

## #2

# Stories of incidents I experienced and people I encountered during my life and when I was in the Diamond business.

By Royden V Chan.

*I will be 91 years old in August this year 2023 and throughout the years, from my childhood, my working in the diamond business and to my retirement, I have experienced interesting incidents, and came into contact with diverse people who impacted my life with both good and bad impressions.*

I think that I should write about these people and the incidents I experienced before I pass on.

## My Parents

My family was lower middle class. They lived in a small cottage at 196, Charlotte Street, Georgetown, Guyana. My father was of Chinese, Portuguese and creole heritage and my mother was of Jewish, Scottish and creole heritage.



My mother.



My father

My father worked as a shop clerk at a bush shop in the mining district of Guyana located at Tumereng Landing, on the Mazaruni River. It was owned by an expatriate Diamond company named Triefus & Company Limited.

He was allowed to come home for only one week every year.

His father (my paternal grandfather) was born in China.

When he was an early teenager he became a member of the Christian Missionaries in China.

He was tutored by them in the English language and the teachings of the Christian Bible. He spoke and wrote both Chinese and English.

He was involved in the Taipeng rebellion; influenced by the Missionaries who were hoping that the Qing Dynasty would be overthrown so that Christianity can be proselytized in China.

When the rebellion was crushed, the Qing Government imprisoned or executed all of the Chinese persons suspected of being part of the rebellion. Most of them fled to areas south of China and to different parts of the world.

The Missionaries assisted my paternal grandfather to flee China by enlisting him as an indentured labourer sent to work on the sugar plantations in Guyana. They registered him under a false name "Fung A Shing" so as to protect his family in China.

Most of the legitimate Chinese indentured labourers left the plantations after serving their contracted period of four years and engaged locally in small businesses and jobs similar to which they were doing back home in China. But my grandfather did not; he continued working as an indenture on the plantation under his false name "Fung A Shing."

We assumed that he did this because the Chinese Government was still active in bringing the Taipeng insurrectionists to justice.

In 1877 when the Chinese Government stopped penalizing these Taipeng dissidents my paternal grandfather was then able to reveal his true identity. He got the Guyana Government Immigration officer to insert his real name - Chan A Moon- in the immigration records. He was now legitimately free to use his real name and openly take part in all activities as a normal indentured resident - owning property, getting married and being employed locally.

He became an active member of the Christian Brethren Church, administering to their Chinese community who could not speak or read English.

He had always desired to have a religious vocation.

He got married to Maria Barker who was of Portuguese and African heritage and they had three Children - Solomon (the eldest) Benjamin (my father) and Sarah Lucille (the youngest).

Sometime in 1890 he joined the Anglican Church. He was selected by them to be trained as a catechist, and was later appointed as the resident catechist at the St Savior Anglican Church where he served until he died in 1918.

After he died his family were no longer allowed to live in the church rectory and they had to rent a house in Regent Street Street, Georgetown. They received no pension or financial assistance from the church.

Solomon got a job with a commission agency but Benjamin being too young to be employed repaired bicycles to assist with the living expenses of the family.

A Chinese shop owner who was a member of the St.Savior Church, gave Benjamin bags of rice on credit which he sold from his carrier bike to residents who lived along the roads of the East and West banks of the Demerara River. He rode all day in the hot sun with the heavy loads of rice on his carrier bike selling small lots from house to house.

This was an arduous task and instead of enjoying his teens as a normal child (he was only 16 years old) he spent all day doing this in order to help support his family.

Later that year another Chinese member of the church offered Benjamin a job in the interior as a shop boy at one of his mining shops which was situated at an isolated location on the Mazaruni River.

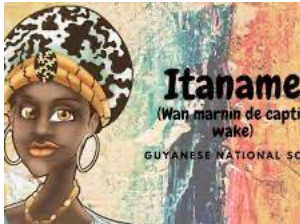
In those days Art Williams (the American bush pilot who flew an Ireland Wasp) had not yet introduced air travel transportation to Guyana, so Benjamin had to travel by river to the shop in the interior, on a cargo boat.

This trip was dangerous and many porknockers (the name given to all Diamond and gold miners in Guyana) lost their lives while crossing over the numerous falls and cataracts in the river.

There is a story told of an old porknocker whose cargo boat had foundered while crossing a cataract. He was thrown into the river but managed to hold on to a rock. While he was there

clinging for his life another porknocker who was struggling to stay afloat in the swift current asked the old porknocker to help him get on to the rock and he replied "if God wanted to save you he would have put a rock for you as he did for me, so pass on to eternity".

There was also a Guyanese folk song composed about one of the most dangerous of these cataracts "Itaname"



[https://youtube.com/watch?v=8ISxS\\_YShPc&feature=share](https://youtube.com/watch?v=8ISxS_YShPc&feature=share)

Benjamin was relieved when he arrived safely at the bush shop. It was a small unpainted rough wooden building with galvanized sides and roof - there was one room for the manager at the back and the sales counter and a small Diamond office at the front. Benjamin slept in a hammock slung over the sales counter.



A typical small bush shop

He was allowed to go home for one week every year.

There was only the manager and himself there. Life was lonely and boring.

Imagine a young teenager living in such isolation. But Benjamin was steadfast and dedicated to his job.

After a few years later he was offered a job by Triefus & Company Ltd. as a shop boy at their main bush shop - Tumereng Landing - on the Mazaruni River. This was a much bigger shop, on a large compound.

It was located on a reddish brown earth hill shaded and landscaped by large trees. There were several buildings on the

landing and a lot more people lived there - more staff and several prostitutes.

The manager had a separate house and the staff had their own living quarters. The entire compound was powered by a Delta lighting plant. It was was a livelier and brighter place to live.

