



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

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Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

NORMA FONG LIM

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This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I pay my respects to the late Norma Fong Lim and her family. I did not know Norma personally, but I feel duty-bound, as the current custodian of the Fong Lim electorate, to acknowledge her passing, not least as a beneficiary of her legacy.

In my maiden speech I reflected on the fact that Fong Lim is, by NT standards, a relatively new electorate, having been created in 2008 as a composite of inner original Darwin suburbs and newer northern suburbs. It is named, as I frequently mention when I travel, after Alec Fong Lim AM, the first Chinese-Australian Lord Mayor. He was awarded the Order of Australia in 1986 for his services to the community and local government. I reiterate that I am deeply honoured to represent a constituency named after Alec Fong Lim AM, the embodiment of Australia's most successful multicultural community. I proudly bare my father's name, alongside my eponymous electorate, knowing how much I owe them both. I extend those remarks to envelope Norma, knowing the extent to which she has been a pillar for the entire Fong Lim family, especially her husband as Lord Mayor.

Norma was 27 years old when she met the charming and handsome Alec Fong Lim in Darwin on his way back from overseas, where I believe he was on a junket to find himself a wife. Having returned unsuccessfully, he instead managed to snag himself a date with Norma and proposed after a whirlwind romance of six weeks. I am told she was saved from being left on the shelf, but I am not sure who saved who, based on the notes that I have.

Norma and Alec lived a full life together, having six beautiful intelligent daughters of whom we know about in different contexts. Norma valued teaching the girls to be strong, independent women and was clearly proud of them all. As a wife, Norma supported Alec through all his ventures, including his involvement in the family pubs, business ventures, wholesale groceries, alcohol, dress shops, the fruit juice stall and even his life as a bookie. After many years of practice, with Alec Fong Lim having held many significant posts in the interim, she was likewise serious in her support as lady mayoress and quietly offered sustenance.

She rarely stepped into the spotlight, by many accounts, insisting the spotlight was for Alec in the first instance. Nevertheless, she was still always willing to throw an impromptu dinner party, put on a frock and have dinner at a moment's notice or to offer her arm at functions. I learned that, in her time as lady mayoress, Norma explored her talent as an artist. She loved painting landscapes and fauna and holding exhibitions to sell her artwork. Many people, in this room in fact, have one of Norma's paintings in their office, and there are a few hanging in the chambers on the third floor of Nichols Place.

Her love of painting continued even when her dementia started to take over her life. She attended many paint-and-create sessions and usually put her spin on the subject. It was her own and, therefore, worth recognising in its own right. It was great to see her have something of her own beyond being a mother and wife. She loved colour and appreciated nature, which is evident through all the testimony about her paintings.

I also learned through Tanya's eulogy, which I hope she will not mind me drawing from, that while she supported Alec through his endeavours, particularly as lady mayoress, what is not known is how difficult she found public life a lot of the time. I quote from the eulogy:

While she was immensely proud of Dad, her shy nature made it difficult for her to attend so many social functions smiling nicely and making small talk. But like the queen (after who she got her second name) she did it well.

When Alec passed away, she of course missed him dearly but was also happy to say good riddance to those social events. The exception was when she had the opportunity to go to Government House and meet King Charles, who was then Prince Charles. Her love and focus for family shone through when she asked him, 'Do you get to babysit your grandchildren often?', and he said, 'Oh no; I am not good at that.' She was a family person through and through; it was always at the forefront of her mind.

She was a stoic and humble stay-at-home mum, which probably shone through most after Cyclone Tracy, having to shoulder the burden of looking after the whole family in the wake of tragedy. Luckily, she and her four daughters were visiting her mum in Sydney at the time for Christmas when disaster struck. With Alec away doing cleanup in Darwin, Norma organised schooling for the four youngest daughters and made their lives as normal as possible, despite the devastation that had been brought upon Darwin. She knew that Darwin had been decimated, her brother-in-law had been killed and her eldest daughter and mother-in-law had been saved by police who collected them and took them to safe haven.

