
823 suitcases? Whatever. Let me know. I'm there for you." Because he's my hero, right, I mean, he's
824 inspired so many people **01:42:00** around the world and you know and the chance now is like,
825 okay, I can do something to support his visit. Anything I want, I can do. Let me know. So, over
826 the next several months, we're trying to figure out what the visit was going to look like and I
827 tried to coordinate certain things. We ended up figuring out a couple of components because he

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

828 was going to be in Beijing for 3 days. And so, there was going to be the Great Wall visit, of
829 course, because that's an iconic location which he visited 25 years prior. And so we needed to
830 figure out all of that. So, I arranged for 500 students to be up on the Great Wall with him and that
831 was exciting. And he was excited, too, because the Great Wall had finally an accessible path that
832 wasn't there 25 years before that. So, it was very exciting for that visit. Oh, Dashan was there too
833 as well as the host, of course, the ambassador and all these other **01:43:00** people that were there.
834 Second thing was I arranged was for him to visit, the school. So, he got a chance to see the entire
835 school, met with the elementary, high school, middle school, and high school. And he really
836 appreciated. This is one thing. It's like, the school is an international school - it's got a really cool
837 feel to it, it's got a mix of Chinese culture and Western culture. In the high school, there's an
838 accessible ramp. Right so, he was able to go up and down it and he said to me, he said, you
839 know, this is one of the most, how was the wording, he said this is one of the best ramps he's
840 ever been on. It's world class. And I'm like, this is crazy. You know coming from, this is a huge
841 compliment coming from Rick Hansen. Right, so I translated that to our director and let him
842 know that this is coming from Rick Hansen because you don't get that, you know. **01:44:00** And
843 luckily, one of our media guys is Canadian. So he went, "You got to be kidding. He said that?" I
844 said, "Yeah, this is nuts." So, for us to receive such a compliment from such a national figure, it
845 was such a great thing for us. So again, building that moment for Rick, I think, was something
846 I'll never forget because we finished off the visit with a reception at the Canadian Embassy and I
847 filled it up with all the Canadian alumni that we could think of and that could be there. And we
848 made him our honorary chair of the Canadian Alumni since he was a UBC grad, and we had a
849 whole bunch of UBC folks there as well, so go UBC! Are you noticing, I'm making a lot of plug
850 for UBC for some reason here, but I'm proud UBC alumnus. But yeah, I get to see Rick once in a
851 while whenever he's in **01:45:00** Vancouver. So, it's, we always have fond memories of that
852 visit but - yeah, Paralympics, as I say, was quite something for me. I mean, the Olympic and the
853 Paralympic movement both very important. I mean, so much to the point that even during
854 COVID, I decided I'd wanted to still be with Team Canada. So, I went last year with the team. I
855 was lucky enough to be appointed to accept it on the mission staff. I was able to be with them for
856 about 5 weeks on the ground over there. You know this is, it's sad when you think about it
857 because last year, COVID was still pretty active in China and the games were still going to go
858 on, but it was in a closed loop. So, we were in a bubble. So, I wasn't able to see any family or
859 friends while I was there. It was quite an unusual experience, even though it was all sports-
860 related and exciting, and we were doing what we could but **01:46:00** there is no way we could go
861 to the school, for example, to do anything with them because it was off-limits. And so yeah, all
862 the things that we had hoped to do, we couldn't do. So, we did we were given, you know, what
863 cards we were dealt with, so we did that. And yeah, that's, that was my, It was kind of almost
864 like a full circle feel to me in a way because I was only, I've only been a handful of Canadians
865 who can say they did both 2008 and 2022 games. There's only a handful, I can count them all on
866 one hand. And I was lucky enough to see some during this last year's games as well, but when I
867 think about it, it was kind of, it was happy and sad at the same time, you know. Because, you
868 know, **01:47:00** happy enough that it was really joyful. I was back in Beijing, I was involved
869 with the team, exciting, and able to see the games. You know, the side advantage was because of