Over the years Triefus recognized the zeal and capability of Benjamin and promoted him as manager of their Tumereng shop. In 1929/30 there was a world depression and operating mining stores in Guyana was no longer economically viable. Triefus decided to transfer the ownership of their shops to the managers who were then liable for all of the shop's expenses and investments. But they would now reap any profits made by the shop.

Triefus continued to finance them but the managers had to sell Trefius all of the diamonds they produced or purchased.

Benjamin was now the owner of his own shop. Because of his years of experience and diligence his shop was successful and he was earning much more than he ever did. He now lived in the manager's house and came home two weeks every year instead of one week when he was a shop boy.

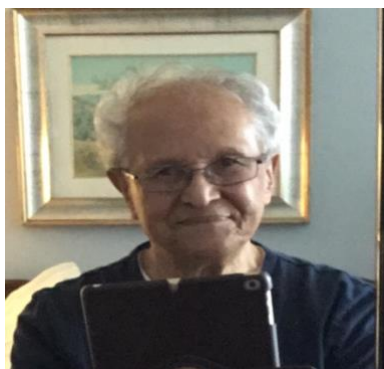
He met Enid Fraser (my mother) who was of Jewish, Scottish and creole heritage),

They got married in 1930 and had seven children. I was the second child (named Royden Vibart Chan but was called Roy all of my life.

## Royden V Chan



Royden V Chan 1976.



Royden V Chan 2022

I was born in August, 1932 and since I can remember I had always been fascinated by talking to people and listening to their life stories. In my early teens I became interested in reading novels and writing poems and short stories. One of my early short stories "Memories" won a prize and was published in the 1958 Guyana Christmas Annual. Some of my later short stories were published in Guyanese Online and The Story Project.

*I AM MORE OF A STORY TELLER THAN A HISTORICAL/FICTIONAL WRITER* and apart from the historical/fictional short stories which I have written I am writing here mostly tales about my parents, myself, the incidents I have personally experienced and of all the diverse and interesting people I have encountered over the years; especially the years I spent in the diamond business.

In 1962 I was working in Georgetown at a commission agency "T Geddes Grant Ltd." when my father asked me to join his business. He was a diamond dealer who produced, purchased and sold rough diamonds in Guyana.

He started working in the interior of Guyana as a shop boy in 1918 and by 1929 he had owned his own mining shop at Tumereng Landing, Mazaruni River.

When I joined his business 1962 he had already become the largest diamond dealer in the Mazaruni area; he owned 6 bush shops, 12 mining dredges, dozens of mining claims and employed several staff in his business.

He was appointed by the Governor of Guyana as Justice of the Peace for the Mazaruni mining district and was also appointed as the interior agent for Guyana Airways.

Tumereng Landing, where his main shop was located, had become one of the largest and liveliest compounds on the Mazaruni River.

He was loved and respected by most people in the Mazaruni and he was fondly called "Uncle Benjie" and "Godfather"

I respected him for his enterprise and achievements and admired him for his meticulous attitude and discipline. I considered him "a perfectionist "

Every Saturday when he was back home in Georgetown he would carefully prepare his clothes and clean his Humber bicycle for going to church on Sunday.



Whenever he was leaving to go back to his business in the interior he would hang his bicycle on wooden racks up in the ceiling.

But he was not an affectionate person. He was always serious and never smiled; I cannot remember ever seeing his teeth.

He would often whip me for minor misbehaviours which I did not think was deserving.

Sometimes I hated him because of his detached harshness.

He insisted that I should live in the interior for a while in order to experience the operations of the business.

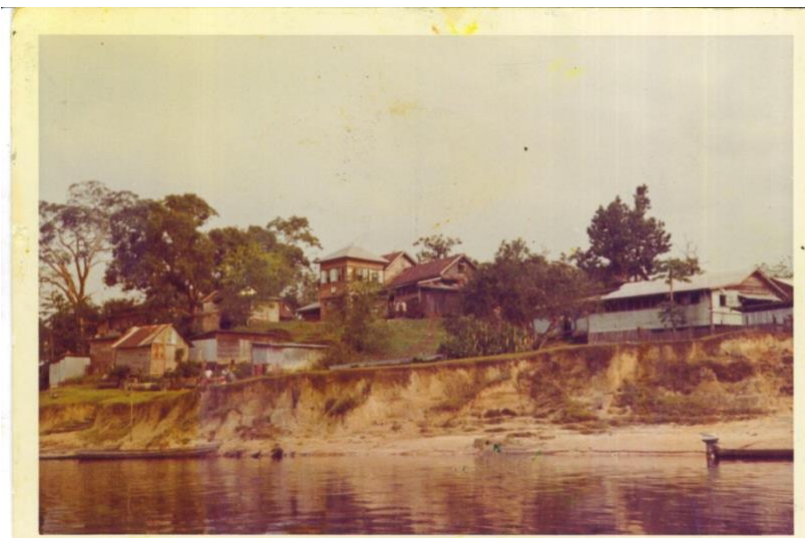
He sent me to Tumereng in 1962.

Fortunately I did not have to travel by cargo boat as he had done, but flew on the Guyana Airways Grumman amphibious plane piloted by a Canadian bush pilot named Capt. Hicks.

I was the sole passenger and Capt. Hicks asked me if I wanted to fly the plane. He showed me how to handle the controls and went to the back of the plane and fell asleep. It was a mixed feelings of exhilaration and intimidation flying a plane for the first time and on my own.

We flew over a forest of huge trees that looked from the air like the tufts of a green carpet interspersed by red and yellow colours, which were tall colourful trees pushing their heads above the jungle canopy to get a better share of the sunlight. Sometimes there were small treeless clearings - seemingly lifeless settlements or deserted mining operation sites devoid of any sign of life and the ever winding serpentine coffee brown river snaking itself along the endless green below.

