

Finding Mr. Wong

Susan Crean

Family-By-Affection



Susan Crean was born and raised in Vancouver, Ontario, and is of Scots-Irish descent. Her articles and essays have appeared in magazines and newspapers across Canada, and she is the author of seven books, the first, *Who's Afraid of Canadian Culture*, appearing in 1976. Her most recent book, *The Laughing One: A Journey to Emily Carr*, was nominated for a Governor General's award and won the Hubert Evans Non-Fiction Prize (B.C. Book Prizes) in 2002. Crean currently lives in Toronto.

Susan Crean's memoir *Finding Mr. Wong* chronicles her effort to piece together the life of the man she knew as Mr. Wong, cook and housekeeper to her Irish Canadian family for two generations. Reminiscing, Crean writes, "I grew up in Mr. Wong's kitchen ..."

A Chinese Head Tax payer hired by Crean's grandfather in 1928, Wong Dong Wong remained on the job following Gordon Crean's death in 1947. Mr. Wong eventually retired in 1965 and moved to Chinatown. Crean's homage weaves the various strands of her memories of and discoveries about Mr. Wong during the last 25 years of his life; she travels the streets and histories of Chinatowns in Vancouver and Toronto, Canada, and twice she visits Guangdong, China, where she located his home village, found descendants of his father's brother, and learned the beginning of his story: orphaned as a newborn, then brought to Canada by his uncle, Wong YeeWoen.

At the core of the narrative are Crean's observations of the blurred lines between numerous socio-cultural dynamics (worker/employer, family/servant, child/adult). She particularly considers relationships that cross race as well as class. Beginning with the partnership formed by Crean's grandfather and Mr. Wong – a partnership whose long alliance and evident mutual regard guaranteed Wong's presence in Crean's own story – she relates her own experience grappling with racism as a small child in the Vancouver of the 1950s and 1960s. Crean's exploration also considers memory and its role in the writing and researching of a book such as this. She meditates on the ways socio-cultural issues are represented (or not) in film and literature, ultimately combining fiction with historical recreations and memoir.

Finding Mr. Wong is an important contribution to a growing body of writings that illuminate the lives of people silenced or otherwise negated by myopic history.

"The memory portrait of a beloved servant is always a project fraught with dangers of sentimentality and mystification. Too often, the white author turns the tale of the racialized servants into hagiography or Hallmark sentiment, blurring entirely the brutal realities of race and class that undergird and hedge in such relationships.

Crean is exquisitely aware of these narrative dangers, and she is remarkably successful both in delineating them and avoiding them in this exemplary memoir."
—Vancouver Sun

For further information, or to arrange an interview with Susan Crean please contact Spencer Williams.

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