



NIKKEI

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Roy Hamaguchi, a Gizmo Award Winner by John Hurst

A Canadian engineer of Japanese ancestry who experienced with his family the dislocating effects of the Second World War on Japanese Canadians, has been honored for his work in inventing assistive devices for people with disabilities. Roy Hamaguchi was one of five technically skilled volunteers living in Lower Mainland communities who received Gizmo Awards recently, from the Tetra Society of North America. The awards ceremony was held at the Hilton Vancouver Metrotown in Burnaby.

Tetra matches skilled technicians, designers and engineers with people with disabilities who face obstacles to independence in such areas as self-care, work and leisure. Hamaguchi, of West Vancouver, won the Hydrecs Award for Emergent Technology. He modified a laser pointer for a child with cerebral palsy that would meet strict school district safety requirements. "They wanted a light source strong enough to allow the child to point at various things on his desk or on the blackboard," Hamaguchi said in an interview with the *North Shore News*. "The problem is the school board bans laser pointers because they can damage the retina if shone directly in a child's eye."

A retired optical engineer, he commented, "Technically, it was not difficult. The difficulty came in trying to convince the (Surrey) school



Roy Hamaguchi poses with fellow retired engineer, Murray Henry, at the 2001 Gizmo Awards ceremony. Each man won an award for inventing devices to assist persons with disabilities. (Tetra Society photo, 2001)

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Nikkei Heritage Dinner
September 15, 2001

Dedication of Charcoal Pit Kiln
Galiano Island,
September 16, 2001

Annual General Meeting
October, 13, 2001

Wine/Sake Tasting
November 2, 2001

Nikkei Fishermen's Reunion
November 3, 2001

Mochitsuki
December 29, 2001
12:00 - 4:00 pm

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board that lasers can be made safe." Regular laser pointers have a beam diameter that almost matches the pupil size of the eye. If aimed at the eye, the laser directs all the energy into the retina, damaging it permanently. He increased the beam's diameter from two millimeters to 14 millimeters, spreading the energy over a larger area. A filter was added to the front of the beam to reduce its strength further. The beam is attached to the child's head with a velcro strap and shines up to a distance of nine meters. By enlarging the beam size and adding a light filter to the pointer, Hamaguchi was able to dilute the laser's strength enough to make it safe for use in the classroom. He said the school board is so pleased with the pointer, it is duplicating the device for other disabled students.

"The best part was to see the child's face when he tried it out. He can't verbalize and he can't use his arms very well, but he had this tremendously happy smile on his face," Hamaguchi said. "It's a simple thing too, but it makes a whole lot of difference for him because now he's able to communicate more."

His past projects for Tetra have ranged from non-slip bathtubs seats to wheelchair bumpers that allow kids to play power soccer.

Hamaguchi was born in Steveston as one of nine children in a Japanese-Canadian family. "I was always interested in doing things with my hands," he said, "and this was

combined with a liking for calculation." With many other Japanese Canadians, the Hamaguchi family was relocated during the Second World War to an internment camp. The spent one and a half years in a camp at Minto mine, near Bridge River, B.C., before moving to the nearby community of Greenwood, in British Columbia's west Kootenay region, near the U.S. border.

Hamaguchi graduated from high school in Greenwood, and from the University of British Columbia. While he was a student at UBC, he came to know Audrey, the woman who would become his wife. They would meet again later when they were working in Eastern Canada, Roy as an engineer and Audrey as a public health nurse.

The Hamaguchis have two children. A son is graduating from the Plastics Technology Program at British Columbia Institute of Technology, and a daughter who graduated from a college in the U.S. and lives in New York.