## Tumereng Landing Mazaruni River



*Tumereng Landing was situated on the bank of the Mazaruni River, atop a reddish brown hill. It was landscaped and shaded by large spreading trees. There were several buildings in the compound. The largest building was the Tumereng shop with an attached dancehall and the diamond office in its adjoining tower.*

*The other smaller buildings were the living quarters for the staff, the kitchen and mess hall, my father's residence, the shop manager's home, and a guest house for the Lands and Mines warden or any other visiting Government official (my father was the Justice of the Peace for the Mazaruni district). There were also some very small houses for other persons who lived on the Landing - (mostly elderly prostitutes).*

*When I arrived at Tumereng Landing, I was shocked by the raucous, licentious and vulgar lifestyle there - people were having sex in the open, there was a constant deafening sound of juke-box music blaring out the latest popular records, to which drunk Porknockers and elderly prostitutes were lewdly dancing and cursing.*

*Sometimes fights would break out.*

*Tumereng was the brightest and liveliest place on the upper Mazaruni River. The whole compound was brightly lit by a powerful Delta lighting plant. There was a continuous throb of loud music and merriment emanating from the dancehall where men and women drank and danced with abandoned revelry. All the people who worked and lived in the areas along the river came there for their entertainment.*

*When approaching Tumereng Landing, on the river in the blackness of the night, it was a cheerful relief to see its bright glare like a halo in the darkness and to hear the exciting drumming of its music in the distance.*

*The lifestyle there was so different from Georgetown; wild and uninhibited, raw and indecent.*

*It was hard for me trying to adjust to that promiscuous environment.*

*But I was treated like royalty being Uncle Benjie's son. Even the prostitutes offered me free sex.*



At that time in 1962 there was political upheaval in Guyana. The whole country was later shut down by a general strike in 1963. I was stuck at Tumereng for three months. But during that time, with the support of the resident bookkeeper (Aubrey Mc Clelland), a well bred, educated and decent middle aged man who seemed out of place in that lawless environment, I was able to redress the numerous malpractices that were committed by the shop managers.

These discrepancies were causing the shops to suffer unbearable losses.

Mr. Mc Clelland also disclosed to me that my father had fathered three children ( Carlotta, Vilma and George) with a younger Amerindian woman named Agnes Henry and they were living with him at Tumereng all those years.

When my father realized that he was sending me to Tumereng, he moved them to Georgetown and sent them to school.

What was amazing is that he carried on this double life for years and no one ever mentioned it to my mother or to any of us. I was abhorred and angry when I heard that he had done this to my mother who adored him. I lost my respect for him and no longer considered him a perfect person. I thought less of him from then on.

However, I never mentioned it to my mother or to any other member of my family. And never ever discussed it with my father.

I convinced him to allow me to stay in the Georgetown office where I started buying diamonds from independent producers. I made contact with several international diamond companies and exported some of our diamonds to them.

This enabled us to get better prices for the diamonds we purchased and exported. It afforded us to be more competitive with the other two major Jewish owned companies who exported rough diamonds from Guyana.

We had now become one of the top three exporters of rough diamonds from Guyana.

## Phantom and the fight over a prostitute

Whenever a crew of porknockers came in to Tumereng with the diamonds they produced from working on their claims, they go up

to the diamond office to sell them to the Manager (Mr. Lyndon Gillis).

The prostitutes are all excited because it meant business for them. They all lined up outside the diamond office.

After the porkknockers sold their diamonds and settled their accounts they collected the balance owing to them, partly in cash and the balance in cash orders (which are like bank checks but issued by the diamond dealer and cashed at his office in Georgetown).

As they came out from the office each one of the crew chose the prostitute he wanted to be with and would stuff a few large notes in her bosom. She was committed to be with him for the rest of the time he was on the landing.

Phantom who was the head of his crew was a tall black muscular man. He was built like a Greek god with handsome features, smooth shining skin, except for a large scar on the left side of his face and a perfectly shaped shaven head.

He had chosen a prostitute named Gertrude, a voluptuous light red skinned middle aged woman and went off with her to have sex, drink alcohol and frolic with her all day.

This was what most of the porkknockers lived for - their trip to the landing and the time they spent with the prostitutes.

The leader of another crew also wanted Gertrude and made advances to her. This got Phantom enraged and they started a verbal confrontation which became physical.

The fight started in the dancehall, down the hill and ended up in the river. It went on for over three hours.

I had never seen two men fight that furiously and that long before; cuffing, kicking, choking. Their faces were bruised and bleeding from the vicious punishment they exploded on each other. They were both exhausted but continued fighting for hours until they both collapsed with exhaustion in the river.

It seemed that Phantom had gotten the best of the contest because his rival finally gave up and went off with another prostitute and Phantom was tenderly cared for by his prostitute Gertrude.

## Trip to our Kurupung Shop

When I was stationed at Tumereng Landing I had to visit all of our interior shops. The shop I dreaded visiting the most was our Kurupung Landing Shop at Two Mouth.

The manager of this shop was named Mr Rose.

He was a light skinned black man with fine features and a medium stature.

He was about fifty years old but looked much older because he walked with a stoop and had no teeth.

He was always dressed in the same faded white T shirt that looked grey with age and he wore an old tattered felt hat all day and all night, either because he thought it made him look sophisticated or to cover his bald head.

He was a quiet man and rarely spoke, and whenever he did he never looked at me but kept his head bowed looking down or staring beyond me.

He spent most of his time sitting quietly, doing nothing and staring into space, or endlessly jotting notes in a writing pad or putting around the shop rearranging things.

He lived alone in that small dilapidated building for years and only came to Georgetown whenever he brought the diamonds he purchased to our office.

I don't think he had any family because he never talked about them.

