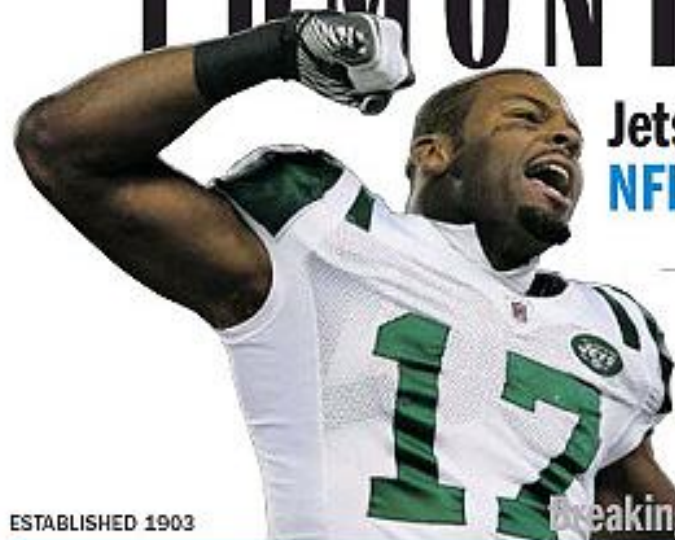


# EDMONTON JOURNAL



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## Filmmakers off to China to capture immigrant experience

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Edmonton filmmaker Kenda Gee will head to China next week for work on a documentary about the Chinese immigrant experience, in which he uses his own local family as a means to tell the tale.

Production on *Last Years* has been underway in Edmonton this month and will soon shift to China, when Gee and co-producer Tom Radford travel to Gee's familial village with Gee's father, who will turn 78 the day they arrive.

Gee, who grew up in Edmonton and continues to use the city as his home base, says he was reluctant at first to focus on his family's experi-



Kenda Gee, left, and Tom Radford at work on *Last Years* documentary

ence in the film. His great-grandfather came to Canada 101 years ago, in 1910.

"I was very averse to using the story because there are so many stories in the community that should be told,"

Gee said. "But Tom (Radford) was very insistent. ... My condition was that I said 'as long as whoever's watching the documentary, especially Chinese Canadians, can see the same story through the eyes of

the storyteller.' So it's not so much my family's story, but that they can identify. 'This has happened to us as well,'" he says.

Radford has worked for the past 35 years in Canadian film and TV as a writer, director and producer. Gee is a filmmaker and chair of Edmonton's Chinese Head Tax & Exclusion Act (Redress) Committee, seeking redress for the head tax charged by the Canadian government to Chinese immigrants who arrived from the mid 1800s right up until the 1940s. Some 81,000 families arriving in Canada paid the head tax in that period, Gee says.

The documentary will eventually air as a two-part miniseries. It will premier as a one-hour film on CBC during the network's prime-time

summer series. Then the two full episodes will air on Access.

Up to half the story is based on the Chinese community in Edmonton, says Gee. But filming will also take place in Montreal, Ottawa and possibly Ellis Island in New York.

"As a filmmaker," says Gee, "if you have a production that has maybe two or three years of shelf life, you'd be very happy. But I would say this production, with all the modesty I can spare, it's one of these productions where 10 years later, in the Chinese community, this is going to be a classic because the story's never been told the way that we're telling it and a lot of the messages are universal."

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