



Name in English: Victor Keung Wong
Name in Chinese: 黃自強
Name in Pinyin: Huáng Zìqiáng
Gender: Male
Birth Year: 1927 –2001
Birth Place: San Francisco, California

TV Journalist, Artist, Actor

Profession(s): Actor, Artist, Comedian, Photojournalist

Education: No degree, Political Science/Journalism, University of California, Berkeley; No degree, Graduate School of Theology, University of Chicago; Master of Fine Arts, 1962, San Francisco Art Institute

Contributions: Victor Wong chose his own paths in life despite being the eldest son of Sare King Wong, the unofficial mayor of San Francisco’s Chinatown, advisor to Chiang Kai Shek, and wealthy retail merchant. After a bout of childhood tuberculosis and several years of hospital isolation, Wong followed a restless journey that took him to UC Berkeley then theology school in Chicago where he helped found the Second City comedy troupe that gave many now legendary comedians their start in the business. Then it was back to San Francisco to study art where he became associated with the “Beat Poets” in the late 1950s. Jack Kerouac wrote about Wong as the thinly disguised character, Arthur Ma, in his 1962 novel, “Big Sur.”

The assassination of President Kennedy in 1963 inspired Victor Wong to become a journalist. By 1968 he was working for KQED-TV’s Newsroom program covering Chinatown but also local stories such as the kidnapping of Patty Hearst and the 1968 Democratic National Convention. During this time he is credited with creating the “photo essay” format of TV journalism by taking still pictures then commenting on them on air, a standard staple of TV journalism today and of Ken Burn’s documentaries. As one of the few Asian American TV journalists at the time he inspired Asian Americans everywhere. The stress of his work though may have caused him to develop Bell’s Palsy which made the left side of his face droop and ended his TV career. Ironically this trait made him much more memorable and in demand as an actor.

Depressed by his health and career problems, Wong plunged into the Asian American theater scene in San Francisco and New York. His work was noticed and in 1984 at the age of 57 he began his association with director Wayne Wang, first appearing in his movie, “Dim Sum: A Little Bit of Heart.” Other movie roles quickly followed, “Year of the Dragon,” the cult classic “Big Trouble in Little China,” and “The Last Emperor.” It was on the last film that the director, Bernardo Bertolucci, vowed never to work with Wong again because he presumed to share his expertise of Chinese customs and history during shoots. More roles with Wayne Wang followed including “Eat a Bowl of Tea” and

“Joy Luck Club.” Victor Wong became one of the best known character actors in the nation. His life was showcased in the 1997 Sundance award winning documentary, “My America...or Honk if You Love Buddha” by filmmaker Renee Tajima-Peña.

Victor Wong retired from show business in 1998 after several crippling strokes and resumed abstract art painting. Worrying about two of his sons who lived just blocks away from New York’s World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, Wong found out they were safe but continued to watch the continuous TV coverage of the terrorist attacks. Exhausted, he passed away in front of his computer screen on the night of September 12th. His last words were, “The world is never going to be the same.”

External Links:

http://asianweek.com/2001_10_05/arts_victorwong.html

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0939378/>

<http://www.newsreview.com/sacramento/Content?oid=9103>

<http://articles.latimes.com/2001/sep/26/local/me-50017>