

HARRY HIRO-O AOKI

Pronunciation: Hey-ree Hee-roh-oh Ah-oh-kee

ANSWER KEY:

■ IRON SPRINGS, ALBERTA

1942-1945: After being injured in a logging camp in Blind Bay, joins family on a sugar beet farm. To pass the time, plays harmonica, studies music, and learns to ski.

■ PRINCE GEORGE, BC

1950s: After being unable to accept a university scholarship in the United States due to immigration laws, teaches self to play the double bass while injured in a skiing

■ VANCOUVER, BC

1968: Co-stars in a CBC television show called Moods of Man with African American singer and guitar player Jim Johnson.

CHECK IT OUT:

■ HARRY AOKI LEGACY PROJECT:

<http://blogs.ubc.ca/harryaoki/history-life-as-a-japanese-canadian/>

Watch the video on this page, and explore the rest of the website for more videos, stories, and information.

FURTHER READING:

■ “Cumberland” and “Harmonicas”. Sounds Japanese Canadian to Me. Nikkei National Museum, 2017. Podcast. <http://centre.nikkeiplace.org/sjctm-podcast>

■ Greenaway, John Endo. “Harry Hiro-o Aoki 1921-2013”. <http://jccbulletin-geppo.ca/harry-hiro-o-aoki-1921-2013/>



Harry Aoki Fonds. NNM 2017.61.1.1

HARRY AOKI

Pronunciation:
Hey-ree Ah-oh-kee

HARRY HIRO-O AOKI

Harry Hiro-o Aoki was born in 1921 in Cumberland, BC. Cumberland was a mining town on Vancouver Island where people from all around the world came to work, including many people from Japan. Harry's father, Sadayoshi, and his mother, Masa, had come from Japan to teach Japanese to the Japanese miners' children. Harry's parents loved music, and he learned to play the violin and piano from his mother. When Harry was 13, the family moved to Vancouver, and Harry attended Britannia Secondary School. Since his parents were teachers, they considered education very important, and Harry's older brother Ted went to the University of British Columbia. But the Aokis could only afford to send one child to school at a time, so Harry went to work for a lumber company until it was his turn to go to university.

Just before Ted was going to graduate, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. UBC expelled all its Japanese Canadian students and all Japanese Canadians were forced to leave the coast. Harry's family moved to Iron Springs, Alberta to work on a sugar beet farm, so that Ted and the other older Aoki children wouldn't be separated from their parents and younger siblings. Harry didn't want to be sent anywhere by the government, so he got a job at a sawmill in Blind Bay, BC instead. He did many other things with his life, but Harry never got the chance to go to university.

Harry couldn't take his violin with him when he left Vancouver, so he took a harmonica, which fit in his pocket. His music kept him company when he was by himself in the logging camp. [But he got injured at the camp, and joined his family in Iron Springs. There, he taught himself to ski, and took a correspondence course in music theory and composition.](#) He did so well in the course that he was offered a scholarship to go study more in the United States. But the US government said he couldn't come into their country because he was Japanese, even though he was actually a Canadian born in Canada. Harry probably wasn't surprised at this kind of treatment: during the war, he had been asked to join the British army as an interpreter. With his own life and dreams of going to university on hold, and his family basically living as prisoners on a sugar beet farm thanks to the Canadian government, he vehemently refused to help Britain or Canada.

[Harry worked a variety of different jobs after the war: he was a logger, an electrician, and a ski instructor. He also taught himself to play the double bass.](#) While living in Prince George, BC, Harry met African American musician and schoolteacher Jim Johnson, and the two started to play music together under the name Moods of Man. [Moods of Man eventually became a TV show on the CBC](#) and also toured across Canada and the US to play for schools.

Harry was always interested in using music to communicate across cultures. In 2002, while living in Vancouver, Harry founded the First Friday Forum and Coffeehouse, a monthly event hosted by the Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association. His band, the Gang of Seven, served as a "flagship" group for the evening, and Harry would invite a variety of other artists to come perform. Using the "pan-cultural language" of music as a starting point, Harry would speak and lead discussion on cross-cultural exchange. Harry led the event for many years before his declining health made it too difficult; at this point, his friends took over running First Fridays. Harry passed away in 2013 at the age of 91.



