

Ray Chen pans a generation with photos

"Photography is the best medium to record the collective memory of a society, and through this publication, Ray Chen, master photographer and storyteller, has firmly shaped a visual memory for Jamaicans of yesterday, today and tomorrow."

- Earl Jarrett

He stumbled into photography by chance, and it became his life's driving passion. And now, after more than 50 years in the industry, Ray Chen is bequeathing to his homeland another pictorial legacy. On Wednesday, March 18, Chen launched *Jamaica: My 50 Years in Photography*, in a small gathering of friends and associates at the Grogge Shop, Devon House, Kingston. His friend of over 60 years, Lascelles Chin, spoke at the event, reminiscing about mischievous schoolboy days and exciting adolescent, then adult years. His memories were as vivid and colourful as Chen's book, from the bicycle rides, beach parties and bonfire nights they enjoyed as youngsters. "We shared many things," Chin said, explaining that it was this bonding which led him to lend Chen a camera. "I borrowed Chin's camera and never let it go after that," Chen joked, and what started with mainly photos for passports, weddings and pretty girls, as was the practice in Jamaica, grew into a finely honed craft that has earned Chen worldwide acclaim and brought him lifelong satisfaction. "Photography ... it's in your blood and you can't get it out," he said with a smile. "In many ways, it's [been about] being in the right place at the right time." After attending school at the New York Institute of Photography, Chen moved to Montreal, Canada, and, as he gained exposure to different styles and techniques, became a successful commercial photographer. He has published two other books of pictorial essays, *Jamaica: The land and the people* (1984) and *Jamaica: The beauty and the soul of the land we love* (1993); as well as a historical volume commemorating the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Han Chinese to Jamaica, titled *The Shopkeepers* (2005). Relevant depiction

This fourth work took Chen three years to complete, as he was very meticulous about the message he wanted to send. "It was tough," he said. "You have to think deep about what you want to say and put it in there. ... I don't think a foreigner would do it like this. You have to live the culture to know what's important and relevant." Even though he had plenty material to work with at the start, he said he sometimes went to take pictures to fill in the gaps and "make the work complete". "What's important to me is to document a lot of the things that we are slowly losing," Chen said. "Because over time, things that are important to you are not going to be as important to the next generation. And I'm caught between the older and the younger, so I'm filling the generational gap." Gloria Palomino, present at the launch, said: "[The book is] just phenomenal. Every school should have copies of it." Howard Moo-Young, a renowned photographer in his own right, added, "I don't think there's any other Jamaican photographer who has achieved what Ray has done. I've known him for over 20 years. He has left a legacy for Jamaica and it will go on for generations and generations. It is a recording of life in Jamaica, of past years." Wayne Chin, who has worked with Chen for years, praised him as "very humble ... his treatment of subject is phenomenal". Barbara Gloudon summed it up perfectly when she said: "Ray Chen is a decent person with great love and respect for Jamaica. He genuinely loves Jamaica." For more information call Periwinkle Publishers(876) 754 - 8379, 371 - 1882 Source: Jamaica Gleaner by Ruth Howard