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by [Diana van Oort](#)

## Cross-Cultural Couples: Edward and Chi

**By: Diana van Oort**

Our family of mixed couples is growing bigger and bigger. The Latitudes Cross-Cultural Couples series is a testament to the intermingling of cultures that makes this world a more interesting and colorful place. Are you a mixed couple and would you like to be featured on Latitudes? Do you have an extraordinary tale of love that surpasses cultural boundaries and geographical borders? Then e-mail us at [info@latitudes.nu](mailto:info@latitudes.nu)!

El Salvadorian Edward and Vietnamese Chi

This time we meet El Salvadorian Edward and Vietnamese Chi who live in Saigon, Vietnam. During the interview the couple constantly comment on and complete each other's sentences. They seem very much in tune with one another, like they have known each other for decades, but still maintain their own characters and quirks. After studying together in Switzerland, they now run a restaurant. It's a nice place with good food. This is their story.

**Please introduce yourselves, what are your names, where are you from and where do you live?**

Edward: 'My name is Edward de Carle, I'm 29 years old. My roots are in El Salvador, but my younger brother and I were adopted by an English couple. So I lived in London, England nearly all of my life. My father also had two sons and a daughter from a previous marriage.'

Chi: 'My name is Phan Kim Chi, I'm 33 years old. I'm from Vietnam and have two sisters. I'm the youngest. I've lived here almost all my life, except when I went to study overseas in Switzerland for a couple of years. We live in Saigon, Vietnam.'





Edward and Chi and their little boy

### How did you meet and where?

Chi: 'We met in 2003 in Switzerland at school, we were classmates.'

Edward: 'We studied hospitality at the Glion Institute of Higher Education. It's an international hospitality management institution.'

### How did your relationship evolve?

Chi: 'We started as friends and were a good team. We backed each other up. Then I started to help him with his studies.'

Edward: 'Because I hate studying. Chi would always push me. Our friendship evolved into a relationship after about four months.'

Chi: 'Then we fell in love and I pushed him more to study.'

Edward: 'Which made me love her even more.'

Chi: 'We graduated and did our six months internships. I did an internship in Switzerland and he went back to London to do an internship, so we did have some time apart.'

Edward: 'After that we had some family issues. My folks passed in 2004. She's been through the difficult times with me. I realized there wasn't much for me left back in England, except for my brothers and sister. So I called her and said: Let's go to Vietnam. I went over to Switzerland where she was finishing her

work. Early 2005 we packed all our stuff and moved over here. Really just for six months, to travel and visit. By then we were engaged. My folks already had given us their blessing so that was all right. The main thing was to meet her parents and get their blessing as well.'

The couple got married in 2006



Chi: 'After travelling around the country for one year, we started working and my parents said okay you are together now. We got married in 2006.'

Edward: 'Two of my brothers and a couple of good friends came over for the wedding. The rest of my family couldn't make it, because they were too busy. It was a great wedding because of the whole buildup. We made a huge trip all over the country to take photos for our wedding. You know the fifties, cheesy style they like. We also made a film. We had photos of her and me as babies, growing up in stages, which they showed together. It was pretty cool. They don't really do that in the West.'

### **What does it mean to your relationship to be of two different cultures?**

Edward: 'It's weird in the beginning, getting used to the changes. Coming from a western society, getting into an eastern society is quite a change. Some things you do completely freely in the west are frowned upon here. Like holding hands, cuddling and kissing in public, all that palaver. I annoyed a lot of people, it was good fun. Chi is more westernized anyway, because she has lived in Switzerland. So it's a lot easier for her. How was it for you to adept to the western society?'

Chi: 'I observed and I was learning. I like the style and I like the relationship between parents and children. When the children are 18, they move out and make decisions for themselves. But we still have to stay with the parents until we get married. So what else?'

Edward: 'I don't know. I think you like the fact that we have more freedom when we are young.'

Chi: 'And the education. In Asia we learn a lot of things, we learn like crazy, but when we finish school we have almost nothing in our heads. You just forget everything, which is not so practical. But he still remembers what he learned.'



At the wedding...all smiles

### **Has it ever caused any problems or miscommunication?**

Edward: 'Sometimes. We've had our arguments.'

Chi: 'Like the language, communication. He always laughs at my English. Sometimes I don't pronounce a word correctly and then he starts teasing.'

Edward: 'O yeah, brilliant. I've got a great story. That was brilliant. In Vietnamese the translation into English of the roots of your hair, is the feet of your hair. One day, she pulled out one of my hairs and said oh, I can see the foot of your hair. You what? The foot? My hair has got feet and they all jump around? I really enjoyed making fun of that. She always says I don't like you bea (beard) and mustard instead of moustache.'

Chi: 'I always mix them up. I don't know why.'

Edward: 'Until today, even though you majored in English.'

Chi: 'And I studied overseas and I still make mistakes. It's still a second language. Sometimes when we have an argument it's difficult for me. I try to advice him or explain things to him and even though my English is really good, some terms, I can only explain in Vietnamese. Then I'm really desperate for the words. Sometimes I get stuck. But all in all we communicate well together.'

