

**Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy**  
**Ontario Genealogical Society (OGS) Conference**  
**May 15, 2010**

Good evening, ladies & gentlemen:

I am very happy to be here this evening as the Honourary Patron of the OGS. Like my predecessor, the Honourable Lorna Milne, I am an active genealogist. I see my role as spreading an interest in genealogical research among the new communities that make up the growing diverse Canadian demographic, particularly in Ontario.

I believe every family has an interesting story. These personal stories come to life when we trace the names of our ancestors, as far back as is possible, and then we discover what they did, which part of the world they came from, and how they ended up in Ontario.

This kind of research helps us to learn geography as well as history. People migrate for a reason, be it economic, political or religious. Or, it could be as simple as wanting to be with members of their families.

For me, I do historical research along with genealogical research in order to understand why my ancestors did what they did, how they lived and even what they ate. Were they entrepreneurial or were they lazy? It was interesting to find out why my grandfather, who was from south China, could speak English at the age of 12. And I am talking about the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Studying the behaviour of our ancestors will also bring to light how genes pass down from one generation to another, and we hope there are more good genes than bad ones! Characteristics can skip one or more generations, and then reappear.

Although many people still think of Canada's history as one with only European and First Nations' characteristics, we need to realize that there is a significant Asian and African Canadian population that can trace their roots back to before Confederation. A few French Canadians who work on Parliament Hill in Ottawa have told me about their Chinese ancestries. If they had not brought it up, no one who looks at them, would have been able to guess.

Forgive me if I am wrong, but I think black Canadian history is better known than the history of Asian Canadians, particularly that of the Chinese, Japanese, and South Asians. I hope to rectify this perception, and to convince Canadians that genealogical research is something we can all be interested in.

I have a colleague in the Senate who is of mixed heritage. Her mother was Cree and her father was Chinese. She grew up in Saskatchewan knowing more about the Cree culture and tradition than her Chinese heritage. Last year, through a friend's arrangement,

and on the invitation of the local government of the county where her father came from, she, along with her brother and son, visited China for the first time. Up till that point, she only knew of her father as a hard worker from China who owned a café in Saskatchewan, which the entire family helped to run.

In her ancestral village in China, she visited their clan museum and ancestral hall. She was taken aback by the civilization and old culture on her paternal side of the family. On her return, she proudly showed me a jade ring that her brother made for her, with her Chinese name carved on it. Her brother is a jeweller and he bought the piece of jade in the market in Canton. I do believe she feels more complete now that she has the knowledge of her father's side of her ancestry.

Many of the members here would know that genealogical research can result in friendships that span continents because of the networks you form. I am going to tell you what happened to me recently. I am researching my husband's family history in Australia, which is a book in progress.

We were in Australia, again, this January, visiting museums, libraries, and government offices to get birth, marriage & death certificates. I taped more interviews with relatives, collected old photographs, and visited old village schools and homesteads.

One day, we visited the town of Beechworth, in the state of Victoria. Beechworth was a thriving gold mining town in the 19<sup>th</sup> cen., where there is a small Chinese Cultural Centre as well as a large Chinese cemetery. The person who looks after the Centre knew me from before, because of my previous visit a few years ago. She showed me the out-of-print book *The Diggers from China: The Story of the Chinese on the Gold Fields*, by Jean Gittens. The Cultural Centre obtained a copy recently from Jean's son, John Gittens, who lives in Melbourne. She gave me his contact information, so that I could contact him to see if I could get another copy.

Interestingly, John asked me if my family is from Hong Kong. And, to make a long story short, it turns out that our grandparents were good friends, and his uncle and aunt were my parents' best friends. He mentioned the genealogist in his family, Peter Hall, who wanted to know if I am related to their family on the maternal side by marriage.

Then, I received an e-mail from Peter Hall from London, England. Peter used to work in a company in Hong Kong where my father was a director. He wrote me because he believed his grand aunt was married to a maternal grand uncle of mine. He also wanted to confirm where he thinks I am in that family tree. It turns out that he has more information about my maternal great grandparents than I do!

Isn't life interesting! I have always believed that knowledge of oneself is rooted in feeling comfortable in celebrating one's own heritage. And by learning about our genealogy, we feel connected to the past. This is what the OGS is all about.

As Honourary Patron, I look forward to working with the members to promote genealogical research, and to helping you in your mission to disseminate the wide variety of resources available in Ontario. Ontarions need to know the good work you are doing, and I will do my best to build the networks that will help you to reach out to new members.