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

870 COVID, they didn't have anyone from the public. They had some in the public watching it, but
871 they didn't have the usual numbers. So, as a team member, I was able to go see a lot of these
872 games, which I normally wouldn't have. So that was nice, like for me in that respect. But the sad
873 part was, I couldn't really connect. Right, it was only a virtual connection. Like, I did a talk with
874 my Saint John folks during Lunar New Year. I called my parents first, of course, you have to do
875 that. I called my folks first, did a little video conferencing with them, and then after that, I did a
876 little talk on the Olympics with my Saint John members. That was nice, that kept me going as
877 well because seeing their young faces on the screen there and telling them, talking about the
878 Olympic movement **01:48:00** and educating about volunteerism. Not that they needed to know
879 because they're all volunteers as well, but how you kick it up, how you kick it up a notch, right,
880 how do you engage them even further, how do you make it more meaningful for not yourself, but
881 for others? Right, and so that's what I tried to do. And I think I got through to a few of them, I
882 think because I still see them – even they're still hanging around and and engaged as well. So
883 that's, I think I, you know, that's, it's a nice in, like I said, "It's an innate reward" right.

884 INTVWR: So, speaking of full circle, when did you move back to Burnaby? And how did you
885 see the, the changes? Because you lived in Burnaby when you were younger and then you left,
886 and then you came back. How do you perceive of the changes that's happened?

887 RL: Yeah. I mean, goodness I mean, I've moved back **01:49:00** in 2014. And I had several
888 moments, one that sticks out in my mind which I can share here right now. And it was, where we
889 know, Highgate, Highgate Mall over there. So, I can't remember when exactly it was, but I
890 remember going by there and kind of going, "What is this Highgate?" And I realized, "Wait a
891 second, this was Middlegate Mall, this was the location of Middlegate." And it was literally like
892 a double-take. And the way I can describe it was sort of like Back to the Future, Marty McFly
893 going back in time, or going to the future, or whatever and looking at this location and kind of
894 going, "Wait a second, this is not... But this used to be." Right, so **01:50:00** hat's how long I've
895 been away. And for some strange reason, I just never noticed that until I went. "Oh." And then
896 sort of envisioning what I remember as a young kid, what Middlegate mall used to be, it used to
897 be like this big parking lot where the Highgate Mall is now and there wasn't these tall
898 apartments. It was just this one, one low rise, you know, just one level stores on the far end. And
899 I'm kind of like going, "Wow, that was weird to see that." So, I literally did a double-take, I
900 remember that. And there was me, and [Eds] is still there, so I'm like, "Okay." I know I'm in the
901 right location, right, it's just the weirdest moment seeing that. And the other one that I can say
902 wasn't as shocking is the, there was a place that I used to go to the arcade, it used to be called the,
903 it used to be called 'Lester's'. And now, not **01:51:00** a lot of people remember, unless you were
904 from my generation. And so, we're talking about 35-40 years ago, something like that. It was a
905 video game arcade and was popular among us young guys. And it was a great place where we
906 would hang out and plug a quarter in to play a video game. It was a good clean fun, we had a lot
907 of laughs, great memories, and then, that would eventually fizzle out because the arrival of the
908 video game consoles, right you know. Who wants to go to arcade now when you can just bring
909 this home right? But that game console indirectly erased another bit of culture because it's like
910 now I can't go to a place where I'm actually hanging out with a bunch of people and we're all

Transcription: BV023.16.17
Interview with Richard N. Liu
Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3
Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)
Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)
Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

911 having, having a good laugh, right. So that Lester's is no longer there, and I think it's a
912 Taiwanese restaurant now or **01:52:00** something like that.

913 INTVWR: Where was it?

914 RL: Across the A&W on Kingsway.

915 INTVWR: Okay.

916 RL: Yeah, yeah so, I think it's a Taiwanese restaurant. But anyways, yeah, I had a great time
917 growing up in Burnaby and that was, that's one of the many fond memories I have of that, yeah.
918 (laughing)

919 INTVWR: And then how did you get involved in Saint John Ambulance? Was that something
920 you started participating in right after you got back to Burnaby?