Nature and wildlife photography have always been Hamaguchi's hobby in his free time. Currently, he volunteers for the Tetra Society of North America and the Japanese Canadian National Museum. Hamaguchi is one of more than 50 active Tetra volunteers in Vancouver, most of whom are retired engineers, mechanics or scientists. The local chapter tackles about 100 challenges every year. Call Tetra at 604-688-6464 ●

The Biography of Sataro Kuwahara, Retail Merchant by Tom Kuwahara

On November 19, 1886, Sataro Kuwahara was born in Hikone City, Shiga Prefecture. Not much is known about his early childhood except he learned a little English in school and was very interested in the possible financial rewards available in Canada. He learned about

Christianity and became a Methodist.

When he was about 18 years of age, he told his father that he wanted to go to Canada and find work as an interpreter. As he was the eldest of seven children, his father (Tomejiro) was quite upset that his first son wanted to leave home.



Sataro Kuwahara. (Tom Kuwahara photo, date unknown)

However, since he was so determined, Tomejiro finally gave up trying to change his mind and wished him well in his new profession as an English-Japanese interpreter.

On board the ship that was coming to Canada, Sataro tested his English but when he spoke to the sailors working on board, he found to his dismay, that he could not understand what they were saying nor could they understand what he was saying.

Under these circumstances, when he landed in Canada he could only take menial jobs that came along until he could improve his understanding of the English language. In 1908 he found a steady job as an elevator-boy in the prestigious Hotel Vancouver, where he quickly became the head bell-man. In this position he also found employment for other Japanese to work in various cities such as Banff, Lake Louise, Winnipeg and Calgary. For about twelve years he worked for the CPR and in his spare time he studied English, built a couple of houses, and courted a Miss Setsuko Matsubayashi.

On April 25, 1912 he married Setsuko Matsubayashi in a Methodist Church in Victoria. On

March 29, 1914, Hiroshi was born. In the summer of 1914, Sataro's step-mother became ill and his wife and son had to go to Japan to look after his many brothers and sisters. During the First World War very few ships crossed the Pacific, so Sataro was separated from his family for four years. On October 24, 1914 Sataro became a naturalized Canadian. In his work, he spent some time at the Banff Springs Hotel and the Royal Alexandra Hotel in Winnipeg.

Seeing no future in working as a bell-hop, Sataro persuaded a Mr. Chiba to go into farming with him. On December 4, 1917 they bought fifteen acres of prime berry land in Mission, B.C. and cleared five acres. Mr. Chiba did not like farming so Sataro carried on by himself. On this farm, two of Sataro's sons, Tom and Mitsuo, were born. Since he understood English better than most of the other Mission Japanese, he assisted in many business meetings on their behalf and interpreted for them.

Ippei Nishio who operated an importing company for Japanese goods became a friend of Sataro's and persuaded him to travel in the Western Provinces selling his products. Farming is very seasonal and Sataro became a salesman in the off-season. It was during these travels that Sataro became convinced of a great future in trade between Japan and Canada. However, first he wanted to have a store of his own and looked at many possible locations. Finally, he found one across the street from where he usually stayed when in Calgary.

Forming a partnership with two of his friends, Genzo Kitagawa and Shigejiro Inouye, they formed a company they named "Nippon Bazaar" and sold products that Mr. Nishio sent them. Their original plan was to stay in business only for one month before Christmas but since the profits were so good they decided to

go into the retail business permanently and Sataro began to work full time at it. He did not have any problem selling his Mission farm to a Mr. Saito. In 1923, Sataro moved his family to Calgary and leased a home near the store. Here three more children were born: Ken, Grace and Dick.

At first Mr Nishio sent small items such as toys, novelties, and necklaces, but the public wanted other goods like silk, rayon and cotton fabrics. However, the quantities involved in these goods were enormous and to solve this problem they started a wholesale company which they called "Oriental Importing Co." Rayon brocades were sold in large quantities to funeral casket companies to line their coffins. Low priced cotton crepes were sold in a vast array of colours to many wholesalers. Silk yarns were shipped on special fast trains to Winnipeg where they were made into silk stockings. Nippon Bazaar was not involved in this silk yarn business, but they sold large quantities of silk stockings to consumers in Calgary.