I used to reflect on how lonely it must have been for him to spend all his life so alone in such an isolated and decrepit environment.

I thought of my father how lonely he too must have been when he was a 16 year old shop boy working at his first interior shop.

This Two Mouth shop was located at the confluence of two rivers on the upper escarpment of the Kurupung river. That is why it was called the Two Mouth Shop. It was only accessible by the GAC Grumman Goose amphibious plane which landed on the short stretch of river tightly enclosed by the surrounding mountains.

The plane had to swerve between these mountains and descend to land on that short stretch of river. That was easily done. But the problem was taking off.

There was not sufficient length of straight river "run way" for that heavy Grumman plane to lift off. They had to tie the back of the plane to a Large mora tree and the pilot would rev the two engines to their maximum capacity and then they would loose

the rope and he would speed down the river, lift off and gain sufficient altitude in order to swerve right to avoid hitting the mountain before him and pass between the other two mountains on the right until he was clear.

This maneuver always gave me the shivers; I was always expecting imminent death.



*The Grumman amphibious plane taking off at Kurupung Landing*

## Trip to our Eping Shop

Our Eping shop was located at the very source of the Eping river.

In order to get to this shop we had to travel by boat for about six hours up the Eping river.

The first time I went there I noticed that this river had very steep high banks on both sides. I also saw massive taboas (large dried broken tree trunks) lodged high up in the treetops that canopied the river.

It was explained to me that just as there are tsunamis in the oceans, there were tsunamis in this river.

When the rain fell on the Pakaraima mountain plateau tops above the Eping river, the water came down in torrents from the escarpment seeped through the rock crevices and rushed down the narrow Eping river causing the height of the river to rise suddenly.

This river tsunami rapidly took all in its path down the river and left tacubas or even unsecured boats in the treetops. Fortunately there were no river tsunamis on any of my trips to the Eping shop.

The manager of this shop was named Mr George Davis. He was a good looking stocky high coloured man with a light complexion and an impressive stature and bearing.

Even though he lived alone in such an isolated environment he was always well groomed and immaculately dressed. He spoke proper English and sounded intelligent, well read and well bred. I enjoyed having conversations with him. I often wondered why a man of his stature and bearing, and who could probably have gotten a better job in Georgetown, would have taken such a lowly and lonely job as manager of our Eping shop.

Eping was cold, especially at nights, because of it's altitude; high up at the foot of the Pakaraima Mountains. I had to wear two layers of clothing to keep warm. I slept in a hammock as the manager did.

The next morning we were awakened by shouts from the porknockers who slept in the adjoining logie. ( a logie is a thatched roof open sided structure where the porknockers who came to sell their diamonds to the shop would sling their hammocks and stay there until they returned to their mining sites)

Early next morning one of them woke up and was having a smoke while sitting on his back pack. He felt the back pack move and was surprised to see a very large labaria snake there. He killed it by smashing it's head with the flat side of his cutlass.

I was told that was the right way to kill the Labaria snake because if you cut off the head it can fly through the air and stick its fangs into your skin injecting its poison. The poison of that snake is very deadly and can kill you within hours.

I did not feel safe or comfortable after hearing that this area of Eping was infested with Labaria snakes.

And I felt even more scared after Mr Davis told me of his experience with a large house snake.

He recalled that one night when he was asleep in his hammock he was awakened and realized that a large snake was wrapped around him with its head staring at him close to his face.

He remained still and eventually the snake unwrapped itself and slithered off.

He explained that those large snakes live in the rafters of the shop and fed on small animals. They are non poisonous.

But in spite of his explanation I slept in terror for the remaining nights I was there at Eping. I was always expecting to awake and find myself enwrapped by a snake.

## Una Carrington Alias "Cat Fur"

Una Carrington was a prostitute who lived on Tumereng Landing. Like all of the other interior prostitutes she was middle aged.

She had a light skinned complexion and was a sturdy woman almost muscular like a man but good looking with feminine features.

They called her "Cat Fur" because she had fizzy hair that looked like a Cat's fur.

She was the 'Queen of the Tumereng hill" - all the other prostitutes paid reverence to her.

No other prostitute was allowed to live on the Landing without her approval and if they did she would beat them so viciously that they left and never returned.

I once witnessed a fight between "Cat Fur" and a female intruder. Seeing two big women fight is an unforgettable experience. Unlike men they bite, scratch, pull out each other hair in tufts and scream all the time like wild animals.

Of course "Cat Fur" won the fight.

Even the men were intimidated by "Cat Fur".

It was said that a huge porkknocker refused to pay her the agreed amount for her service and threatened to beat her. She was not cowed, but fought him like a man. He was getting the best of her physically and she stabbed him with a knife.

He died later at the Enachu dispensary. The police never filed charges against her.

No man ever tried to take advantage of her again.

From the very first time I met "Cat Fur" when I arrived at Tumereng Landing she seemed to like me. She would come to my window and dance naked trying to sexually entice me. After I told her that I loved my wife in Georgetown and would never be unfaithful to her, she was protective of me and never allowed any of the other prostitutes to harass me. I felt safe knowing that she cared for me, even the porkknockers would not dare to harm me.

It's strange how easily one is conditioned to your environment - when I first came to Tumereng I found it intolerable, now it's my world and I am a part of it.

### My Diamond buying trip to Monkey Mountain

An independent porkknocker came into our Georgetown office one day and sold me his diamonds. He was amazed at the prices I paid him.

He told me that he was from an area called Monkey Mountain (which was near to the Brazilian border) and the only shop owner there was paying almost 50% of what I had paid him for his diamonds and if I should make a trip there I would be able to buy a lot of diamonds cheaply.

I strapped a lot of cash in my underwear and took a Guyana Airways Dakota plane to Monkey Mountain.