921 RL: Okay, so Saint John - that's a fun story to tell because I actually, what happened was I
922 wanted, I got to Saint John Ambulance, I wanted my kids to be involved with Saint John
923 Ambulance. That started with my kids, actually, because you know, I originally wanted them to
924 learn first aid, community building and involvement, engagement, **01:53:00** and, and
925 contributing to society, right. So that was the main reason. But it all just came by chance that one
926 fateful day, we had you know, the annual Hats Off Day parade in Burnaby. My kids were
927 marching there, and I was being the proud parent with the, my, I was borrowing my mom's
928 camera, so I got the lens in and everything. The superintendent, was, I got to know him really
929 well and I said, "Hey, do you want to meet the mayor?" He says, "Sure." And so, I said, I
930 brought the mayor over and introduced him to the mayor, and I said, "Oh, by the way. There's
931 minister Katrina Chen, do you want to meet the minister?" So, "Sure, okay" So we got a picture
932 and everything with all of them, and next thing I know, the superintendent is going, "We'd like to
933 appoint you as a special ambassador to Saint John." I'm like, "What? What did I do to **01:54:00**
934 deserve this?" Right? They said, "Well, because you're very engaged with the community, and
935 you have a lot of great relationships that you built." And I said, "Okay. I have no idea what I can
936 do, but you know let's see." So that same year, they appointed me as honorary brigade division
937 president. Again, I had no idea what that meant because like again, I said, I was originally
938 wanted my kids to be involved, I had only done some minimal reading on it. And, but guess
939 what? The pandemic hit. And then the next thing I know, I'm in this leadership role, and I take
940 leadership very seriously, and I wanted to find a way to keep our members connected. Putting
941 both my Saint John and my heritage hat on at the same time, I started thinking, "Okay. What
942 stories can we tell? What programs can we develop?" Of course, **01:55:00** this didn't come
943 overnight, it had a bit of staging, it took some stages to get to where we were. Because when the
944 pandemic hit, just before the pandemic hit, my heritage hat was on for Saint John because we
945 were able to get connected with two of our veterans who happened to be Chinese Canadian. And
946 we were so lucky actually, we, we met Peggy Lee in December of 2019. And then a couple
947 months after that, was it January of 2020, I think it was, this is how fast I was moving. I was like
948 sewing. Suddenly I'm like, "Okay, I've got to do this great story with Peggy and the work that
949 she did with the Women Ambulance Corps here in Vancouver." And the next thing I know, I was

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

950 researching and I'm glad that my linguistic skills came, kicked in because I was it wasn't
951 anything English-related, I it was actually the, I think it was the Sing Tao or the Ming Pao that
952 had an article on **01:56:00** Dr. Po Tin Chak. And that's what, how come I got to know his story,
953 was through the Chinese article. Not anything English because no one was writing about him,
954 right. So next thing I know, I'm talking to my superintendent and he's kind of chuckling with me.
955 He's going, "You know, I used to know a Chak family when I was a kid and they used to own a
956 store or something like that." Right, and it was, I think it was a convenience store and so, he used
957 to help out as a kid. And he was best friends with the son, Danny, and, but that was it, there was
958 nothing else. He, you know back in the day, there was no internet, right, so there was no way to
959 keep up with Facebook, or Instagram, or whatever, right. So, the next thing you know, we've got
960 this meeting with Dr. Chak and it's the same kid - the same son, it's Dr. Chak's son. And
961 **01:57:00** so they were blown away by that reunion that, that time. So, I was really happy when
962 that happened. I was like, "Wow, what are the chances that they're the same family?" So, we got
963 a chance to honor both our veterans just before the pandemic. And that was a real blessing
964 because it was really the only time that we had a full complement of members present with both
965 veterans. Because after that, the pandemic would, you know, just put everything, you know
966 aside. We had to do everything virtual and that was interesting as well. Because, so like I said, it
967 was in stages, so we would, we started out with an awards night, my superintendent had open
968 heart surgery, so I had to take over everything. We were worried for him, luckily nothing
969 happened. He went through it okay, **01:58:00** survived, and he's fine now. But man, when you
970 talk about pandemic and open-heart surgery, you're like, "Oh, my goodness" right. So, we had
971 our first virtual engagement, and it was recorded kind of rough. It was kind of like, we didn't
972 know quality, you know, resolution, and all that kind of stuff. So, I had to learn that really
973 quickly and ended up doing a second one which was to mark the 75th end of the Second World
974 War in the Pacific. And that also gave us an opportunity to, again, honor our veterans. Again, so
975 started to try and build, that, you know again, the culture of what Saint John is all about. And
976 through that, I was able to contact then Cultural, then Consul General Jeff Nankivell, who I knew
977 from my days in Beijing because he used to be in Beijing as the deputy head of mission **01:59:00**
978 who actually, coincidentally was also deputy head of mission during Rick Hansen's visit. So,
979 kind of all connected in that way. And so, I reached out to Jeff and he said, "Yeah, we actually
980 are in touch with Saint John Brigade in Hong Kong." And so, through that, I was able to connect
981 with the Hong Kong Brigade. So, connecting again, and building understanding that Saint John
982 is not just in B.C., not just in Canada, but around the world. So that was sort of my goal, and we
983 were able to that, we were able to connect with the brigade in London, England. So, during this
984 pandemic, it was very proactive, virtually, you know, reaching out, crossing, you know building
985 bridges across oceans, and creating some kind of programming that would keep our young
986 members interested, and also build their appreciation of what Saint John is all about. And I, I
987 had, then as this thing built up, I developed a **02:00:00** speaker series. And so, we had started off
988 with Minister Carla Qualtrough because she was, at the time, and she is again now, the Minister
989 of Sport. And I knew her from my days at the Paralympics because she was the president of the
990 Canadian Paralympic Committee. Right, so we kept in touch after all these years, right and so I
991 said, "I want you to be my first speaker and it would be wonderful for you to talk about it." And