In 1932 under the new name "Nippon Silks & Products Co Ltd.", the company moved into a 8250 square feet building across the street from Woolworth's and one-half block from the Bay store. They had 28 part-time and full-time employees working for them and were considered the leader in the sale of silk hosiery and yard goods in Calgary.

On March 3, 1935 they opened another store in Regina under the management of G. Kitagawa. Tokujiro Wakabayashi was hired to help him. A few years later, S. Inouye and his son Fred opened another branch in Edmonton. Eizo Bob Hori also joined the company. In 1939 when Canada's relations with Japan were deteriorating, Sataro and

company opened a store in Vancouver across the street from the Hotel Vancouver. Sampei Sugiura and Jiro Matsuoaka became the new partners in this company called "Nippon Silks BC Ltd."

When the Pearl Harbour Attack came, Sataro worried that he would lose everything he had worked for. He had had great dreams of building a large trading company, doing business between Canada and Japan. He had sent one of his sons, Mitsuo, to learn the language and be in a position to buy merchandise to ship to Canada. Japan also wanted this trade to increase and they had awarded him with a Medal of Merit from the Nippon Industrial Association on November 25, 1936.

On December 7, 1941 they had to eliminate all references to "Nippon" and the name of the company was changed to Silk O Lina Ltd., which emphasized the fact that they were in the silk business. Up to this time they only leased the stores as Japanese were not allowed to buy property. When this restriction was lifted on March 6, 1946 they bought the Regina store on July 18, 1946. On October 20, 1947 they bought the three-storey Calgary store.

Except for silk hose, they did very little in the silk fabrics business and started to sell more and more ladies ready-to-wear. Every few weeks they received truck loads of clothing from the largest sportswear

manufacturing company in Canada called *Tan Jay*, of Winnipeg. Ultimately they became the largest distributor for *Tan Jay* in Western Canada. A new company was set up to sell ready-to-wear called *Karen Tina* and many stores were started under this name.

Sataro felt that he was a very lucky man and wanted to help others. If he found out that there were any Japanese coming to Calgary, he would meet them at the train station and entertain them although they were strangers to him. He became President of the Japanese Social club which helped many Japanese that were being relocated due to the war. This group set up a Co-op to help local Japanese obtain food that became difficult to obtain. He was interested in golf and started the Alberta Japanese Golf Association and sponsored many annual tournaments.

The War was devastating for Sataro as it was for many people living at that time. His son, who happened to be in Japan when the war started, was conscripted and died in Saipan. He also learned his father had died and all his relatives in Japan were desperately poor. Sataro suffered a stroke in April 1950, and although the doctor said he would die within weeks, he lived three more years until July 11, 1953.

The company that Sataro had started and nurtured during the

early years continued to grow as a family business for many years after his death. In May 1958, a branch store was opened in Medicine Hat and in April 1971 another was opened in Lethbridge. At the peak of the company's growth it had 18 stores located in six cities in Western Canada. The company owned five buildings in prime retail locations, employed about 200 full time and part time workers and reached an annual sales plateau of almost \$5,000,000.

Sataro's accomplishments have been recognized by the residents of Calgary and a special display was recently opened at the Fort Calgary Museum.

Professor K. Suyenaga of Doshisha University, Curator of the Historical Museum of Ohmi Merchants has reported to the Kuwahara family in Canada that there is a display in Japan, in the prefecture of his birth, of Sataro Kuwahara's accomplishments. The Merchants of the feudal fiefdom of Ohmi have for hundreds of years been recognized as the most successful entrepreneurs in Japan. After the Emperor was restored in 1868, Ohmi became Shiga Prefecture, and Sataro was able to bring that Ohmi tradition to Canada's prairie provinces and he and his sons did very well despite the grave problems caused by the war between Canada and Japan. ●

Steveston Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre by Kelvin Higo

On September 22, 1988, the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement was signed and the Canadian government issued an apology for the past injustices against the Japanese Canadians. Shortly thereafter, capital construction grants were available to those regions and areas able to show support for a capital project and willing to contribute financially to it.