Pronunciation:
May-ree Kee-tah-gah-wah

MARY KITAGAWA

UNFOLD FOR ANSWER KEY

MARY KITAGAWA

Pronunciation: May-ree Kee-tah-gah-wah

ANSWER KEY:

- **VANCOUVER, BC**
1942: Father is taken away by the RCMP. Is unable to attend school due to racism. With mother, siblings, and hundreds of other Japanese Canadian families, is made to go live in Hastings Park in Vancouver in a huge barn built for animals.
- **VANCOUVER, BC**
1960: Applies for a teaching job on Salt Spring Island but is rejected due to anti-Japanese racism; becomes a teacher at Kitsilano Secondary in Vancouver.
- **VANCOUVER, BC**
1989: Retires from teaching to go back to school, studying Japanese language and Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia.

CHECK IT OUT:

- **TAIKEN EDUCATION SERIES:**
<http://centre.nikkeiplace.org/taiken-video-resources/>
Scroll down the page to find a short video oral history from Mary Kitagawa.

FURTHER READING:

- Ibuki, Norm. “The Indomitable Spirit of Mary Kitagawa”. Parts 1-2. Discover Nikkei. Japanese American National Museum, July 2014.<http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2014/7/24/indomitable-spirit-mary-kitagawa-1/>
- Japanese Canadian Student Tribute. UBC: Web.
<http://japanese-canadian-student-tribute.ubc.ca/>

MARY KITAGAWA / KEIKO MARY MURAKAMI

Mary Kitagawa was born Keiko Mary Murakami on Salt Spring Island, BC. She lived with her parents and siblings on a 17-acre farm, where the family grew asparagus, berries, and vegetables, and kept chickens.

In 1942, after Pearl Harbor, anti-Japanese racism on Salt Spring Island became so strong that Mary and her siblings were unable to go to school or church. [Mary's father, who was born in Japan and a Japanese citizen, was taken away from his family by the RCMP. Mary, her mother, and her four siblings were sent to live in Hastings Park in Vancouver.](#) In Hastings Park, they lived in the livestock barn, a very unsanitary building which smelled of animal urine and feces and lacked proper washroom facilities.

Mary's family went to Greenwood, an internment camp in the interior of BC. While living there, they finally found out where their father had been all this time: he was working at a road camp in Yellowhead Pass. He was reunited with the rest of the family, and they all went to Magrath, Alberta to work on a sugar beet farm. However, the conditions on the farm were so terrible that they got permission to return to BC, where they lived in a series of different internment camps: Popoff, Bay Farm, Slocan, and finally Rosebery. Mary and her siblings were finally able to go to school in Rosebery in 1943, for the first time since Canada declared war on Japan in 1941.

After the war, Mary's family chose to stay in Canada, so the government relocated them yet again to the New Denver internment camp, where they lived for over a year. They had no money or savings left after paying the expenses of their internment, so they returned to Magrath to work again on sugar beet farms, and later opened a restaurant with extended family in Cardston, Alberta, where Mary finished high school.

In 1954, Mary's family had finally saved enough money to return to Salt Spring Island. But their farm had been confiscated by the government in 1942, and the new owners refused to sell it back to the Murakamis. They ended up starting over with a smaller farm. Mary helped her family clear the farm for a year before leaving to attend the University of Toronto. She graduated in 1959, and then went to the University of British Columbia to train as a teacher.

[Hoping to be close to her parents, Mary applied for a job teaching on Salt Spring Island upon graduating from UBC in 1960, but was refused due to racism.](#) She taught high school in Vancouver for three years, during which time she met and married Tosh Kitagawa.

Mary and Tosh moved to the suburbs and had two children, and Mary worked as a substitute teacher while the children were in school. [At the age of 48, she retired to go back to school herself, to study Japanese language and Asian Studies at UBC.](#) She and Tosh later became active in the local Japanese Canadian community, particularly the Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association and the Human Rights Committee, participating in fundraising and a variety of social justice initiatives.

From 2008-2011, Mary championed the cause of Japanese Canadians who had been expelled from UBC in 1942 during the forced dispersal from the coast. With the support of other Japanese Canadian and UBC community members, she lobbied the university to grant honorary degrees to these 76 students. The degrees were awarded in 2012, 70 years after the forced dispersal. The university also pledged to collect, archive, and digitize historical information about Japanese Canadians, and establish an Asian Canadian Studies program to educate students about this history.

MASUMI MITSUI

Pronunciation: Mah-soo-me Me-tsoo-ee

ANSWER KEY:

■ CALGARY, ALBERTA

1919: Is honourably discharged from the army at the end of the First World War with the rank of Sergeant and a Military Medal for bravery.