Edward: 'Sometimes I get annoyed if I want to know what the staff is saying. I know she is going to be annoyed about me continually asking. If you don't want to tell me, that frustrates me.'

Chi: 'Sometimes I talk with the staff and it has nothing to do with you. And you keep asking, what's that, what's that. But we are just telling a story.'

Edward: 'I want to know what story.'

The bride deserves a kiss

### How did your surroundings react to your mixed relationship?

Edward: 'My parents really liked Chi when I brought her over to my parent's house. They got along really well. You said in the beginning you were a little shy, a little uneasy.'

Chi: 'Of course.'

Edward: 'I wasn't. But your shyness was maybe caused, because I said don't be like this and don't be like that, especially with my dad. Although, he was a good laugh, a tease like me. But, don't cross him, basically. I remember one time, my brother's girlfriend had done something completely stupid and he blew a fuse. He was yelling at her and I was wow, that's one thing I have to remember.'

Chi: 'His mom went to her friends and talked about me. Then I met the family and friends and they said oh I heard a lot about you. I said oh really?'

Edward: 'Oh you are that lady are you? Well done, he was a really bad boy before. You sat him straight. It is true I was very cheeky, very naughty and she sat me straight. My other girlfriends always were a bad influence.'

Chi: 'None of his girlfriends pushed him to study.'

Edward: 'Or made me quit smoking.'

Chi: 'Because we worked together, we passed the exam together. I got my honors and he passed, which his parents really talked about.'

Chi: 'My parents were happy with him. My dad speaks English, my mom doesn't. But they loved him from the beginning. He just went straight into the house and there we go, I'm your son-in-law.'

Edward: 'That's western isn't it? That's our style. Hi, I'm here, if you don't like it, tough luck.'

Chi: 'Yes, that's the difference, here in Asia when you go to a girl's family; you have to buy the mom something and try to persuade them. He's totally different. They just have to accept our relationship. Even in the film of the wedding, he said I like your daughter, I want your blessing. He was very straightforward.'

Edward: 'But in Vietnamese society they are also very straightforward. They can be blatant. For example, if they don't like you, they will say it. My first introduction was with your nephew. We got off the plane, he spoke Vietnamese to my wife and I asked her what he said. He said you are very fat. Oh yeah thanks. I don't know you, but thanks, good observation. It was a bit of a shock really. It's amusing after a while and you get used to it. In the beginning, I didn't speak Vietnamese that well. You were meeting your friends and dragged me along. In the beginning they would be nice with the English they knew and of course then it was all Vietnamese for the rest of the evening and I'm sitting there like a lemon. I might as well just have been a lemon. Now I can get by in Vietnamese and I understand a lot more than I used to. I studied it for three months on and off and I had tuition.'

Chi: 'I think there is still a barrier for them, even though they like him, but they are not so fluent in English. But if we get together with our friends who studied overseas, we're good together.'

Edward: 'Yes that's true, but then it's all back to Vietnamese.'

Chi: 'Sometimes his friends come over to Vietnam or sometimes we go back to England.'

Edward: 'It's easier for you, because you speak English fluently.'

Chi: 'Yes, but I still have to have all my ears out to understand, because they speak fast, make jokes and use slang.'

Edward: 'She does say that when I'm with my friends, I talk really fast, I use a little cockney and slang. That's confusing.'



## What are the biggest challenges you had to overcome?

Edward: 'Exams, I hate studying. We did nearly break up on that.'

Chi: 'No, not break up; I just got really angry with you, mad at you. If you don't study then let me be, I tried to drag you along and you're not even trying to push hard.'

Edward: 'Yes that's right. She was very angry with me.'

Chi: 'Because I studied hard to get my honor certificate. It was really hard for me already and I also tried really hard to push him.'

Edward: 'I guess that's one of the reasons we are so good together. We balance out the seesaw. If she gets stuck with something and I can do it, I do it and if I get stuck with something she helps me.'

Chi: 'I guess because we started out as friends, that's our foundation.'



Merry Christmas!

When they first started out in Saigon, Chi was the Sofitel restaurant manager at Sofitel L'Olivier. Edward was a restaurant chain manager for Juice Bar in charge of staff training and quality control. After a while they both quit their jobs.

Edward: 'I kept an eye on my old boss and then he opened another restaurant. In 2007 he called us and asked if we wanted to open up a franchise. We jumped at the opportunity. At that time we were already planning to open up a restaurant. We were very excited and pretty naïve. We put a lot of time and effort into it.'

Chi: 'It was a franchise, so you're the owner, but you

can't make decisions if things go wrong and you want to make changes to adapt it to the environment. We had limited authority to fix things.'

Edward: 'We were situated in a non-western area but the menu was all western food.'

Chi: 'That doesn't work. In two years it didn't work out, so we pulled out.'

