

# Come rain or shine

*They are from different backgrounds but have one thing in common – a love of swimming. And many of those who regularly take to the sea in Deep Water Bay have found camaraderie.*

WORDS AND PICTURES **SASKIA WESSELING**

Mr Yiu, 85, is a retired architectural designer. He has come to Deep Water Bay every day at 8am for 50 years. He remembers a tragedy 20 or 30 years ago, when a young woman was in the water when lightning struck: "Her body turned black in a flash. It was all too quick to help." Yiu likes playing the harmonica and singing with some of the 100 or so friends he says he has met over the years in Deep Water Bay. The coldest day he can recall was in 1964. "It was about 3 degrees Celsius. I remember shivering all day after that swim."



Ms Chan, 82, has just recovered from a knee injury. She says she doesn't bother swimming: "I just float." Originally from Chaozhou, in Guangdong province, she moved to Hong Kong when she was eight. She started working in a factory on Hong Kong Island when she was about 11 and lived in Kowloon. She used to get the 5am ferry to her job, she says, and finish work at 10pm. She started swimming in Deep Water Bay when the facilities consisted of a bamboo shed. She used to wash off in mountain streams.



Mr Tam, 94, is a former hairdresser. He learned to swim as a child, in rivers in mainland China. "When Chinese economic reform first started, there was no organisation nor rules in China. It was a bad environment to live in." In the 1950s, he caught a train to Lo Wu and crossed the border into Hong Kong without any documentation. Having joined his two older brothers, he worked with them at their hairdressing business until retirement. When he started swimming in Deep Water Bay, in his 20s, it wasn't easy to get down to the water – to reach Deep Water Bay he had to climb over a hill. After swimming, "we would just wash in the mountain stream".



Before their retirement, Mr and Mrs Choi, both 69, worked as oyster farmers. From Xixiang, near Shenzhen, where they got married, they "smuggled" themselves into Hong Kong in 1972, in search of a better life. Having sailed their own boat into Hong Kong waters they followed in ancestral footsteps by becoming oyster farmers. The Chois began swimming at Deep Water Bay more than a decade ago, for the health benefits.

FEATURE



“The Big 4” group of “swimmer friends” have been meeting here since 2003 and always wait until they have all arrived before starting their morning routine. They almost never arrange to meet up away from Deep Water Bay. **From left:** Mr Fung, 80, a former Correctional Services officer at Stanley Prison, started swimming daily after his retirement, in 2000; a 64-year-old, who prefers not to be named, lives in the Southern district and has been swimming in Deep Water Bay for three decades; Mr Yiu, 78, has been swimming in Deep Water Bay for 20 years – the other members of the Big 4 call him “Captain”. Yiu describes the morning swims as an addiction, saying he would fall ill whenever he skipped a session; Mr Lee, 60, swims in his own “Cantonese style”, meaning no one can figure out which stroke he uses. He works as a driver and started swimming in Deep Water Bay in 2003.



Sam Law, 85, spent his working life on floating restaurants. Having started at the bottom, he worked his way up to general manager of the Jumbo Floating Restaurant, in Aberdeen. He remembers working at the neighbouring Tai Pak floating restaurant on the night in 1971 on which the Jumbo caught fire. He watched as the flames consumed the restaurant, which was destroyed in just 20 minutes. Law, who was born in Guangdong and came to Hong Kong in 1951, has been swimming for 45 minutes every day for 45 years. When he started to swim in Deep Water Bay, there were no buildings in the area, he says. He is proud of his muscles and the quality of his eyesight. “None of my friends are as healthy as I am,” he says. “I don’t drink coffee or soft drinks.”



Mr Ho, 84, moved to Hong Kong from Zhongshan, in Guangdong, in 1957. He used to earn HK\$80 a month in a factory before working his way through a succession of jobs to become an officer at the Transport Department. He has been swimming in Deep Water Bay for 34 years and started doing so on a daily basis after surgery to remove kidney stones. Swimming makes him hungry, he says, and eating makes him happy.



Mr Chung, 64, has been swimming at Deep Water Bay since he was 40. A former chef, he worked long hours, which exacerbated his back pain. When he was about 40, he changed jobs, giving him more free time. He’d heard swimming was good for one’s back. “Swimming in winter is best for your health,” he says. “The cold causes your blood vessels to contract; that makes the heart rate go faster and promotes good health.” Last year, he took part in the New World Harbour Race that crossed Victoria Harbour (the swimming hat pictured is a souvenir of that event). He has also participated in races between Quarry Bay and North Point, which took him 26 minutes, he says, and Tsim Sha Tsui and Wan Chai. Chung, who lives in Aberdeen, can be found at Deep Water Bay every morning. “There are no enemies here, we’re all friends. We don’t compete with each other. Once you start talking to someone here, you easily become friends.”



Lau Yun-ping, 84, moved to Hong Kong from China in 1946, just after World War II had ended. She lived in Mong Kok. Lau recalls seeing many dead bodies, especially those of children, on the streets and in the canals in China during the war. In the 1950s, it was hard to find work in Hong Kong but she eventually found a job in a Sham Shui Po factory, got married and had three children. For the past 27 years, she has swum in Deep Water Bay every day, as she lives close by, in Aberdeen. She says she has made lots of friends doing so.

Ms Tse, 83, was adopted by a Hong Kong woman and nobody could tell her where she was originally from, so she told herself that she “came from the sea”. Tse, who lives in Aberdeen, says she was attracted to the beauty of Deep Water Bay and with the spare time she had after her children had grown up, started visiting every day. That was about 30 years ago. At first she would just float, before teaching herself how to swim.