■ VICTORIA, BC

1931: As president of the Japanese Canadian Legion Branch #9, successfully lobbies the BC government to win the right to vote for all Japanese Canadian veterans of the First World War.

■ VANCOUVER, BC

1942: Is taken away from his poultry farm in Port Coquitlam and forced to live in Hastings Park. Throws his medals on the floor of the BC Security Commission office in rage and frustration.

CHECK IT OUT:

■ NIKKEI STORIES:

Go to <http://nikkeistories.com/> and watch the video “Masumi Mitsui”

FURTHER READING:

- Warrior Spirit: The Bravery and Honour of Japanese Canadian Soldiers in the First World War. Nikkei National Museum online exhibit. <http://www.warrior-spirit1916.ca/>



mi Mitsui collection. NNM 2014.0110

MASUMI MITSUI

Pronunciation:

Mah-soo-me Me-tsoo-ee

UNFOLD FOR ANSWER KEY

MASUMI MITSUI

Masumi Mitsui was born in Tokyo on October 7, 1887. The son of a naval officer, he tried to enter the Japanese navy, but failed the entrance exam. Feeling like he had failed Japan, he decided to immigrate to North America, arriving in Canada in 1908.

In 1916, Masumi joined some two hundred other Japanese Canadians to start training with the Canadian Japanese Volunteer Corps. At that time, Canada had been fighting in the First World War, as part of imperial Britain, for over a year; casualties were high, and there was no end in sight. Masumi and other Japanese Canadians decided to offer their service to their adopted country of Canada. But the army turned down their offer, saying there were not enough Japanese Canadians to form a full battalion. While this was true, the army was also under pressure from racist politicians in British Columbia, who did not want Japanese Canadians to serve in the army. The politicians knew that if Japanese Canadians served in the army, they would ask for the right to vote in elections, which Asian Canadians were not allowed at the time. However, after the Volunteer Corps disbanded, the community heard that army recruiters in Alberta needed more soldiers, and were less anti-Asian than those in British Columbia. One by one, the former members of the Volunteer Corps, including Masumi, travelled to Alberta and enlisted as individuals.

Masumi joined the famous Fighting Tenth battalion, which played a major role in Canada's famous victory in the Battle of Vimy Ridge in April of 1917. By the end of the war, he had been promoted to the rank of Sergeant, and had been awarded a Military Medal for bravery in the field.

After returning home from his service with the Fighting Tenth, Masumi Mitsui became president of the Japanese Branch #9 of the Canadian Legion, British Empire Service League (BESL). In this role, Masumi, along with legion secretary Corporal Sainosuke Kubota and CJA officer Saburo Shinobu, took up another fight: for the right to vote. At the time, racist laws prevented people of Japanese, Chinese, South Asian, and First Nations ancestry from voting in elections in BC even if they were Canadian citizens. Veterans felt that they deserved this citizenship right because they had fought for their country and had been willing to sacrifice their lives. In fact, many Japanese Canadians joined the army with the hope that their show of loyalty would convince BC politicians to give all Japanese Canadians the right to vote. After years of struggle, in 1931 the provincial government finally passed a bill allowing Japanese Canadian First World War veterans the right to vote. But this victory was bittersweet: although the veterans could now vote, the right was not extended to their families until the ban on Japanese Canadians voting was lifted in 1949.

Masumi was still president of the legion in December 1941, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in the United States and Canada followed its ally in declaring war on Japan. As representative of the Japanese Canadian veterans, Masumi sent telegrams to the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence that pledged the loyalty of Japanese Canadian veterans to Canada. He offered for them to serve their country in any way that was needed. Masumi and his fellow veterans went on to serve as interpreters and security guards in various work and internment camps for Japanese Canadians.

When Masumi learned that his Port Coquitlam poultry farm was to be seized and he, his wife, and his four children would be forcibly relocated one hundred miles inland from the coast, he threw his medals on the floor of the BC Security Commission office, asking what good they were. After the war, the Mitsui family settled in Hamilton, Ontario. The family tried several times to get back their farm in Port Coquitlam, but never succeeded.

In 1985, Masumi visited Vancouver to represent his comrades and re-light the Japanese Canadian War Memorial lantern in Stanley Park, which had been extinguished in 1942. He passed away in 1987, months shy of his 100th birthday, and the year before the government recognized the injustice that he had endured during the 1940s by signing the Redress settlement.