The terrain there was like grassy savanna, dotted with small hills, similar to the landscape you see in western movies.

When I arrived I told the shop owner - Malcolm Rodriguez - that I was a student visiting the interior. Malcolm was a sturdy built middle aged Portuguese man with a dark tanned complexion. He welcomed me, offered me food and drinks and invited me to sleep at his shop.

When I looked around the area, I was shocked to see that porkknockers were buying alcohol in the shop for the indigenous amerindians. When the amerindians got inebriated, the porkknockers had sex with their daughters, who were as young as 12 years.



Those little girls just lay prone on the savanna grass with their eyes closed while they were being ravished by the porknockers.

When I complained about this to Malcolm he said nothing can be done about it - it was the way of life there.

The next morning the person who had invited me to Monkey Mountain, took me behind some hills where he arranged for me to meet some porknockers with diamonds for sale.

I bought all of their diamonds and made an enormous profit.

On my way back to the shop I heard Malcolm shouting in a rage and gun shots were being fired. My contact person advised me not to go back to the shop, because Malcolm was aware that I was the diamond buyer from Georgetown who had bought all the diamonds from the porknockers whom he had financed and he was threatening to shoot me.

There was only one policeman stationed at Monkey Mountain - he was a middle aged black corporal named Fortune. He agreed for me to stay with him.

During the night Malcolm became more enraged and was now firing off his gun more often threatening to kill the porknockers.

I asked Fortune if he was going to do anything and he told me that he was not there to prevent a crime but only to make a note when crime was committed.

I realized then what a serious life threatening situation I was in and decided that I had to do something to resolve it.

The next morning I went to talk to Malcolm. I told him that I was willing to refund him all the money owing to him by the porknockers.

I also explained to him that because of the low prices he was paying, if it were not me, some other buyer would come and do the same thing in the future. He seemed to be pacified and invited me back to stay at his shop.

But I never felt safe being there with all those diamonds on my person and was only at ease when I boarded the GAC Dakota plane on my way back to Georgetown.

During our talks, Malcolm had explained me that the diamond/Dealer/Exporter whom he dealt with in Georgetown was paying him low prices for the diamonds he sold to him and that was why he could not pay more than he was paying at his shop.

I suggested that he should deal with me instead and I will guarantee him better prices.

He had been dealing with me since then and continued to be one of my loyal customers until I retired and left Guyana in 2000.

## Gunnar Penikis

Gunnar Penikis was of Latvian birth who emigrated to Canada. He was a good looking man in his mid 20s with medium height and stature. He wore his blond hair in a crew cut and he had steel blue eyes which penetrated your psyche and attracted you to him.

He had a dynamic personality and impressed everyone he met by his charm and affable disposition.

He was married to a beautiful Peruvian girl named Andrea, whom he met while they were studying at university in Toronto, Canada. He graduated with a university degree in Geology .

I first met Gunnar when he and his wife came to Guyana hoping to get wealthy in this diamond rich country. He was not satisfied with his earnings as a Geologist.

He was a very ambitious and enterprising person

He was working on the diamond claims of Frederick Mahaica, a very successful diamond miner in Guyana. Somehow, he was able to access some of the diamonds from Mahaica's claims and used to sell them to me in Georgetown.

With the limited capital he had, he started buying a few diamonds from some other claim holders in the interior, and sold them to me in Georgetown.

After a while he made contact with some foreign buyers and sold his diamonds directly to them at reasonable prices. They were impressed by the low prices he sold his diamonds to them and when he suggested that if they advanced him capital he could get a lot of cheap diamonds for them. They agreed to give him the money.

They authorized him to withdraw from Barclays Bank cash for the value of each parcel he lodged with the bank. But the total was

limited. And whenever they returned to Guyana they would value the parcels and take over the diamonds,

The first two transactions were so profitable for them that when he asked them to increase the limited amount to US\$ 1000,000.00 they agreed.

It was then that he pulled off his first scam.

The first person he scammed was an old English Jewish buyer who had advanced him \$US 1000.000.00. When the buyer checked the parcel they were all was all poor quality "rejects, diamonds worth a fraction of the money advanced to him.

The buyer spent months in Guyana but could not get in touch with Gunnar.

The poor man had most of his capital involved.

The severe loss that poor man suffered caused him to suffer from a heart attack.

Gunnar now had a fair amount of his own capital, and went on to scam a few more gullible foreigners until he accumulated a sizeable amount of working capital.

He became a very popular and successful buyer in Guyana.

He used his attractive wife to entice porknockers to sell him their diamonds. He was unscrupulous and immoral.

It was rumoured that he once had a confrontation with a porknocker and he shot him, took his diamonds, and threw his body in the south Road canal.

Early the next morning he took a private flight to Imbaimadai in the interior and made his presence known there so as to have an alibi if needed.

He also swindled two of the largest banks in Guyana; he got large loans from them and left them as collateral sealed parcels of so called diamonds which were in fact poor quality "rejects" worth a fraction of the loans.

These same banks had refused to give me the loans I needed to carry on my business when my father died and the estate was temporarily frozen.

When Gunnar was absent from Guyana for a long while and the bank could not get in touch with him (he was deported). the bank decided to open the sealed parcel of diamonds he left with them as collateral. They asked me to value the diamonds. They were

shocked when I told them that the diamonds were only worth a fraction of the loan.

However, I was gloating because it was ironic that they were more trusting and accommodating to Gunnar than they were to me because he was "white" and a foreigner.

Gunnar wanted to get rich fast and eventually got involved in selling illegal drugs in Guyana. The Government investigated him and he was deported.

I was at Timehri Airport when he was escorted to the plane in handcuffs and sent back to Canada. Although he was such a terrible person, I felt sorry to see him so humiliated and dejected.

