



James (Shau Vui) Fam

Researched & written by John Burchill

James Fam is one of the longest-serving Asian members of the Winnipeg Police Service.

James was born and grew up in Kota Kinabalu, North Borneo. At the time, North Borneo was a British Colony that was originally established as the North Borneo Chartered Company, much like the Hudsons Bay Company and Rupertsland. During the Second World War, the Japanese Army invaded and occupied Malaya, North Borneo, Sarawak, and Singapore for more than three years. After the war, North Borneo became a British protectorate, eventually uniting with Malaya, Sarawak and Singapore in September 1963 to become Malaysia.



Malaysian Badminton Club - James Fam, Front Row, Far-Right

Today Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural country that is home to more than 32 million people. It is a federal constitutional monarchy that consists of thirteen states and three federal territories, separated by the South China Sea into two regions, Peninsular Malaysia and Borneo's East Malaysia (Singapore left the federation in 1965). Kuala Lumpur is the national capital and largest city. About half the population of Malaysia is ethnically Malay, with minorities of Chinese, Indians, and indigenous peoples. The country's official language is Malaysian, although English remains a second language.

James ventured to Canada in 1979 in his late teens to attend high school at the University of Winnipeg Collegiate at the suggestion of a second cousin who had come to Winnipeg. Being from a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural country, James could speak several languages or dialects, including Mandarin, Malay, Cantonese, Hakka, and English.

Arriving from a country where the temperature remains relatively constant year-round with averages of 27 to 32°C, James landed in Winnipeg mid-winter when it was -31°C. It was climate shock James experienced, not culture shock.

James lived on Young Street across from the University of Winnipeg. After receiving his high school diploma, he enrolled at the University of Manitoba in Economics. James worked in the hotel industry but hoped to become a

pilot. He took lessons at St. Andrews Airport, however, the cost was prohibitive for a student and, in the end, it was a dream unfulfilled.

James was also a black belt in *Taekwondo*, a sport he began while still living in Malaysia. After coming to Winnipeg he continued training and teaching *Taekwondo*. He received a citation recognizing his efforts in helping develop *Taekwondo* into a world martial art and Olympic sport in advance of its debut at the 1987 Pan Am Games and as a demonstration sport the following year at the Seoul Olympics.



In 1984 James became a landed immigrant and three years later a Canadian citizen. While working in the hotel industry, he met a number of police officers, including Constables

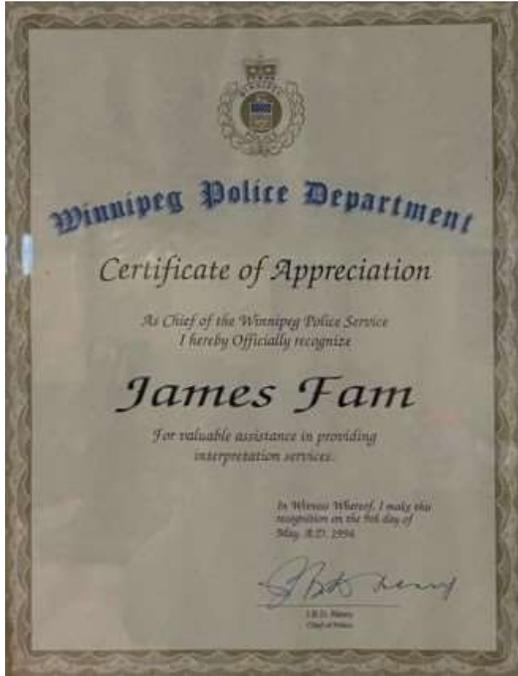
Rick Kirton and Don Gosselin, who suggested he apply for the police department. About the same time Ron Bilton, one of the top *Taekwondo* athletes in Canada who trained with James, would also join the police department.

In the 1980s competition for police positions were high, with almost 1700 people applying for one recruit class. When James first sought to apply, he was told he needed volunteer experience or something in the field of law enforcement if he wanted to be competitive. So he enrolled himself in a criminal justice program at Red River College and, in his spare time, volunteered with Probation Services. James submitted his application in 1990 and was one of 22 candidates who were selected for Recruit Class 117. He was one of the first Asian officers to be hired in the 1990s. He was given badge #1734.

Unfortunately, with English not being James' first language he had some difficulties in recruit class. However, Herb Stephen, Chief of Police at the time, accommodated James in a staff position. In speaking with him today, Herb told me, *"I was impressed with James and thought he would have been an excellent officer. The Police Service had a real shortage of Asian employees at that time, with no one available to interpret for Winnipeg's growing Asian population. [So a different] position was offered to James. This proved to be an excellent decision."*

While never overcoming Winnipeg's cold, during the past 31 years James has "acclimatized" himself to life in the Winnipeg Police Service. He was recognized for his assistance in

translation and interpretation services as envisioned by Chief Stephen.



In addition, James tells me, *"I have met a lot of good people, and they are just like a big family. With many opportunities within, I decided to enroll myself in a Buying Procurement course and earned a Diploma and later on promoted as a Buyer for the Police Service in the Quartermaster Stores. Starting from uniform, weapons, protective equipment, I was also involved with the buying of helicopter equipment when we bought Air1"*. While James never did get his pilot's licence, the crew of Air1 took him up on a flight he would never forget for his help in procurement.

James has also been a staple in the Winnipeg Police Choir for the past 26 years. He was involved in a Winnipeg Police badminton club, a sport he had played back in Malaysia, and volunteered for the Winnipeg Police golf tournament for several years with retired Staff Sergeant Bud Guest.

James has also been active in the Chinese community, catching the attention of Winnipeg City Councillor Markus Chambers, who told me that *"James is an asset to the Policing Community and the local Asian Community here in our city. James is an extremely loyal individual and provides exemplary service in his professional and personal community commitments. I am glad that James is a member of the Winnipeg Police Service and proud to call him a friend!"*

James still has family in Malaysia, and he returns when he can. Twelve years ago, on one of his return trips, James climbed Mount Kinabalu. At 13,435 ft (4,095 m) it is the highest mountain in Borneo, the Malay Archipelago and Malaysia. It took James two days to reach the summit. It was tough, he says, but he was proud of himself when he got to the peak at 1 am.

James is also very proud of his work with the Winnipeg Police and looks forward to climbing many more mountains in the future.