Oka Family collection, NNM 2001.28.2.14

KINORI SHINOHARA OKA

Pronunciation:

Kee-no-ree

She-no-hah-rah Oh-kah

KINORI SHINOHARA OKA

Pronunciation: Kee-no-ree She-no-hah-rah Oh-kah

ANSWER KEY:

■ ABBOTSFORD, BC

1929: Learns how to sew Western-style clothing while nursing her first child.

■ WOODFIBRE, BC

1942: Pregnant with her third child, tries to induce labour before she is forced to move to Hastings Park.

■ VANCOUVER, BC

1955: After elder daughter has moved to Toronto and son has gone to live at Woodlands School in New Westminster, returns to Vancouver with husband and younger daughter. Family turns to running a grocery store on Commercial Drive.

CHECK IT OUT:

■ NIKKEI STORIES:

Go to <http://nikkeistories.com/> and watch the video “Lives of Women”

FURTHER READING:

■ Stillwell, B. Masako. “Kinori Shinohara and Sanzo Oka: About Their Marriage”. Nikkei Images 21.2: Summer 2016. <http://centre.nikkeiplace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Volume-21-No.-2.pdf>

■ “Picture Brides”: Sounds Japanese Canadian to Me. Nikkei National Museum. Podcast. <http://centre.nikkeiplace.org/sjctm-podcast/episode-3/>

UNFOLD FOR ANSWER KEY

KINORI SHINOHARA OKA

Kinori Shinohara was born on February 22, 1904 in Fukuoka prefecture, Japan, the daughter of a samurai family. When she was 15 years old, she went to Formosa (now called Taiwan) for a year to live with her sister and brother-in-law and help care for their children. After returning to Japan, another sister living in Canada arranged for her to marry Sanzo Oka, a neighbour and family friend in Canada. Kinori and Sanzo got married under the picture bride system, a common method of courtship for Japanese immigrants at the time. Since Sanzo was in Canada and Kinori in Japan, they didn't meet in person, but sent each other photographs of themselves as well as letters to get to know each other. When they decided to get married, Kinori had a wedding ceremony in Japan, and they recorded that the marriage had taken place by adding her name to Sanzo's family registry.

After they got married, Kinori had to wait several years before meeting Sanzo. He was saving up money in order to pay for his boat ticket to Japan, and for both of their tickets to sail back to Canada together. He came for her in 1927, years after they got married.

Kinori went with him to the Oka family's farm in Abbotsford, where Sanzo's parents and siblings also lived. Kinori had to work very hard in Canada, first helping out on the farm, and later following Sanzo as he got different kinds of jobs around BC. She found work like cooking and cleaning wherever she could.

When Kinori became pregnant, she quit her job, even though money was tight, and stayed home to nurse her newborn daughter in 1929. Since she wasn't working outside the home, she used her spare time to learn how to make Western clothing. When her daughter was a bit older, Kinori left her with her grandmother and went back to work, but fell ill with tuberculosis and had to be hospitalized. In the hospital, she developed a liking for Japanese poetry which stayed with her throughout her life.

After she recovered from her illness, Kinori rejoined her husband and they had another daughter. She was pregnant with her third child when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, and rumours were flying around about Japanese Canadians being forced to leave their homes. Not knowing what was going to happen, Kinori worried she might have to give birth in a strange place or even while travelling. She tried to make the baby come faster by using her sewing machine treadle constantly. Her son, Peter Eiichiro, was born a few weeks before the family was confined in Hastings Park, where unsanitary conditions made the newborn and his mother fall ill.

Kinori and her family were moved from the temporary facilities at Hastings Park, which were overcrowded and designed for livestock, to the Lemon Creek internment camp. Kinori's oldest daughter Nancy later went to Toronto to work and continue her schooling, while the rest of the family moved to New Denver. Peter, who had an intellectual disability, was sent to Woodlands School in New Westminster, and the rest of the family later moved to Nelson. They finally returned to Vancouver in 1955, making it easier for them to visit Peter as well as reuniting them with some Japanese Canadian friends who had returned to Vancouver. Kinori and Sanzo ran a grocery store called Colonial Confectionary on Commercial Drive until Sanzo died in 1960.

After Sanzo's death, Kinori sold the store, and with the help of her children, enjoyed travelling in her retirement. When the Redress settlement was signed in 1988, Japanese Canadians were provided compensation for the unjust hardships they had faced during the 1940s. Kinori used her settlement money to travel to Japan with her daughter and son-in-law and visit her relatives. She passed away in 1991 at the age of 87.