An ad hoc committee comprised of established community groups including the Steveston Community Society, the Japanese Language School, United Church, the Buddhist Church, and the Judo/Kendo/Karate clubs met to discuss the opportunity to build a lasting memorial to the Japanese Canadian Issei and Nisei who were impacted by the relocation of the Japanese

Canadians from the West Coast. It was also felt that a facility such as a cultural centre could be a place where this population could attend and spend their remaining years enjoying various activities and functions.

Through the generous donations from the Japanese Canadian Redress Committee (\$500,000), the B.C. Government



Steveston Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (Kelvin Higo photo, 2001)

GOBC Fund (\$259,000), community fundraising (\$100,000), the Steveston Community Society and the City of Richmond, the **Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre** was built in Steveston Park in 1992.

The philosophy of the Centre is to provide activities primarily for the Issei and Nisei members of our community and secondly to the following Nikkei generations as a place to promote and keep alive the cultural and heritage legacy of our community. Though the Japanese Canadian community has first opportunity at any space that is available in the facility, there are no restrictions as to who else may use the centre. It was felt that we as Japanese Canadians should be the last to discriminate against other ethnic groups because of the injustices to our community.

Currently a wide variety of groups use the facility including the Japanese Language School that operates five days a week in the Centre. Language is often thought to be a unifier to our cultural past and as such an important skill to maintain. The Wakayama Kenjin Kai also meets regularly at the facility and it is interesting to note that over 300 persons attended this group's last social activity. Many of the Steveston area residents can call Wakayama Prefecture their ancestral home, which accounts for this group's strong membership. This group also has a regular bonsai club which meets once a week in the centre to share techniques and ideas about this ancient art form.

The Centre is also home to the Steveston Kokufu Shigin Group where shigin is still practised today. Mr. Toshio Murao, co-sponsor of this group, recently travelled to Japan to attend a shigin contest. This is the second tournament he has attended in recent years and he reports that he thoroughly enjoyed the various activities and the opportunity to sing at this prestigious event.

There is also a very active Japanese Craft group of between 15-35 members working diligently under the tutelage of several instructors who provide guidance on constructing paper cranes from cigarette boxes to making Japanese dolls out of fish can labels. Members also sell their crafts at the July 1st Salmon Festival held annually in Steveston Park and donate the proceeds to the Centre.

Karaoke is also a very popular activity and at any given time there are several groups operating out of the senior's lounge where the karaoke machines are located. These groups tend to be smaller in size so that everyone has an opportunity to take their turn at singing.

The Steveston gateball group is also indirectly affiliated with the Centre and can take advantage of any of the City of Richmond's leisure activities. Any affiliated group of the Centre can book transportation for a nominal fee, which assists these groups in travelling to other venues to partake in activities or outings.

The Tatsumi Japanese Dance Society uses the Centre for its practices. The Society recently celebrated its 30th Anniversary by hosting a sold out performance at the Gateway Theatre. Chiyoko Hirano as the head instructor plays an integral part in the promotion of the cultural heritage of the Japanese Canadians by continuing to teach Japanese dances to a new generation of children. She also chairs the Japanese Canadians activities during the Salmon Festival on July 1st in Steveston. She organizes a variety of activities and demonstrations in the Martial Arts Centre as well as the Cultural Centre.

The Chinese Seniors Circle meets once weekly and the Richmond Golden Rods and Reels Society convenes twice weekly in the Centre.

Overall, the Centre is being well utilized but it is hoped that we can look to hosting more cultural activities in the future to keep some of the Nikkei traditions alive and meaningful for new generations. ●

Fraser Valley Buddhist Church' 45th Anniversary Service

by Stan Fukawa

On May 13, 2001, in a structure reminiscent of pre-war Japanese Canadian communities, a small crowd of mainly Nikkei gathered to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the building of the temple in 1955 by thirteen dedicated families who returned to the Coast after the internment years. Located on Haverman Road in

Bradner in the heart of the daffodil growing country, it was built on land donated to the Buddhist congregation by Mr. Kazuo Imamura.