I met Andrea many years later when I had emigrated to Canada. She told me that after he had left Guyana, Gunnar went to try his luck in Brazil and while he was there he contracted a debilitating disease.

He was in hospital in Canada for years, confined to a wheel chair and died a painful and miserable death.

We do not know the inner workings of Gunnar's mind, so we can only judge him by the things he has done. We know that he did some terrible things. And we also know that Andrea loved him - she cared for him for many tears until he died.

I do believe in Karma.

## Simca onn

I called him Simon. He was an Askanazi jew.

His parents had fled from Europe during the programs against Jewish people and they went to live in Venezuela via Spain. His father opened a garment factory there and Simon worked in the business.

Venezuela is a diamond producing country and Simon became fascinated with diamonds. He left his father's business and went to work for a Jewish diamond dealer in Venezuela by the name of Isadore Eder. He bought rough diamonds for him in all the mining areas of Venezuela and finally came to buy diamonds in Guyana where I met him for the first time.

Simon was my age. He was not good looking but had a pleasant likeable face and a very humorous personality. He made you laugh all the time with his incessant jokes and pleasant disposition. You liked him right away and we got along well together.

He was an Orthodox Jew by birth but never attended synagogue. He was more of a liberal than a religious.

He enjoyed Chinese food and was fascinated by the Chinese culture.

He loved women of all races and religions.

He had an office in Main Street, Georgetown, where he kept wild parties - there were always a lot of beautiful young girls and alcohol.

He fathered a child with an Indian Guyanese girl and not only did he acknowledge the child as his own but supported them in London England where he sent them to live.

He went to Israel, and served in the Israeli army for three years where he met his wife (Naomi). She was a very beautiful Israeli girl who was 10 years younger than he was.

She did not like living in Venezuela so he bought a house in Miami and opened a jewelry store for her in the Seybold building and established his office there.

We both dealt with the same diamond dealer and I would take my parcel to his office in Miami for shipment to the dealer.

After we concluded our business we would go to his home for dinner and Naomi would play the piano for us while we had coffee and desert. She was an accomplished classical pianist. We had a wonderful relationship.

Similarly, Simon and my wife (Patsy) had a wonderful relationship they liked and respected each other.

She always had him home for dinner whenever he was in Guyana.

He and I had also developed a binding relationship, both business and personal. He always had my interest at heart, and helped me many times in my business. He introduced me to several foreign diamond companies who paid me competitive prices.

He always gave me good advice how best to improve my business in Guyana. Because of him I became one of the top buyers and exporters of rough diamonds in Guyana.

He was the best friend I have ever had in the diamond business.

During the years of severe depression in the diamond market he bolstered my hope whenever I was deriding the business by telling me not to complain, because all that we have today was due to this business. I had to concede that he was right

When the diamond business was not profitable he ventured into other investments in which he suffered severe loses.

On my latest trip to Miami, Naomi told me that Simon was diagnosed with terminal cancer and was dying. He asked me to bring Patsy to Miami, so that he can say goodbye to her. When she was there he asked her to say a prayer for him. She reminded him that she was Roman Catholic and he was Jewish. And he said it does not matter it's all the same God. And that he was covering all his bases. On his dying bed he still had his sense of humour. What a guy! I still think of him with fond memories.

## The death of my father

When my father died in 1979 I realized how much I really loved him in spite of all his lack of emotions and his shortcomings. I understood what a hard life he had endured. How difficult it must have been for him to loose his father at such a young age and become a breadwinner.

How lonely it must have been for him to be away from his family for so many months, living alone and working in such an isolated environment. I appreciated his need for companionship

Now, I had to carry on the business on my own, supporting all my family as he had done, and I now felt the burden of that responsibility which he had to bear since he was 16 years old. I regretted that I was so critical of him and did not give him more love, compassion understanding and respect.

After his death I incorporated a new company called Chan & Company Ltd. with my mother, brothers and sisters as equal share holders.

I purchased a property in New Market Street and renovated it.

I installed my office in the bottom flat and converted the top flat as living quarters for my mother and other dependent members of the family who lived with her.

I also restructured the whole interior business by giving over the shops to my managers as Triefus had done to my father, with similar conditions.

I continued to increase my diamond buying in Georgetown and expanded my dealings with foreign diamond companies.

I also became a shareholder in a diamond cutting factory named Enachu Diamond Traders in Georgetown which was established by two Americans, who marketed the polished diamonds and a Guyanese named Wavney Phillippi who managed the Company.

I supplied the factory with my rough diamonds.

I integrated the selling of polish diamonds as a major part of my business and made a lot of money especially when people wanted to get their money out of Guyana by buying polished diamonds.

I gained more knowledge about cutting and polishing rough diamonds and selling polish diamonds through my involvement with that factory than I ever had before.

## The 24 Carat Rough diamond

There was a 24 carat rough diamond that was being offered for sale and most of the other buyers were only willing to pay \$16,000.00, because the diamond had a light yellow colour. I examined the stone carefully and with the experience I had gained by cutting and polishing rough diamonds in our factory, I realized that there was a small cleavage at the top of the diamond in which there was some "catchcow" (this is a yellow ochre mineral stain deposited by nature during the formation of the diamond over thousands of years in the earth - I am not sure of the correct spelling)



I came to the conclusion that this stain was reflecting the light yellow colour in the whole diamond and if removed the diamond would be a top white stone.

I bought the stone for \$20,000.00.

I soaked the diamond overnight in hydrofluoric acid and as expected the next morning the stone was white.

I had it cut and polished and the yield was two stones - one polished diamond - 4.34 carat, G Colour and the other a polished diamond weighing 1.29 carat, G Colour. I made a fantastic profit.

I also had some experience with green skin coloured diamonds. These rough diamonds have a green skin colour which is caused by vegetation staining over thousands of years in the rivers. Sometimes we polish a window on the surface of the diamond to see what is the real colour on the inside, and sometimes to determine if the green colour is only superficial or saturates the inside also.