AYAKO “IRENE” UCHIDA

Pronunciation: Ah-yah-koh Eye-ree-n Oo-chee-dah

ANSWER KEY:

- **LEMON CREEK, BC**
1944: Principal of the school in Lemon Creek internment camp. Lives in shack with father until he joins their family who are stuck in Japan.
- **TORONTO, ONTARIO**
1951: Earns PhD in zoology from the University of Toronto, hoping to help people through a career in genetic research.
- **MADISON, WISCONSIN, US**
1959: After a lengthy struggle with United States immigration, is allowed to live there for six months to study genetics as part of a prestigious fellowship.

CHECK IT OUT:

- **SCIENCE.CA PROFILE:**
www.science.ca/scientists/scientistprofile.php?plD=21
Go to the website www.science.ca and search for “Irene Uchida” to find a profile of Irene’s scientific achievements, including clips from an interview with her.

FURTHER READING:

- Plokhii, Olesia. “Obituary: Irene Uchida, world-renowned leader in genetics research”. The Globe and Mail. September 13, 2013.
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/irene-uchida-world-renowned-leader-in-genetics-research/article14324306/?page=all>
- Watada, Terry. Seeing the Invisible: The Story of Dr. Irene Uchida - Canadian Scientist. Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1998.



Photo courtesy Karen Yamazaki. NMM 2017.3.1.1.1

IRENE UCHIDA

Pronunciation:

Eye-ree-n Oo-chee-dah

UNFOLD FOR ANSWER KEY

AYAKO “IRENE” UCHIDA

Ayako “Irene” Uchida was born in Vancouver on Easter Sunday, April 8, 1917. She lived with her mother, father, three sisters, and brother near Hastings Park in East Vancouver. Her father, Sentaro Uchida, owned a Japanese bookstore in the Powell Street area. Irene learned to play the piano, organ, and violin, and was an active member of the United Church on Powell Street. After finishing high school, Irene enrolled at the University of British Columbia and studied English literature. She also began writing for a new community newspaper, *The New Canadian*, which was the voice of the younger generation of English-speaking Japanese Canadians.

In 1940, Irene took a break from university to visit her mother and youngest sister Junko who had recently gone to live in Japan. She travelled there with her other sister Kazuko. In 1941, Irene, her mother and sisters decided to return home to Canada. Irene was able to catch a boat leaving from Yokohama, but her mother and sisters missed it. As it happened, this was the last boat to leave Japan for North America before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and all passage to Canada was blocked. Irene’s mother and sisters were trapped in Japan for the rest of the war.

Back in Canada, Irene, her father, brother, and her brother’s wife and children moved to the self-supporting internment camp at Christina Lake. Living at the self-supporting camp meant that they could all stay together with a bit more freedom than in a government-run internment camp, but they had to pay for everything they needed with their savings. Irene and her father soon left Christina Lake for Lemon Creek internment camp, where Irene had been invited to become school principal.

Irene’s father joined her mother and sisters in Japan near the end of the war. He took an opportunity to go there as part of an exchange program that traded Japanese Canadians for prisoners of war being held by Japan. Irene was left alone in Lemon Creek continuing her duties as school principal. She enjoyed that the job allowed her to help people, and planned to become a social worker after the war.

After the war ended, Irene received a scholarship from the United Church to study at the University of Toronto. She moved to Toronto and finished her Bachelor of Arts degree there. She took one Science course in genetics during her degree, and her genetics professor encouraged her to continue her scientific studies. Irene decided that she could also help people by working in genetics, so she switched her graduate studies to sciences and earned her PhD in zoology in 1951. While studying for her PhD, she supported herself by working in a sewing factory. After she got her PhD and started working at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, she was able to bring her mother and sisters back from Japan to live with her. Unfortunately, her father had died in Japan.

In 1959, Irene was offered a prestigious fellowship in the United States, but the United States government would not let her into the country, because they said she was Japanese. Irene was born in Canada, so she was actually Canadian, not Japanese, but the United States still wouldn’t let her in. She was finally issued a work visa thanks to a personal request from the president of the university she was supposed to go to, but she was only able to stay for six months instead of the intended full year.

Irene returned to Canada in 1960 and worked in Winnipeg, Hamilton, and Toronto. She studied genetic mutations, and made a number of very important discoveries about birth defects in babies caused by genetic mutations, including a link between X rays and birth defects. This new knowledge has helped doctors understand and prevent genetic mutations such as Down syndrome. Her discoveries were so impressive that in 1993, she was awarded an Officer of the Order of Canada for her contributions to science. Irene passed away in Toronto in 2013.