Master of ceremonies was Joe Tateyama, president of the Fraser Valley Bukkyokai. Rev. Orai

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Fujisawa conducted the service with a special sermon by Bishop Kyojo Ikuta, head of the Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Churches of Canada. Bishop Ikuta's father Shinjo was the priest who officiated at the ceremony opening the FVBC 46 years previously. Representatives from the Canada, B.C., Vancouver and Steveston Jodo Shin organizations also participated.

At the end of the service, Stan Fukawa spoke on behalf of a committee including Nobby Ishikawa, Naomi

Shikaze, Joe Tateyama, and Yosh Kariatsumari. He urged the people to participate in a project to collect the life stories of all Japanese Canadians who lived or who still live in the Aldergrove-Matsqui-Abbotsford area for a year or more.

The afternoon concluded with the traditional Japanese Canadian buffet – *sushi*, *sashimi*, *teriyaki* salmon, BBQ mackerel, chow mein, *manju* and other goodies. *

Bamfield, Vancouver Island by Midge Ayukawa



Margaret Wright. (Midge Ayukawa photo, 2001)

How many of us who casually take snapshots ever think of the import of what may now have been recorded for posterity? In early December 1941, eleven-year-old Margaret Wishart (now Wright) joined the many others in Bamfield who were taking photos of the Japanese Canadian fishing boats that were anchored in the harbour. Immediately after the December 7, 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese military, the boats, from the west coast of Vancouver Island – Tofino, Ucluelet—had been rounded up by the Canadian Navy. Rough weather had forced the boats to take shelter at Bamfield for two days before they were able to resume their journey to the Fraser River.

In January 2001, Margaret discussed the photos with me. Everyone had rushed out with their cameras but the films, she later heard, had been confiscated by the authorities. Hers however had survived because none had paid attention to a child rowing around the fleet on an errand to pick up the family's daily supply of goats' milk.

The films were mailed out for developing and then carefully placed in a photo album. Now she has donated this invaluable record to the JCNM. Margaret drew a rough sketch of where the boats had been anchored and referring to some of the photos, she pointed out her home, and where some of her Japanese neighbours had lived. She also had photos of the Canadian Navy officer, and the ship that had escorted the boats. (See map and photos) After briefly scanning the shelves and shelves of books in her living room, she zeroed in on one particular book and then identified the navy ship as likely to be the **HMCS GIVENCHY**, a Battle Class Trawler.

This fortuitous connection has not only provided us with priceless photos, but also given us an opportunity to gather information on some of the Japanese Canadian fishers who lived in one small community on the west coast of Vancouver Island, Bamfield. The story Margaret wove of her childhood and the area she lived in appeared to be almost idyllic. The Japanese Canadian families were accepted by the general populace and did not all live in a separate area. There were occasional rumours and misunderstandings, however. For example, when her neighbour, the Uyede family, had the two *kanji* characters for Uyede painted on the roof of their house, some people wondered later if it was a message for possible Japanese invaders.

Margaret described her childhood when she rowed herself daily across Bamfield Harbour to attend the one-room school. She named older Nisei boys who were also at that school. The Uyede family lived two houses away from her home, and the Suzuki's were also nearby. Other Japanese families lived on the shore of Grappler Creek. She recalled that the Uyedes had two little girls who were Margaret's younger sister's age. Margaret said she occasionally visited the Uyede home to play with the girls and enjoyed the Japanese rice cracker treats Mrs. Uyede often gave her. The mother of Margaret's friend, Ebba Ostrom, used to visit back and forth with Mrs. Uyede.

