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Born and grew up in Calcutta, India, I immigrated to Toronto, Canada, where I studied accounting and received my CGA (certified General Accountant) designation. After working in accounting for twenty odd years, I decided to return to school and studied Professional Writing. I switched from working full time to part-time. Now I enjoy working with numbers almost as much as I enjoy writing. My website is: [www.kwaiyunli.com](http://www.kwaiyunli.com)

My publication history:

2011- *Deoli Camp: An Oral History of Chinese Indians from 1962 to 1966* (MA thesis, University of Toronto)

2009- "The Handwriting Expert" in *Henry Chow and other stories*

2006- *The Palm Leaf Fan*, published in India as:

2008- *The Last Dragon Dance*

2005- "Recording" in *In The Totally Unknown Writers' Festival 2005: A Celebration of Arnie*

2004- *A Kiss Beside the Monkey Bar*

## Recording at CBC

By Kwai Li

“CBC Radio bought my story!” I drop the phone back on its cradle, spring up from my chair, race around my cluttered desk, out of my tiny office and into the office next door to mine. “I am going to the studio next week, to record my story.” I grin at Vivian.

“What story?” Vivian’s fingers pause above her keyboard and she raises her eyebrows. Vivian and I work in the accounting department of Greenwood Inc—an international company that owns and operates residential and commercial rental properties. We look after the commercial properties.

Vivian and I started work at Greenwood Inc. in the same week, and we have similar immigration backgrounds. Her Jewish parents emigrated from the then USSR to Israel with their children. Vivian, the eldest of four daughters, immigrated to Toronto, Canada when she finished High School in Israel. My Chinese parents emigrated from Southern China to India. I finished High School in India and immigrated to Toronto.

“The very first story I wrote for my Creative Writing course,” I dance into Vivian’s office and drop onto the chair across the desk from her. “During a really bad monsoon in Calcutta, the fish farm near our house overflowed, one of the fish escaped into our flooded living room, my brother and I caught it and we had it for dinner. It was fun.” I beam at Vivian.

I fail to mention that the flooding was so bad trucks carrying food could not get through the flooded roads. Most of the families in the neighborhood had run low in staples like rice, flour and noodles. We could not leave for higher grounds as the whole of Tangra, the suburb of Calcutta, had turned into a lake pock-marked by rain drops and

pimpled by floating debris.

“Congratulations!” Vivian laughs. “Let’s go out and celebrate. It’s lunchtime.” She glances at her watch. “Well, almost.”

“11:45,” I shoot up from the chair. “Close enough. I will get my purse.” I sprint back to my office.

On the day before the recording, I told my supervisor, Rahul, that I have a nine-fifteen doctor’s appointment next day and that I will be late coming to work.

“We have to finish our month-end reports by tomorrow.” Rahul frowns and adjusts his narrow tie. “Can you finish the Willowdale Shopping Centre reports by then?”

“Oh, yeah.” I wave my hand airily. “It’s almost done. It will be on your desk by tomorrow.”

“Okay.” Rahul looks dubious, but he nods.

“Thanks.” I skip out of his office.

At 8:25 on the day of the recording, I stand in the large atrium at the center of the CBC Building, an atrium that soars up to twenty or so stories, and lets the sunlight in from the glass roof. Voices and footsteps echo in the vast space. I buy a coffee from the café and sit at a table, watching people rushing by; people in suits, briefcases in hand, people in jeans and t-shirts with knapsacks on their backs. I recognize faces from CBC Television.

The thick human traffic thins at 9:05. I stroll towards the elevators and stop at the security desk.

“Good morning. Which department are you going to?” The security guard, his name tag says Jim, asks.

“Good morning. I have an appointment with Janice Smith, CBC Radio, at 9:15.”

“Can I see a photo ID?”

“Sure.” I hand him my driver’s license.

Jim checks the sheet on a clipboard in front of him and glances at my driver’s license.

“The recording studio is on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor.” Jim hands me back my driver’s license and waves me towards the bank of elevators. “Just follow the signs. You can’t miss it.”

I thank Jim, and take the elevator to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, I stop by the walkway overlooking the atrium and look down to admire the vast atrium, flooded with sunlight. I follow the sign that says CBC Radio and an arrow pointing to my left.

I peer into a large office. Work stations jostle with filing cabinets and battered chairs for space. Phones shrill, computers hum, people bustle between the desks and voices drone.

I stop by the desk closest to the door. A man in t-shirt crouches behind his computer, his phone cradled between his left shoulder and his ear and his right hand clamped around his mouse. He glances at me.

“I am looking for Janice Smith.” I say.

He points at a woman three rows back from his station.

“Thank you.” I walk towards Janice Smith.

Janice looks up, bounces up from behind her desk, dashes up to me, shakes my hand briskly, and smiles widely. “Kwai, right?”

I nod.

“Hello good to finally meet you. How are you? No trouble finding the place?”

Without waiting for me to answer, she dashes back to her desk, stirs the papers around, and pulls out a folder. “Here, come come come. Sit. Fill out the forms. Union stuff.” She thrusts me onto a chair beside a small table, and drops the five pages filled with small print onto the table.

I squint at the small print.

“Don’t worry, just a formality.” Janice laughs. “Take your time. I will be at my desk.”

I fill out the form, joining a union for the duration of the reading.

Janice rushes me into the sound-proof recording room.

I sit and wait for Janice to give me the signal to start reading.

I rub my damp hands on my skirt and look around. On my right, red and green lights blink on a bank of sound equipment. On my left, overhead lights reflect off the firmly closed sound-proof door, the door that shut five minutes ago with a heavy thud. In front of me, a large glass window looks out to the Control Room of the recording studio. Janice sits at a table with dials and push buttons in the Control Room. She hovers over a table with blinking lights, dials and push buttons. Why is she frowning at the papers in front of her, the paper with my story on it?

I shift in my chair, adjust the over-large headset clamped over my ears, rest my elbows on the table and turn the pages of the story.

Janice clears her throat, the sound loud in my earphone.

“Well,” She hesitates, “I wonder...”

I look up.

Janice rakes her fingers through her short spiked hair. She ruffles the papers in front of her.

“Well, I wonder,” Janice clears her throat again, “If you could change your brother’s name to Jack, or ...?”

I blink. In the story, I use my brother’s real name, Fu. In Chinese, Fu means prosperity, Fu means good health, and Fu means happiness. Fu is a word that represents every thing one would wish for.

“Oh.” I blink again. “That’s his name.”

“Yes, I know. You see, well, it’s...” Janice spreads her hands.

“Oh.” I wonder if I should change Fu’s name to Dick.

“Maybe if I use his middle name as well?” I chew my lower lip. “His full name is Li Chiang Fu. I can read his name as Chiang Fu.” I use the Chinese pronunciation of my brother’s name.

“Oh, yesyesyes.” Janice’s smile flashes. “Thatwouldbegood. Reallygood. Anytimeyouareready.” She laughs.

I smile, looked down at my pages and start reading.

I got back to Greenwood Inc at 11:30.

“Good, you are back,” Rahul calls out from his office. “Let me have your reports as soon as you are done.”

“No sweat.” I say.

I work through my lunch hour munching on crackers at my desk. I miss my afternoon tea at the lunchroom with Vivian. Rahul paces by my office every five minutes. At the last pass-by, he stops by the door and asks in a causal voice, “How is it going?”

“Almost done.” I answer just as causally.

I e-mail the reports to Rahul at 4:45 p.m.