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

992 she did a great job, gave Saint John high praise, and even spoke on behalf of the Prime Minister,
993 da, da, da. So, it was really nice, and we got that all on our, on our YouTube channel. By the
994 way, and we also created a YouTube channel through all this which was something we didn't
995 expect to do, you know because we had created so much programming that we wanted to use it
996 to build out a channel for our members to go and learn. **02:01:00** And if they missed it, they had
997 a chance, you know, chance to catch up on it too, as well, a resource at the same time for them to
998 appreciate the culture of Saint John. And it, yeah it was just a very, very meaningful way to keep
999 people connected during the global pandemic, which was very devastating for a lot of people.
1000 But I think through this, we were able to save our members in that regard, you know. They were
1001 educated, they were engaged. It was positive. And I also, you know, not only got community
1002 leaders, but I also got a celebrity from Kim's Convenience to speak, Mr. Sugith Varughese, who
1003 is a South Asian actor who's known for doing the CBC, what's that show... not only Kim's
1004 Convenience, but he did, **02:02:00** oh, I should have wrote this down, (pauses thinking) it's an
1005 old CBC Muppet Show, he use to be, you know, I should know this, it's on the tip of my tongue,
1006 and I just can't seem to get it out right now, but you know, it was very well known. But what was
1007 neat was I had him speak during Asian Heritage Month, and to share his Asian heritage, his story
1008 of migration, and the work that he did in the entertainment industry. He's an actor, he's, you
1009 know did Kim's Convenience, but he also did The Expanse. He has done a whole bunch. He's in
1010 a doctor show, he's playing a doctor right now in another show on C -, I can't remember which
1011 channel now, CTV here in Canada. But and that took a long time to get, by the way, it took a half
1012 a year to get Mr. Varughese on because you know I'm just a Joe Blow off the street, right,
1013 reaching out to him. **02:03:00** But he was so kind, generous, and, and you know, he spent an
1014 hour with us online as he was getting, he was in, who was he, he was in Montreal at the time,
1015 getting ready to do a show the next day for that morning, I forget, no, no for that night. He was
1016 supposed to do a show that night so he was going to go on, he was able to speak to us and then
1017 do that aft-, do his, so work after. Very, very lucky to get him. But yeah, just to be able to do that
1018 channel - to be able to create that channel and be able to put content on there, tell the stories of
1019 those folks, and tell the stories of our veterans, I mean, It's such a rare occasion that we were able
1020 to tell the stories of those who came before us. I mean, one thing you know, young people need
1021 to realize is that we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, **02:04:00** right. And we
1022 kind of need to remember what they did, you know, because none of us are the first to do this,
1023 right, you know. So, and I think that's important. You know, I've been very fortunate to have met
1024 the veterans over time, and sadly, they are no longer with us. My two veterans passed away,
1025 right, in the last couple of years and it's tough with that. I mean, I think I might have taken it too
1026 personally in that regards because it really hit me harder than I thought when they died. And you
1027 know, it was just realization that life is short. Right, life is short, and you have to do what you
1028 can in the time that you're given, right.