If the green colour remains all through the inside then that polished stone can become a top blue or green diamond which is very valuable.

Before I was knowledgeable about these skin coloured stones, I had sold an irregular shaped dark green skinned stone to a foreign buyer named Isidore Eder at the industrial price (which is way below the price for a good quality diamond) because of its colour and shape.

The next month when he returned to Guyana he gave me \$2000.00 and a bottle of Johnny Walker Black. He explained that the stone turned out to be a top blue colour and he made a fantastic profit.

It does not always work out this way. Once I bought an 8 carat rough stone with a light brown colour. I paid a cheap price for it because of the colour.

When the stone was cut into 8/facets (the first step of cutting a rough diamond) the colour of the stone turned white.

However, when the stone was finished cutting with 52 facets, the colour returned brown.

We decided to recut the stone into 8 facets and the colour returned white.

I sold the stone as it was in 8/facets.

We realized that sometimes when light enters the diamond the facets can affect the light refracted in the stone in such a way that the stone colour changes.

I gained a lot of experience that I never learned in all the GIA and George Brown diamond courses I took over the years.

## How I almost lost an expensive parcel of diamonds

One day I went for lunch and carelessly left a parcel of diamonds in my unlocked desk drawer instead of locking it in my safe. The parcel was worth about US \$200,000.00.

When I returned to the office the parcel was not in the drawer. I checked my office safe and it was not there.

I panicked.

I went to the bank to check my box where I usually locked my diamonds over night, it was not there.

I asked Mr Mc Clelland who was the bookkeeper at my Georgetown office, who were the persons that came to my office when I was at lunch and he said only one person - the daughter of a friend of our family. She usually asks and is allowed to make a call on the phone on my desk, so Mr Mc Clelland had allowed her.

I realized that she was the only person who could have taken the parcel.

I went to see her at her home and she denied very strongly that she would never do such a thing.

I had to find some way to get her to admit her guilt.

I told her that I have a camera in my office and it shows her taking the parcel from my desk drawer.

She still denied any guilt.

Then I told her if she returns the parcel nothing will happen to her, if not, I will take her to Brickdam Police Station and she will be charged and locked up.

She still denied.

So I took her in my car. As we approached the station she confessed that she had taken the diamonds, I felt a great relief.

However, she said that she had given the parcel to a friend who lived on the West Bank of the Demerara river and she could not get the parcel until tomorrow.

I realized that this was a ruse. I went to see my friend Skip Roberts who was an assistant superintendent of police.

He agreed to help and right away he and his squad took her to Eve Leary headquarters and grilled and interrogated her the way the police do.

She buckled under their pressure and admitted that the parcel was left with a friend who lived in a back house next to Lees Funeral Parlour on Camp Street, Georgetown.

Skip took her there and collected the parcel from her friend.

All the diamonds were intact except for one polish diamond.

I was so happy to get my parcel back that I told Skip to forget that one polish diamond.

He also wanted to charge and incarcerate her but her mother pleaded with my mother and I told Skip to drop all charges.

I learned a very important lesson that day - never again to be that careless with my diamonds.

## My one and only attempt to ship my diamonds out of Guyana illegally

There was another incident when I almost lost my entire capital. The Guyana Government had introduced a new financial control law; all foreign currency payments we received for the diamonds we exported had to be exchanged with the bank of Guyana at their fixed rate which was way below the rate being paid on the free market.

Most of the diamond exporters in Guyana had resorted to smuggling out their diamonds and selling their foreign currency on the free market. This gave them the advantage of being able to pay a higher price for the rough diamonds they purchased. Whereas, the ones who did not smuggle out their diamonds could not compete anymore.

I was one of the exporters who did everything legally.

I tried for a long time to survive, doing everything legally, but my business was sinking rapidly. I had to do something in order to survive. So I decided to try exporting illegally.

I knew a good friend who was a pilot. They were never checked at the airport. He was already doing this for others so I decided to give it a try.

I delivered the parcel to him and left on a flight that night for Piarco Airport in Trinidad. The next morning he was supposed to arrive on the first flight at Piarco and deliver the parcel to me.

The next morning, however, he never arrived on his flight.

I went back to the Belair Hotel, where I was staying, and tried to contact him in Guyana but got no response.

I was so distressed that I could not relax. I suspected that he was held up by the authorities at the airport in Guyana and the diamonds were sized and that he may have disclosed my name.

This meant that I could not go back to Guyana and all my assets there would be confiscated by the Government.

My parcel was worth over US\$1,000,000.00, which was most of my capital.



*Sorting my parcel of rough diamonds for export worth over one million us dollars*

I phoned my wife and told her what had happened, and she calmed me down by saying not to worry, everything will be ok, God will help us and we will make out on whatever we have left.

That I should book a flight and come home right away.

I was able to sleep that night.

The next morning the pilot arrived on the first flight. He delivered the parcel to me and explained that he was having a

few drinks at the Pegasus Hotel in Georgetown and had missed his flight.

I never again tried to ship my diamonds illegally.

Fortunately the new Government under Desmond Hoyte abolished the restrictive Financial Control Law and I was able to carry on my business as before.

## Shipping diamonds from Guyana

I used to ship my diamonds from Guyana to Antwerp via Frankfurt by ALM Airlines.

I had to get my parcel weighed and sealed at the Lands and Mines Department in Georgetown, take the parcel to Timehri Airport, Guyana, get it checked and certified by the Customs there and lodge it with the pilot and the airlines looked after it until it was delivered in Antwerp.

The problem was in getting the parcel from my home to the airport.

First of all when the parcel was being processed at the Lands and Mines Department Georgetown the whole procedure was done in the open office exposed to anyone who was there, officials and non officials.

