

Afternoon Tea - Mrs Norma Fong Lim's 80th Birthday
SPEECH by His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC
Administrator of the Northern Territory
Government House – 13 February 2009

Norma, it is a considerable joy to welcome you, your family and friends to Government House.

There are names indelibly linked to particular places. For example, Vancouver in Canada is named after the explorer Captain George Vancouver; the capital of New Zealand, Wellington, honours the first Duke of Wellington, victor of Waterloo; nearer to home we have Palmerston named after Lord Palmerston who became British Prime Minister at the age of seventy and was in office in 1864 when the South Australian Government was surveying for a new northern outpost.

Almost no one called it Palmerston because of the confusion with Palmerston on North Island New Zealand and another in Queensland. This “northern outpost”, was officially renamed Darwin in 1911.

The new capital of a Commonwealth Territory was a struggling child of the new nation. It needed committed citizens, families who would contribute to the community and none have done more than yours. It is my great pleasure to acknowledge that today. At the risk of sounding like “This is Your Life”, I will reflect on some of the roles your family has played in northern Australia. Their names are remembered to this day.

Your maternal grandfather, James Chee Quee, is an integral part of the history of Thursday Island, which, one hundred years ago, was an important transit point for boats travelling between China and Australia. I've seen an old photograph of Chee Quee's Store on Douglas Street, next to the picture theatre. Family history has it that James also spent a period employed as a cook here at the House of Seven Gables - Government House. This was probably in the days of Gilruth or Weddell, the first two Administrators of the Northern Territory.

Norma, you left Darwin as a young child but links with the Territory resumed when you returned in 1955 as the wife of Alec Fong Lim, a famous name in local history.

Alec's grandfather, Fong Ding, was born in Guangdong Province, China and arrived in the Northern Territory in 1890. He married in Port Darwin and settled near Pine Creek. Your mother and father-in-law, George and Lorna Lim, left Pine Creek and moved to Katherine, then on to Darwin.

During the war years the family were evacuated to Alice Springs where "Lims" café became a wartime institution. Later on, back in Darwin, they owned the renowned Vic Hotel. I well remember the Carlton Restaurant there where my favourite dish from the menu was, for years, "crispy friend chicken". At that time, you would remember, George and Kath Dudley had the licence for the Vic.

Alec began his career in public life as a trustee of the Cyclone Tracy Trust Fund. In 1980, he became Inaugural Chairman of the Northern Territory Australia Day Committee and he worked long and hard for many other community organisations. Alec was elected Lord Mayor of Darwin in 1984 and again in 1988 and appointed a Member of the Order of Australia in 1986. All in all, your family life over the years has been a fulltime commitment to supporting each and every member.

Tomorrow is Valentines Day, but I know that in the Chinese Calendar, Valentines Day falls on the 7th day of the 7th lunar month and is also known as the Daughter's Festival. An old tradition on this day was for girls to demonstrate their domestic arts, especially melon carving. I sincerely hope you have six melons handy for Dallas, Michele, Tanya, Katrina, Camille and Lorelei!

Norma, you were born in the Year of the Snake and as an earth snake you are known as a pillar

of strength, calm with good sense, graceful and appreciative of the finer things of life.

The American Master Chef, Julia Child, spent some time in China, where, in fact, she received the Emblem of Meritorious Civilian Service. I like to think she enjoyed some memorable cuisine. Julia observed: *some people like to paint pictures, or do gardening, or build a boat in the basement. Other people get a tremendous pleasure out of the kitchen, because cooking is just as creative and imaginative an activity as drawing, or wood carving, or music.*

I know that you are both a talented water colourist and a generous and talented cook. I am sure it is immensely rewarding for you to enjoy the company of your family around the dinner table and I wish you many more years of sharing good food and harmony.