A few years after the Japanese were expelled from the area, Margaret moved away from Bamfield to continue her education in Esquimalt, where she lived with her maternal grandmother. She recalled that the transition from a one-room school to a large urban high school had been traumatic and she was as quiet as a mouse. But one day when she was in grade nine she spoke up. What had aroused her was a fellow student's comment that people were vandalizing the Takata Tea Garden. (Note: The Takata Tea Garden had for decades been a popular site on the Gorge Inlet where families picnicked, enjoyed the English-style tea served in a Japanese tea house surrounded by a beautiful Japanese garden. The father and



Map of Bamfield showing area where the Japanese troller fleet anchored prior to steaming for the Fraser River. (Drawn by Tim de Lange Boom, Omega Design, Victoria)

uncle of Toyo Takata, a national advisor and former board member of the JCNM were the proprietors.) He said that the expulsion of the Japanese Canadians from the west coast had been necessary, a wartime precaution. Margaret protested vehemently, and the ensuing free-for-all was interrupted by the teacher who suggested a debate. Margaret argued that the Japanese were not spies and the government actions had been unwarranted. Many others claimed otherwise. When the debate was over, the class took a vote and decided that Margaret had been the victor. She had been the most persuasive she said because she KNEW the Japanese Canadians and KNEW they were not dangerous, while the others had just “bought” the propaganda. She is over-modest however, because she must have had an extraordinary ability for public speaking since she later became a radio broadcaster, and also conducted weekly interviews on a daytime television program in Victoria, “Maturity of the Golden Years.”

Margaret not only donated the original snapshots that she had taken in December 1941, but also some fine bone china that had belonged to her maternal grandmother, Margaret Trowsdale (Mrs. W. H. P. Trowsdale), who was the daughter of A. C. Muir, the

first engineer at the Esquimalt dockyard. Margaret’s grandmother had married William Trowsdale, the Foreman of Works of the Marine Department in 1900. When the British ship, **HMS Hood**, had returned from a trip to Japan (likely 1910), a sailor had presented a complete tea set to Margaret’s grandmother and a delicate coffee mug to the young daughter, Ethel (Margaret Wright’s mother). Ten place settings of the tea set were donated a while ago to the Royal British Columbia Museum but Margaret had retained a few pieces, presumably for sentimental reasons, since the set had been passed down from grandmother to mother and then to Margaret. Margaret also donated several books from the extensive collection she had gathered when she had managed the bookstore at Woodward’s in the Mayfair Mall, Victoria.

The JCNM will especially treasure the items not only for their historical value but also because of the donor, Margaret Wright, who had been a remarkable young girl who dared to speak up because she had a positive memory of a small group of Japanese Canadian fisher families in remote Bamfield. We thank Margaret Wright—a very special person.

I checked a 1940 Tairiku publication, *Zai Kanada hojinjinmeiroku* [Record of Japanese in Canada]. The following were listed as living in Bamfield: Uyede Ichizo, Suzuki Shoichi, Hiraoka Heijiro, Hiraoka Masao, Kawaguchi Yoshigoro, Kondo Bunnosuke, Takeuchi Fujitaka, Kakiuchi Iwakichi, Kakiuchi Iwaichi. (Some names may have different *kanji* readings).

Some of the Japanese Canadians stayed in touch



Japanese trollers in Bamfield harbour before steaming for the Fraser River. (JCNM photo, 1941)

with their Bamfield friends. Margaret contacted some of her friends and heard that the two Uyede girls became teachers in Vancouver,

and that the Hiraoka family had moved to Golden where Kiyoshi passed away but Masao may still be there. Two men returned to the area

to fish, Fred Shoichi Suzuki to Uclulet and Ichiro Henry Uyede to Bamfield. ☀

The First Powell Street Festival by Tamio Wakayama

Since I was never directly involved in its organization, I can't provide you with a detailed structural account of the first Powell Street Festival. I can, however, share with you my remembrances of an extraordinary moment in our communal life when so many divergent streams came together to spawn the remarkable celebration called the Powell Street Festival.