1029 INTVWR: Yeah. You mention a lot about, I mean throughout your life experience, it's been very
1030 much focused on building intercultural understanding. Like, opening doors and **02:05:00**
1031 connecting people. And also, I also feel like you very much value the importance of education
1032 and you've kind of talked about that as well in terms of like your passion for encouraging the
1033 next generation, like inspiring them to really to think, think outside the box and to be more

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

1034 involved in the community. I find all that very interesting in how it comes together in the ways
1035 you serve community because like you're involved in the Heritage Commission. And I think a lot
1036 of the work that takes place in that heritage context is also about building those understanding
1037 across cultures and also supporting education. So, can you share a bit, sort of like, about your
1038 involvement in that role, and like what it's meant **02:06:00** for you, and like any stories or
1039 memories you have of like when you served as a commissioner? I'm sure you've met a lot of
1040 folks, heard a lot of interesting stories about the community, and oversee a lot of projects.

1041 RL: Oh gosh, there's a lot. I mean, I mean, I mean we're here at the Burnaby Village Museum,
1042 celebrating the 50th was such a moment right. You know, just to realize that, you know, I was, I
1043 think I was, I had just been born when this thing started, right. But it was such an honor to be
1044 part of that celebration and I knew that I wanted to do something on, during that year. So, when,
1045 when we celebrated that 50th, I did a special event on-site here with Saint John. **02:07:00** And I
1046 took a signature class photo, again, that's, again where my two worlds collide of the Heritage
1047 Commission and Saint John. I kind of figured that this would be also something which – I, I
1048 looked at those young members and I kind of calculated in my head. I'm going, "When the
1049 Burnaby Village Museum celebrates 100 years in 50 years, I'm not going to be around." Right,
1050 it's reality. Unless someone figures out a lifelong pill that I can just take, right. But the reality is I
1051 probably won't be around, but those kids will. And so this photo of all of them lined up there on
1052 the main street of Burnaby Village Museum with the 50th banner is going to be that moment in
1053 time that they could look at and kind of talk about that, when they, what they **02:08:00**
1054 remember, right, as a young cadet, a young member of Saint John sitting on the street there,
1055 seeing this old guy, Richard Liu, directing "Everyone sit down, da, da, da or whatever." When
1056 they receive an award, or a promotion, or whatever - they'll remember that for the rest of their
1057 life. I kind of remember doing that purposefully because I wanted to give them something later
1058 down the road, right. So hopefully, they'll still be involved, or they leave, and they come back
1059 whichever, but this might be in the Burnaby archives, the photo, and they can bring it up and
1060 kind of go, "Oh, I remember that" right. You know, like, all of us probably won't be around but
1061 they will be and that's important. So that's kind of why I want to leave something for them in that
1062 regards. I think that's kind of, kind of important piece there where, where you connect - that's the
1063 word, **02:09:03** it's connect. I mean, that's just one of many, many, many experiences. I mean
1064 my, oh gosh, the, the exhibit Across the Pacific was also very meaningful, talking about our
1065 Chinese Canadians in the community. I, it's, it's also bittersweet at the same time because I
1066 remember being there with Colonel Howe Lee. And you know, he was such a kind and generous
1067 individual, a citizen of our city who served our country with distinction and honor and led
1068 **02:10:00** by example. Though you know, being there at the opening with him and hearing his
1069 story, you know, it's sort of, it brings joy but also sadness at the same time because I would
1070 never see him again because of the pandemic, right. But like I said, life is short, and you do what
1071 you can with those that, you know, the time you spend with them, right. And so, you know I was,
1072 I was very, the year before he passed almost exactly to the day, I think, we are able to, we are
1073 able to honor him, I'm just trying to remember the full name now, it's escaping me, The Chinese
1074 Historical Society?

Transcription: BV023.16.17
Interview with Richard N. Liu
Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3
Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)
Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)
Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