She would have been terribly worried about what sort of future would lay ahead, but she proved her mettle by working with Alec to get things up and running interstate and home in Darwin.

Her support for Alec was absolute by all accounts. She was there in good times and in bad, and theirs was a partnership of equals born of real mutual love and respect. She was by his side when he was forced to resign early as Lord Mayor because of ill health and, likewise, by his bedside when he passed just a month later.

To the family first and foremost, I say that I am proud to be associated with the Fong Lim name. That sentiment extends to the late great Norma Fong Lim as well as Alec Fong Lim. Lady mayoress Fong Lim was gracious, charming and kind—words used to describe her by the many people who crossed her paths over the years.

My sincere condolences go to all in the family here tonight and beyond—perhaps online.

Vale, Norma Fong Lim.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, I pay tribute to Mrs Norma Fong Lim, a remarkable Territorian who sadly left us on 5 September 2025 at the age of 96. I acknowledge all the family members who are here with us.

I had the privilege of meeting Norma earlier this year at her 96th birthday celebration at the senior's lunch hosted by the Chung Wah Society. I remember walking in to that room—filled with laughter, family and friends—and seeing Norma surrounded by many people who adored her. When I presented her flowers on behalf of our team, she smiled with that unmistakable mix of grace, humility and quiet strength that so many people have described. Even at 96 she carried a presence that spoke volumes about the Territory's past and the extraordinary life she had lived.

Born Norma Chin Ling Ying in Darwin on 18 February 1929, she was the daughter of Chin See Pon—known affectionately as 'Botany'—and Pauline Chee Quee. Hers was a family deeply woven into the fabric of Northern Territory's Chinese-Australian story; her lineage stretches back to the goldfields, the rail camps and the early days of Palmerston and Pine Creek. Norma's childhood took her from Darwin to Thursday Island and later to Sydney during the war years before she returned to the Territory as a young woman.

In 1955 she married Alexander (Alec) Fong Lim. His grandfather, known as Fong Ding, migrated here in 1890, and Alec's father, Fong Fook Lim—known as George Lim—was born in Fountain Head in the Douglas Daly region in 1902. This family was instrumental in building Darwin's most iconic hospitality landmarks, including the famous Lim's Hotel and Sand Pebbles Restaurant. For those who have not made the connection—only some are old enough to have been to Lim's—this is now the Beachfront Hotel in Rapid Creek.

Alec would go on to become one of the Darwin's most beloved Lord Mayors, elected in 1984 and again in 1988, remembered for his generosity and civic pride. I am also reliably informed that he had a quirky sense of humour. Through it all, Norma was by his side, as a partner, confidant and quiet powerhouse. Those who knew her speak of her kindness, hospitality and artistry. She was a talented watercolourist, accomplished cook across many kitchens and matriarch whose home was always open.

Norma and Alec raised six daughters—Dallas, Michele, Tanya, Katrina, Camille and Lorelei—each of whom went on to succeed in their chosen paths, and together they have carried forward the values of service, resilience and family that Norma embodied.

Camille and I did the Australian Institute of Company Directors course together in 2022, and I have met with her in the last two or three years. I used to see her at many AICD events after that as well.

I was unable to attend Norma's funeral as I was in Sydney for the Multicultural Affairs ministers' meeting, but I thank Lorelei for providing me with the eulogies from the day and the moving letter to her mum. I was struck by many things, but there were a couple of takeaways I will share. She said, 'You showed me that forgiveness is never conditional. You taught me strength and resilience and to never be afraid to be vulnerable.'

The Fong Lim name is now etched into the Territory's history. It stands proudly on our electoral map, with the electorate of Fong Lim named in honour of Alec's legacy as Darwin's first Lord Mayor of Chinese descent. We heard from the Member for Fong Lim about this.

The beautiful road from the gates at East Point to the gun turrets was named Alec Fong Lim Drive after the popular mayor, as was Lake Alexander, due to the work he had done to develop the area and the family history of living on East Point Road.