

Willie Woo

Newcastle

*Local legend, Councillor, Goodyear man,
The News Café (now Walsh's Snug)*

We moved to Newcastle in 1954. If you've ever gone into the Snug, that's where it all started. That was my parents' restaurant.

I would say none of us had, as they say, a "pot to pee in." All working class. My best friend was Ukrainian, our doctor was Hungarian, Polish war veterans, English war brides, lots of Dutch, we even had Indigenous people then, right? And we all got along.

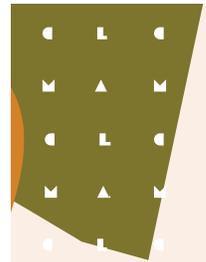
My dad came to Canada in 1911. He was 22, born in China. He was caught up in the Chinese Exclusion Act. The government thought the head tax would be enough to dissuade any Chinese from coming over, but somehow there were able to pay the \$500 head tax.

My mom came over in 1952, and I am only assuming it was an arranged marriage. They never talked about it. If I did ask, you know, they didn't want to talk about it, and you didn't pry.

Growing up at the Snug, we lived at the back. If you look there is a 2 storey part, and I slept in the same room with Dad and my sister slept in the same room with Mom. We used to have a Quebec stove that we put coal into, and then dad got a little Superior propane heater. It was supposed to heat the upstairs, but I can remember wearing probably 10 layers of clothes just to keep warm. But we never knew anything different. It's just the way it was.

I think back now, if my friends came over and my parents were speaking Chinese,





Current owner of Walsh's Snug, John Walsh, makes a point to celebrate his Dublin history alongside local history.



I'd be embarrassed. We would be serving fried rice and chicken balls up front, and we were eating authentic Chinese food at the back... you know, with chopsticks. And that was pretty novel for Newcastle. You know, I would be embarrassed. And I look back now and think "what did I have to be embarrassed about?"

It's those reflections I do now, and how proud I am of my Chinese heritage. The first time I went to China, back in 2011, I got off the plane in Hong Kong and I just had this sort of feeling that Mom and Dad were looking down on me, and how proud there were of where I am in my life. They never had that opportunity.