1075 INTVWR: Chinese Canadian

1076 RL: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of B.C. And we were able to honor how that night.
1077 **02:11:00** As a heritage commissioner, I was there with Lisa Codd, and we're very, very able to
1078 present him with something in there. And I can see the smile across his face right now and the
1079 pride and joy that came out of it. And you know, you know, you have to do these things before
1080 people leave us. And that's one of the things I, I take away from this is that, you, you, you know,
1081 we go to funerals a lot, you know sadly, right you know, it's a part of nature, people go. I was
1082 actually at one last week, right. You say things about the people right, but they're no longer
1083 around. So how Dr. Chak, Peggy Lee, you look at those folks that served and you have to say
1084 thank you to them before they go. And so, part of my **02:12:00** personal mission, particularly
1085 with Peggy and Dr. Chak, was to honor them before it's too late. And so luckily enough, for us, I
1086 had the great support of our leadership from B.C. But also, from across Canada. And so, we've
1087 been able to honor both of them. Interestingly enough, both of them are buried in Burnaby and
1088 so, which gives us that added opportunity to honour them for a long time, for a long time. And
1089 so, I'm really glad that I was able to go to Peggy's service and realized that she was going to be
1090 buried in Vancouver, actually, in Burnaby. So, I was like, "Oh, wow." So that means for Saint
1091 John, we actually have two of our World War II veterans buried right **02:13:00** here. Who would
1092 have thought?" Right so it was, that gives our young members who had a chance to meet her and
1093 hear about both of them and but every Remembrance Day that we're able to, or that
1094 remembrance month, we're able to go and honor their service because we do a service called the
1095 'No Stone left Alone', where we honor those who served. And we do this the weekend before
1096 Remembrance Day. And so, because Peggy just passed away this year, we're going to try to do
1097 two in one weekend because they're at two different locations in Burnaby. So, this is going to be
1098 the first time we're going to try that where we do the service. And hopefully the, our dignitaries
1099 **02:14:00** have enough time. We're going to give them advance warning, but hopefully we'll have
1100 a chance to get them all to those two, two services. Yeah, it's a, so like I said, it's a, kind of a
1101 combination of my two worlds. Sometimes, they all overlap sometimes, but it complements each
1102 role in that respect. I feel very fortunate and blessed in that regards that I've been able to utilize
1103 that and make something good out of it.

1104 INTVWR: Thank you. I also want to congratulate you that earlier this year in June 24th, you
1105 were formally invested into the Order of Saint John's, the correct name now. When you heard
1106 about the news, yeah, what was your reaction?

1107 RL: Oh, gosh. **02:15:00** Overjoyed, honoured. I didn't really expect it.

1108 INTVWR: Actually, can you explain the significance of the Order of Saint John for us?

1109 RL: Sure, absolutely. Well, it's a humanitarian order. The Order of Saint John is one of five
1110 orders within the Canadian honours system, like the Order of Canada. And each recipient is
1111 based on merit and contribution, and time and the like. It's, it's a surreal kind of feel to it when
1112 you, when you receive something like that. I can never really express what that feeling is like,
1113 because you know, you hear about people receiving **02:16:00** these orders, right, and you never
1114 expect you would be one to receive it. You know, I was always told to just do your job and don't

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

1115 expect anything. Right, just do your job, do well, and carry on. So yeah, I mean, I was incredibly
1116 honoured. I received a letter, I believe it was, it's kind of, it's a bit of a blur. Like, even the
1117 ceremony and everything was a bit of a blur to me because you never really, it's you never
1118 thought you would actually get something like this. Right, so it's a, but it's a huge honour for my
1119 family in that regards. As a, you know, a son of Chinese immigrants, Chinese-Italian immigrants,
1120 **02:17:00** I think I can call them and say that they came from Italy, but a son of immigrants who
1121 worked very hard and to raise two boys, and to, I want to say 'succeed'. I think, to achieve a level
1122 of recognition of what they do in the community, I guess if that's the right way to say it, it's a
1123 huge honour. I mean, I feel like this should be given to my dad, you know what I mean? It's like,
1124 he did so much. I feel that in a way, I was receiving this on behalf of my dad because it was my
1125 dad who inspired me to do a lot of this bridge-building. So, in a way, this kind of also belongs to
1126 my father. He did a lot, you know, to raise the family, but also to inspire me and to **02:18:00** do,
1127 do the things I do today. So that's, part of that, you know, so I'm grateful for my family - my
1128 parents, my brother Stan, everyone who supported me through this time. My wife and my kids as
1129 well, thanks to my kids for getting me into Saint John. If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have, you
1130 know, do this. But yeah. I mean, it's just a crazy, crazy moment in time. I mean, like, kind of
1131 like, a couple of things that stuck out for me during this moment was when I got the, when I was
1132 invested in Ottawa, it was **02:19:00** just this past June, June 24th, because that's Saint John Day.
1133 So, our location for the St. John, for the order, investiture was at the Senate of Canada. So, I'm
1134 not sure how familiar you are with the locations in Ottawa, but the Senate of Canada is in an old
1135 train station. And it's in central Ottawa. It's, it's kind of cool, like when you walk into it. It's an
1136 old, old building but it's so grand, high ceilings, and everything. But it was the old Ottawa Union
1137 Station. And so for me, it was kind of coincidental, **02:20:00** and I would only realize this after I
1138 got back home, it kind of hit me that this, this event that I had experienced took place at the same
1139 venue that took place 80 years before, where my great uncle who was the first minister, first
1140 Chinese Minister to Ottawa, would receive, and had arranged actually and would receive
1141 Madame Chiang Kai-shek at the same train station. And that's where Prime Minister Mackenzie
1142 King and the governor-general would also be there to welcome her. And so that was a very
1143 unique moment there, and was because it's a historical piece where, **02:21:00** you have to
1144 understand, like back in the day, the Prime Minister wasn't really fond of the Chinese, right,
1145 didn't really understand Chinese culture. But my great uncle did what he could to break that
1146 barrier down as much as he could because he was a outstanding intellectual. One that, not, you
1147 thought my father spoke a lot of languages, my great uncle was also one of those that, and I have
1148 to have, have to look through his list of education because it always drives me bananas because I
1149 can't remember all of them, that's how educated he was. I'm trying to think back now. **02:22:00**
1150 He was, I don't know if I wrote it down or anything, but he was educated in Tsinghua University
1151 and he got the, a scholarship to go to the United States to study. I'm trying to find it, if I can see
1152 it here, Ah good, I have it here. So, he was a Tsinghua graduate that, and he received the Boxer
1153 Rebellion Indemnity Scholarship. So, he went to John Hopkins University, started a graduate
1154 student in Michigan, and then he went to Harvard to get his master's, and then got a PhD in
1155 International Law at Columbia. So, you can see already just by that, he was very educated. And
1156 so, and also for the UBC side, again, hear me plugging **02:23:00** in UBC. He received an