The documents on which all the particulars were recorded - the total carats of diamonds being shipped, the total value, the date and time of the shipment and the airline flight number were exposed to the public where anyone could see them.

This was very dangerous because anyone would know when I was taking my parcel to the airport and could lay wait for me on the way to the airport.

The flights left late at night and I had to be at the airport by 9.00 pm, which meant travelling by night along that dark desolate East Bank road to Timehri

I used different taxi services each time and also prepared two similar sealed boxes. The real box I kept under the car seat and the fake box I kept in my briefcase. In case I was held up I would give them the fake box.

My shipping trips to the airport were always fraught with fear and stress.

Fortunately I was never attacked.

A similar situation existed when I used to ship my diamonds to New York.

When I arrived at Kennedy Airport I had a broker who cleared me through Customs, but there again the procedure was done in the open where anyone could see that I would have diamonds on my person when I left the Airport to get a taxi.

One night I took a taxi driven by a Haitian driver. On my way to Manhattan - a route which I was familiar with - he took the wrong turn off. I questioned him and he said it was a short cut.

After driving longer than usual he seemed agitated and I was sure that he was going to rob me, and probably take my life. I was prepared to give him the diamonds because I did not have a fake box.

He stopped the car and I was contemplating whether to resist or plead with him, when he took out his phone and called his office.

Apparently he had recently come to the USA and was new on the job. He took the wrong exit and was lost. You can imagine my relief.

I finally arrived safely at my hotel in Manhattan with my diamonds intact.

## My experience with the Mafia

Two Americans had come to Guyana to incorporate a diamond mining company. I was referred by the Commissioner of Lands and Mines as the ideal person for them to contact.

They were impressed by my knowledge and years of experience and agreed to make me a director of their company.

We went to Cameron & Shepherd (a law firm) and incorporated the company. They were going to do all the financing and supply all the latest mining equipment and I was going to be their operational advisor in Guyana.

I was not aware that this was just a legal front for them to purchase rough diamonds and export them illegally. Unknown to me they were buying diamonds from a few independent dealers and paying very high prices, but they never approached me because they did not want to lose the legal status they had established through me.

Among the persons they contacted was a small Italian dealer who had his office on Main Street, Georgetown. Apparently, he was too greedy and suspecting that the Americans were smuggling out the diamonds, he pressured them for higher prices than they were willing to pay. They refused and decided not to do any business with him. He regretted his greed and was finally willing to accept their original prices but they decided not to do business with him anymore.

When they were leaving Guyana they were searched at the airport and the diamonds were sized. They were going to be arrested but settled with the authorities - they agreed to surrender all their diamonds and leave Guyana quietly.

In the attempt to clear themselves the two Americans had told the Customs that they were here in Guyana doing legal business with Royden Chan - indicating that they got the diamonds from me.

Of course there was an investigation but it was realized that the only business I had with them was the legal incorporation of a diamond mining company and no sale of rough diamonds was ever involved.

The Customs took all of their diamonds and allowed them to leave Guyana.

Somehow, the Americans were able to find out that it was the Italian dealer who had reported them to the Customs. It was circulated that the Americans had placed a contract on his life with the Mafia. He got scared and left Guyana immediately and no one has heard about him since then. We do not know if he is still alive or dead.

Another incident I had with the Mafia was when a certain Indian Doctor in Guyana who dealt with diamonds was being financed by me.



I advanced him all the money he asked for. He was supposed to purchase rough diamonds for me, and leave them in a sealed parcel at my office with my brother.

When I returned to Guyana and checked the parcel, there were all industrial diamonds inside worth about a fraction of the money I had advanced him.

The difference was over \$200,000.00

He never answered my call and I could never get in touch with him. It was obvious that his intent was to rob me.

A very good Jewish friend of mine Simon Onn suggested that we should get the Mafia to place a contract on his life.

But I could not be responsible for taking the life of another human being.

I told my friend to forget the whole matter and so I lost \$200,000.00 but my moral conscience was clear.

## How I lost 50% of my net worth when diamond prices collapsed

In the late 1990 I used to deal with a Jewish diamond dealer in New York. I used to take my diamonds to Miami where his agent - Simon Onn - would value and take over the parcel on his behalf.

It was a large parcel valued about US \$1000,000.00

The dealer's agent agreed on my price for the parcel. We shook hands and said "Mazal" which in all Jewish transactions meant that the business was concluded.

He sealed the parcel and the payment was to be sent to my account by the Jewish New York Dealer.

However, a few days after I got a call from the Jewish Dealer in New York saying that diamond prices had fallen and he could only pay me 50% for the sealed parcel.

This was highly unethical in our business, because once a parcel of diamonds is sealed and the buyer or his agent shakes hand and says " Mazal";the transaction is concluded.

I flew to New York and argued with him for several hours but he was adamant; either I accept 50% or take the diamonds back. I knew that I could not get more for the diamonds on the present depressed diamond market, and there was the possibility that prices may fall even further. Also I needed my capital freed up in order to carry on my operations in Guyana. His agent in Miami (Simon Onn) tried his best to get the New York dealer to honour the agreed price and even threatened to take him before the Jewish Diamond Council, but he was adamant. I finally decided to accept his price. I suffered a 50% reduction of my capital.

After that the market continued to decline and it became difficult for me to carry on my business. Because of those conditions, other related reasons and my age I decided in 2000 to liquidate all of my assets in Guyana. I retired and emigrated permanently to Canada to be with my family.

I transferred the company in Guyana to my brother and marketed his rough diamonds for a commission. He died in 2006 and his company was liquidated.

There are many more incidents, stories and interesting people I met which are not recorded here. But if you are interested, this can be done at a later time.

Royden V Chan

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