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Mrs. Sitt Shee Lee or "Leung Sum"

was born in Hong Kong on October 1, 1903.

In 1922, at the age of 19, she came to Vancouver by steamship where she met her husband, David Lee or "Lay Gee Leung."

Left behind in China were her two brothers, Jack and Ying, as well as her mother whom Mrs. Lee would not see again until 1970. . . 48 years later. . . when her mother was 93 and Leung Sum was 67.

One year after that visit, her mother died.

And it was not until 40 years after emigrating to Vancouver that she got the opportunity meet her brother, Jack, again but it was a further 16 years after her reunion with Jack that she reconnected with her other brother, Ying.

This first visit with Ying when she was 78 years of age was followed by several others before his death in 1998-- the most memorable of which was when Ying showed up at Mrs. Lee's 90th birthday party.

Two years after her arrival in Vancouver, her first child, Gar, was born. Then came five additional children: Spike or Gordon, Lily, Shirley, Garson and Mary.

Mrs. Lee also has a family connection to her husband's daughter, Shun Yung-- a half-sister to the six Lee children and the mother of George Lee whose tribute we heard earlier.

In addition, Mrs. Lee is survived by 20 grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren and 5 great-great-grandchildren.

Her life in Vancouver was memorable for several reasons-- one of which that her earliest residence was in the Chinatown area, at the back of what was known at the WK Oriental Gardens Restaurant-- which her husband, David, owned and operated for a number of years.

After moving to 444 Keefer Street where the children were born, the family moved once more--this time in 1964, to the house on McGill Street after their home on Keefer had been expropriated.

It was during these years that she developed numerous friendships and close ties with both relatives and neighbours.

In fact, it is likely that she was a friend of the parents or grandparents of many of you present today.

I should mention here that many of her friendships and much of her very active social life developed around the Lee's Association and the Mah Jong games-- an activity she dearly loved and which never ended at the usual 10 p.m. time but often lasted into the early morning

As the children said in my meeting with them:  
Mom was never an early riser but she was always an early arriver-- especially when it came to coming home just a few hours before dawn.

Some of those wonderful memories are captured in the words written by Wayson or Sonny Choy in his reminiscences in the *Jade Peony* as well as in his upcoming work

Mrs. Lee was a loving and devoted mother who cared deeply for her children. . . and insisted on taking care of her children even after they reached adulthood and got married-- as shown by the fact that even in her 80's, she would get on the bus several times a day or a week and go to Chinatown or to the Army and Navy or Woodward's to shop for her family.

Although they would offer their protests, she would dismiss them out of hand and continue to come home laden with heavy shopping bags filled with assorted merchandise from canned soup to underwear-- sometimes even dropping her burden off at Shirley's home before going back for another load.

Although she was, in her children's own words, a somewhat lazy housekeeper and a terrible cook, she continued the tradition started by her husband before his death in 1972 of having her family come home for regular weekend dinners

It is a tradition that continues still today in the many and varied ways her children and grandchildren gather together around a groaning table to enjoy one another's company, to strengthen the family ties and, of course, to make fun of each other-- which, I might add, they do very well.

One of these family gatherings, incidentally, is the Christmas brunch at Mary's home where Santa--aka John Kerr--shows up bearing gifts and good cheer.

In such ways as these and others,  
Mrs. Lee's quiet unassuming manner began to form the bond  
that maintained and encouraged harmony and close ties  
between herself and her children and between her children and their families.

She was a simple, honest, caring, considerate and generous person  
who never complained about people  
but was always respectful of their feelings and needs.

In short, she was a real lady who carried herself with dignity and grace  
and taught her children to do the same.

Several other interesting items: Mrs. Lee told her children that when she was a young girl,  
someone had read her palm and had told her that she was likely to have a short life.

However, she was also told that if she did good deeds for others,  
she could overcome this prediction--and her 95 full and rich years. . .  
as well as the care and compassion she showed to others  
that came back to her from those who visited her  
while she was in hospital--  
such things stand as clear proofs and wonderful witnesses  
both to the goodness she displayed  
and to the inaccuracy of the original prediction regarding a short life.

You see, although she was just a bit of a woman  
who appeared to be rather frail and fragile,  
the reality was that she was incredibly strong--both physically and emotionally.

For example, on her 90th birthday, she was the centre of attention at a party  
thrown for her and for all those 90 and over.  
This "Geriatric Birthday Party" as the family called it  
included close relatives and longtime friends--  
several of whom were in their 90's and one who was 100--  
all of whom have since passed on where they have been waiting  
to welcome and be reunited with Mrs. Lee.

In addition, her incredible determination showed itself  
when she survived colon cancer and pneumonia two years ago. . .  
and, more recently, although suffering from pancreatic cancer--  
the disease which eventually took her life--  
she never complained to the medical staff  
or made unreasonable demands upon them.

On the contrary, despite her weakened state and the seriousness of her illness,  
she greeted more than 40 of her children and grandchildren  
and great-grandchildren who came to visit last Saturday.

Even Dr. Tang, her family physician,  
was surprised at her strength and resiliency--  
particularly because he had expected  
that when she entered hospital on Wednesday  
that she would be gone by Saturday  
and was amazed to find her still alive after the long weekend.

In fact, it was not until the Thursday one week ago that she died,  
thus dispelling yet another prediction regarding her early demise.

And ~~even~~ then, she didn't leave this world  
until she had made certain that she had said goodbye to everybody--  
including her grandson who was making a special trip to see her . . .  
but whose flight wouldn't arrive until Wednesday evening.

Only after he showed up at the hospital at 9:30 p.m.  
and she managed a smile for him--  
only then did she take her leave. . . and leave those she loved.

And if that demonstration of tenacity wasn't enough,  
Mrs. Lee resisted and eventually overcame the power of death  
in yet another way when she was baptized into Christ  
and was given the promise of eternal life.

This extraordinary, powerful and life-giving event took place on Wednesday  
just after Sister Carissima sang "Jesus Loves Me" to her. . .  
in much the same way that Mrs. Lee had sung it  
to her children and grandchildren.

After giving her assent to what was about to happen by nodding her head,  
Mrs. Sit Shee Lee, known throughout her life as Leung Sum  
but known now and forever by her baptismal name--LeeAnn--  
in peace and serenity, Mrs. Lee--daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother,  
great-grandmother, great-great-grandmother and child of God--  
laid down her burdens and went home,  
holding on, firmly and joyfully, to the cross--to her "passport to heaven."

And in that dignified and gracefilled manner,  
Mrs. Lee rejoined her husband, her parents and brothers, her friends and her Lord--  
the one who did and does and always will love her.

Blessed be the memory of Mrs. Lee.