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

1157 honourary degree from UBC in 1944. So, the thing is, for me - yeah, you got all those degrees,
1158 it's nice, but what, what, the proof in the pudding, I guess you can say, was when I finally heard
1159 his voice for the first time. I've heard his voice before; I met him before and once in the early
1160 '90s. This is before he passed away in San Jose, California. But he, I was kind of looking on
1161 YouTube for some stuff on him, right and something popped up and it was this National Film
1162 Board video on Chinese culture. And this guy **02:24:00** with his 1930s voice, talking about
1163 Chinese culture and everything, right. And the next thing I know, I'm reading the description and
1164 it's saying the narrator is Dr. Liu Shih-Shun, and that's like my great uncle. And I'm going,
1165 "That's my great uncle's voice" from whatever year that was, from 1940, 1942, I believe it was.
1166 So here I am listening to his voice, I'm going like, "Wow." So, his English level was fairly high,
1167 right." So even without looking at all his degrees and all that stuff, you listen to it and you go,
1168 "Okay, wow." Alright, so now, that's a bridge builder right there, right. And for him to be able to
1169 talk about Chinese culture in a clear **02:25:00** concise narrator's voice, how rich the thousands of
1170 years of Chinese culture is, right. You've got the visuals of the Chinese artifacts and all that
1171 stuff, and it's in full color. And imagine if you're Prime Minister Mackenzie King watching this
1172 for the first time - and all your time was this racial view of the slums, the opium, all that stuff,
1173 and suddenly you see this, you suddenly realize, "Oh, there's a whole different side to the
1174 Chinese culture." I just realizing, did my great-uncle, like manage to do all this? Not by himself,
1175 but of course, with his role as the ambassador, and you know began to eloquently express, you
1176 know or describe Chinese culture to a man who's never thought about Chinese culture. So, I'm
1177 almost certain that through diplomacy, he was able to break down the barriers with **02:26:00** this
1178 prime minister who was known for his very racialized views. And the fact that he was able to
1179 arrange Madame Chiang Kai-shek's visit, Soong Mei-ling to, to Ottawa, probably further broke
1180 those barriers down because her English is also way up there. There's a video about her speaking
1181 in parliament, that's online that you can also see, and if you listen to it, you go, "Yeah, okay." So,
1182 you got those two breaking the barriers down. I mean, it means that there's a wider appreciation
1183 now for Chinese leadership, for Chinese culture, and the like. And so I think that may have
1184 played a little bit into how things would happen a few years after that. Because, I mean, he, he,
1185 **02:27:00** he traveled across Canada and this is documented by, okay I'm trying to remember her
1186 name now, she's from the University of Manitoba, I'm trying...