Edward: 'We started here two years ago, in 2010. I am a Chef. Chi does the accounting and bookkeeping, the hiring and firing. I do the firing as well, sometimes. She's more the sensible one. I'm more the idiot.'

Chi: 'You said it, not me.'

Edward: 'Well, I like to be a clown. My staff knows it. They can have a laugh, they can do what they want, within reason, but once they push that boundary, they know it. I'm still a hot blooded Latino. I've knocked heads with them a couple of times.'

## What are the best things that this relationship brings you?

Edward: 'We still like to tease each other and have a laugh. We've got a little boy who's five. He's a joy.'

Chi: 'He's fluent in both languages.'

Edward: 'He's so fluent I sometimes ask him to translate for me to the staff. It's actually quite amusing. When I'm angry I tell him to tell it to the staff and he imitates me. The tone of his voice gets really angry.'

Chi: 'We bring the best of our country and our traditions together. For the education we chose the west. For some of the politeness and the behavior we chose the east.'

Edward: 'He's still a very cheeky little boy. I love him. But I always told my staff and the nanny: never clean up after him. If he makes a mess, he cleans it. Like sitting down and eating. I can't stand children running around with an old woman running after them with a spoonful of rice. Sit the kid down and let the kid eat. That's western upbringing. Another thing is that the boys are the king of the castle. They always make a fuss over the boys, with the girls it's just whatever. If he falls over or hurts himself, if he's not bleeding from his ears, he's okay. If he bumps his head, oh dear, he will learn not to do it again. You don't run over there and smother him with your love and affection, because he's going to grow up being wet boy. When educating our son, you don't like the way I'm strict on him. I'm very military like my father was on me.'

Chi: 'I try to bring that down.'



Their little boy is fluent in two languages

### **What language do you speak with one another?**

Edward & Chi: 'English.'

### **Are religious differences an issue between you and your partner? How did you solve these?**

Edward: 'I'm Christian. You're not really religious, but your parents are Buddhist.'

Chi: 'Not really, but technically we are Buddhist. We go to the pagodas every beginning of the year to get our blessings. There's a difference but we don't make a big deal out of it. We both adapted.'

Edward: 'Later on I would like James to have a religion. Just like my parents did. I had no religion until I was 12, old enough to make my own decision. So I went with my mother's side who's Church of England. My father was Christian Scientist. The Church of England is more modern. My brother did also join, but now, he can't be bothered. There's no Church of England here. I have asked around, but no one has found it. I miss it. If I go back to England I will probably go to Church to catch up. I haven't received my communion since I've been here. I want to let the big man know I'm still here, still thinking about them. Otherwise we really don't have an issue. I'll tag along to the pagodas.'

Chi: 'He does all the procedures and the praying. It's pretty cute.'

Edward: 'I'll do the bowing, the incense and all that, but I don't know if they know what I'm trying to tell him or should tell him.'

Chi: 'Talk from your heart.'

Edward: 'I just go along with it, if it keeps everyone happy. Religion is religion. You can be extremely strict with your religion, but you have two points of view here.'

### **What are your future plans?**

Edward: 'I want more restaurants and hotels and I want a daughter. I'm really happy about my little boy, but I also want a girl now. James already said he wants a sister.'

Chi: 'Did he?'

Edward: 'Oh yeah, he told me: I want a sister. Catch up, he wants a sister.'

Chi: 'I'm a little bit superstitious, so I keep telling him it's not a good year for a girl yet, maybe in two years. I'm also getting back in shape and if I get pregnant I would blow up again. Let me enjoy it first.'

Edward: 'I'm not into that superstition palaver, I go along with it, I wouldn't argue it, but I don't believe in it. I'm trying to think about James as well. The older he's going to get, the further the distance is going to be between them.'

Chi: 'I also want more restaurants, to build it up for the family. But I like to make a steady move, I don't want to expand now, and not be able to control it. A lot is going to fall into my hands, because I speak

both languages. Slow, but steady, is better than fast and collapse. He's really pushing and I'm the one who's slowing it down. If we would go his way, it would be mistake, mistake, mistake. But if we do it like I do, too conservative, we would never develop. Again, it's a balance.'

Edward: 'This year we were meant to open up a restaurant, but we're nearly at the end of the year and we still haven't found a place. The excuse? We're losing weight, so instead of going to look for a restaurant, we're going to the gym.'

### **Do you have any tips for other mixed couples?**

Edward: 'Don't take it too seriously. You have to have a laugh, you only live once. You have to understand each other, that is the main thing. Basically you have to know each other first. It took us two years at University, and on top of that one extra year here, to really get to know each other. We were friends almost straight away, we just clicked. You also have to find your strengths and weaknesses and make your weaknesses your strengths.'

Chi: 'Understand each other and respect each other. You have to find the middle ground. We have been through difficult times when his parents passed. Then we came here and we travelled, we have experienced things together and that is tied up in the relationship. Now we are trying to lose weight together. We are a good team when we need to. We share the work and when there's a difficulty, we help each other.'