

## Migrant's long road to NZ

What do you know about Chinese war refugees in New Zealand? **Karina Abadia** talks to survivor Kong Chew Loo in advance of an event marking the 75th anniversary of the boats arriving in Auckland.

KONG Chew Loo was 7 when he and his mother took a boat from Hong Kong to Auckland. It was 1939 and they were fleeing persecution from the Japanese.

The owner of KC Loo Fruiter in Mt Eden remembers the brutality committed against his village people during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

He and his mother spent seven days walking along railway lines with a group of people from nearby villages to get to the port.

The boat took about a month to arrive and Loo made lifelong friends during the journey.

"I was virtually reared not by my parents but by outsiders. Even up till now, we are very close."

He and his mother were among the 244 women and 239 children who arrived as refugees from China in 1939 and 1940.

Loo's father was already in New Zealand working as a cook for the Waihi Gold Mining Company.

"Me and my mother were



**Lucky ones:** Eileen, 81, and Kong Chew Loo, 83, own KC Loo Fruiter in Mt Eden and came to New Zealand as war refugees in 1939.

Photo: KARINA ABADIA

only granted a permit to come here for one year. But the war dragged on which is how I came to be a New Zealander."

His family lived in One-

hunga but moved around a lot because money was scarce. He attended Te Papapa School and Manukau Intermediate.

As the eldest son he

helped his father in the market gardens. Loo went on to run a fruit shop with his uncle at 429 Mt Eden Rd.

They were frequently harassed by a man shouting out

"Ching Chong Chinaman" from across the street.

"One day we were waiting for him and we nabbed him," Loo says. "I said to him 'you say that again'. He was pleading with us not to beat him up and he never came back."

Auckland used to be a lot



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— Kong Chew Loo

less racially tolerant than it is now, the 83-year-old says. Early Chinese immigrants were referred to as aliens in the archives and his father had to pay a poll tax when he arrived.

He married Eileen when he was 21 and they had four children. They've owned the greengrocer's on the corner of Mt Eden Rd and Stokes Rd for 22 years and Epsom has been home since 1970.

One of their daughters,

Frances Loo, runs Chapter Book and Tea Shop a few doors down. The couple hasn't retired but daughter Glennis Loo is in charge of the fruit shop now.

The Loo's are looking forward to attending a commemorative event called To Grow Roots Where They Land. It's being put on by the New Zealand Chinese Association Auckland and celebrates the 75th anniversary of Chinese refugees arriving in New Zealand.

Association chairman Richard Leung says it's about helping people in the Chinese community find out about their history, especially descendants of former refugees.

The event will raise money for the WISE Collective, which is run by Auckland Regional Migrant Service, and supports refugee women's business enterprises.

It's being held on Sunday from 11am till 5pm at Alexandra Park. Tickets are \$45 for adults and \$20 for children and include a buffet lunch, speakers and family competitions.

Go to Facebook and search To Grow Roots Where They Land. Email 75thnzca@gmail.com for tickets.