1187 INTVWR: Professor?

1188 RL: Yeah.

1189 INTVWR: Professor Marshall?

1190 RL: Yes. So, Professor Alison Marshall documents this my great uncle's visit to Manitoba.
1191 Because interestingly enough, there was a large contingent of Chinese Canadians in Manitoba at
1192 that time back, because back in the day, right. So, he, my great-uncle traveled across Canada
1193 twice by train and the Chinese communities welcomed him with open arms and there's photos of
1194 him and all that stuff. And Professor Marshall shared with me a couple of photos. I was blown
1195 away; I had no idea about this. It was amazing. And so, the Manitoba Press in Winnipeg
1196 **02:28:00** documents that said that he demanded the full franchise for Chinese born, oh,

Transcription: BV023.16.17

Interview with Richard N. Liu

Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3

Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)

Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)

Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

1197 Canadian-born Chinese and relaxation of barriers preventing Chinese immigration to Canada. He
1198 had demanded that. He was working towards that. And so, I have a feeling that there was a lot of
1199 work behind the scenes that were not privy to but that allowed for certain things to happen. And
1200 so, by the time 1947 rolled around, my fa-, my great-uncle finished his posting in Ottawa, and
1201 then he would go on to New York, to the UN, United Nations. And then after that, he would go
1202 to Mexico for his final posting. Because by that point, the, I think it was the '60s, I think it was,
1203 we're starting to see, or '50s we're starting to see it, **02:29:00** a degradation in the, in the, in the
1204 '60s. You start seeing the, this, the nationalist government was having less sway in the
1205 international world. And so, the PRC would now become more of the recognized China versus
1206 the ROC. And so, my great-uncle would eventually retire in San Jose.

1207 INTVWR: So, you've obviously met a lot of really amazing people or are related to a lot of really
1208 amazing people in your life that's inspired you to do, yeah, all the accomplishments that you've
1209 made over your lifetime. I guess as we get to the end of the interview, I'd like to hear from you
1210 any sort of words of wisdom you would like to pass down to future generations, **02:30:00** future
1211 leaders, community builders. What would you like to share with them with your rich experience?

1212 RL: Well, I shared, first of all, was know your French. That was very important to me personally,
1213 but I think to Canadians. Especially, Canadians on the West Coast. Pay it forward, you know,
1214 we're not in this world for a long time, so you try to do what you can to maybe inspire the next
1215 generation. Share a little bit of what you've experienced so that maybe they can take some of that
1216 away and maybe help, you know, navigate their own life, you know, for, in a better way. Yeah, I
1217 think those are the two I really, **02:31:00** really appreciate the, you know, my life that I've been
1218 given. And you know, I also give kudos to my school, my high school as well, to STM, because
1219 they gave me my lifelong friends who I'm very blessed to have, and the community that I've been
1220 given. Shout out to STM because they've also got over 60 years in Burnaby, my two girls also
1221 went to the school as well for their high school, they graduated from there too. So we have at
1222 least two generations of Saint Thomas More knights. And I just remembered, there was another
1223 note I was going to say about one other school. Of course, my memory is not serving me well
1224 today but something for Burnaby, which is also exciting, because my youngest went to Saint
1225 Francis de Sales. And they're marking 90 years **02:32:00** this year.

1226 INTVWR: Oh wow.

1227 RL: Yeah, so I just kind of wanted to throw that in as well because I just remembered that I was
1228 at an event with the mayor at Saint Francis de Sales. The father there was indicating that it was
1229 90 years already this year. I'm like, "Okay, that explains it." You know, they've been around for a
1230 while, they're well-known and well-liked. It's a great place for community, for the community to
1231 gather and all that. So, yeah I know, I appreciate the opportunity to speak and share some of my
1232 stories. And hopefully it does, in some way, shape or manner, inspire the next generation. So,
1233 thank you.

1234 INTVWR: Thank you so much. It's amazing lifetime of experience and just the global
1235 perspective that you bring from all of your experiences and all the people you've met, I think,

Transcription: BV023.16.17
Interview with Richard N. Liu
Audio Recording: 2023_0016_0017_004.mp3
Interviewer: Denise Fong (INTVWR)
Interviewee: Richard Liu (RL)
Date of Interview: September 11, 2023

1236 will be very valuable for anyone who's listening to the interview. So thanks so much for your
1237 time. **02:32:59**