

Keeping Heritage Alive

Our multicultural fabric is one of Canada's most defining characteristics. But that fabric would fade quickly if newcomers did not strive to keep their cultural heritage alive. Fortunately, as *Our World* discovered, a number of employees are honouring their past and, in the process, amplifying their contribution to Canada.



photo: Charles Enman/DFAIT
Though born in Calgary, Vivian Hung feels a deep affinity with her family's Chinese traditions.

Though born in Toronto, Roman Waschuk, Director of the Stabilization and Reconstruction Programs Division, grew up speaking Ukrainian, the language of his parents, who had emigrated from Ukraine in the late 1940s.

"Language was just the beginning," Waschuk says. "Actually, there were many Ukrainian elements in my childhood."

His family attended the Ukrainian Catholic Church and, as a youth, he was a member of a Ukrainian-speaking scout troop. On Saturdays, he attended a special school that focused on Ukrainian language, culture and history.

However, while cherishing its heritage, the family was entirely open to Canadian culture. Each December 25, they would join relatives for a Christmas turkey dinner. Thirteen days later, they would have a Ukrainian celebration, with the traditional 12-course meatless dinner. "Two Christmases each year—right there, you can see the advantages of multiculturalism," Waschuk says with a laugh.

His heritage has also been of great value to his career. From 1994 to 1998, for example, he was posted as a political counsellor at the mission in Kyiv, where his command of the language was an obvious advantage and his knowledge of Ukrainian history sharpened his understanding of events in the former Soviet republics following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

He is now passing the richness of his heritage on to a third generation. His two children speak Ukrainian and attend a Ukrainian heritage language program at a local school. "As they move into the future, my children will build their own identities—but I send them on their way with perogies and a dollop of sour cream," he says.

The pleasures of preserving one's culture are equalled by the satisfactions of sharing it, says An Nguyen, a senior analyst in the Planning and Resource Management Division. When Nguyen, born in Vietnam, married her Franco-Ontarian husband, the couple took a "hybrid approach" to

the event. At her parents' home in Kitchener, they held a Vietnamese wedding tea ceremony—with Nguyen dressed in an *ao dai*, the traditional tunic dress, and the groom arriving with his family for a formal welcoming, an exchange of gifts and a traditional ceremony.

"My husband's family found this a great multicultural learning experience," Nguyen says. "Everyone enjoyed it."

In a nod to a recent Western practice, the couple also had a destination wedding in the Mexican city of Puerto Aventuras, attended by two dozen friends and family members.

"We honoured both traditions—and we plan to keep on doing that," she says.

Nguyen came to Canada with her parents when she was only months old and for most of her life could imagine Vietnam only through her parents' nostalgic conversations about their homeland. However, in 2004, she went back to teach English for several months, and used the opportunity to tour the country, get to know her extended family and make a good start at mastering the written language.

"My parents have a love affair with their home country and I learned to understand how they feel—and even to share it."

Vivian Hung, a management and consular officer in the Office of Transformation, was born in Calgary but feels a deep affinity with Hong Kong, the city her parents left to come to Canada more than three decades ago.

"I am Canadian-born and feel very Canadian," she says. "But I am also a typical 'CBC' or 'Canadian-born Chinese,' as we call it. I have a foot in both worlds."

All her life, Hung has spoken Cantonese, the language spoken at home.

Among the Chinese traditions that her family honours is "grave-sweeping day," a 2,500 year-old



photo: Charles Enman/DFAIT
Roman Waschuk's rich Ukrainian heritage has been of great value to his career at DFAIT.