Although I was born in the Fraser Valley, I didn't return to the West Coast until 1972 when I stopped over in Vancouver after a year spent in Japan, which was the final leg of my journey through the political and social movements of the tumultuous 60s. The ancestral land had been immensely rewarding but in the end the stifling heat and humidity of summer in Tokyo made me long for the open spaces of home. In Vancouver I happened to meet up with an old friend who whisked me off to the wilds of Thurlow Island, located some 100 plus miles north of Campbell River, and the pristine beauty of this wilderness island became a magnet that drew me back each summer.

Eventually I relocated my Toronto studio in an old home in Vancouver's Strathcona area and began to delve into commercial photography, which, from the lofty heights of my artist and political purity, I had always disdained. However, in the spring a letter from my mother managed to arrest my nearly complete transformation into a slick, city photographer. After hours of fruitless labor wrestling with my mother's indecipherable calligraphy, my roommate suggested I walk up the street to Hastings Street and seek help

at **Language Aid**, run by several beautiful recent immigrants from Japan. I walked into the unassuming store front office near Main Street and was greeted by the lovely and gracious Michiko who quickly translated my letter. During our long conversation, I happened to mention that I was looking for a teacher of the *shakuhachi*, which I had begun to study in Japan and she suggested I walk up the street to **Tonari Gumi** to meet Take-chan. Michiko was and still is a most warm and generous host, and I couldn't have asked for a better introduction to the community that was about to engulf my life.

On entering **Tonari Gumi** I was immediately assaulted by an amplified voice blaring out the bilingual numbers of Bingo. Seated at badly scarred tables scattered around the large room were about 20 seniors who reminded me so much of my own parents and while they stared intently at their cards, a bevy of young attractive women scurried around refilling tea cups and plates of cookies and *sembe*. I somehow managed to locate Take in the midst of this madness and was immediately put at ease by his megawatt smile. We sat and talked for a long time and I was delighted when he suggested I come once a week to his home to play the *shakuhachi*. I spent the rest of the afternoon meeting others in this dynamic group of young Nisei, Sansei and new immigrants who were forging a lively renaissance of their community. On the short walk home I remember thinking how much I had felt at home in this rather bizarre place that, in some curious way, seemed so absolutely right.

Since I was in between

assignments, I spent a lot more afternoons and evenings participating in the rich social life of **Tonari Gumi**. My usual routine was to go for my late morning coffee break to the Lenity Cafe on Hastings and then hang out at **Language Aid** and **Tonari Gumi**. One morning Michiko walked into the Lenity and demanded we talk. She was brimming with excitement - we had to mount a photo exhibit on Japanese Canadian history! As a Japanese immigrant, she had had no knowledge of Nikkei history until she began to hear the dramatic biographies of her Issei clients - the hardships of the early pioneering years, the vitality of Little Tokyo, the trauma of the uprooting, the courageous rebuilding of shattered lives in the post war period. It was a powerful and important story that was so little known. It had to be told and would I, as a photographer, be willing to help. I dampened her enthusiasm by responding that I had absolutely no interest in the topic and besides, I was having too much fun playing hotshot photographer. She said I should get back to being a real person and a real artist and although I didn't say anything, I thought it was awfully presumptuous of her to tell me how to run my life. Despite my negativity, I did agree to attend a meeting to discuss her idea.

We met at my house and the dozen or so people who came were pretty evenly divided into Sansei, Nisei and recent immigrants. It was the first time I met Gordon Kadota who was to play a critical role not only in the photo project (he rescued our floundering attempts to publish the exhibit in its book form) but also in the birth of the Powell Street

Festival. I suspect the Canadian born shared my unease at the novel prospect of working with our ethnic peers for the denial of our racial heritage in the desolate post-war years had led inevitably to a rejection of our community. However, we were all carried away by Michiko's infectious enthusiasm and in the end, committed ourselves to the project. We even anted up \$100 each to get the ball rolling.

We organized ourselves under the unwieldy title of the Japanese Canadian Centennial Project and got down to work. After successfully registering the JCCP as a non-profit society we applied for several grants and once we had sufficient funds we rented the third floor of a bakery on Powell Street for our project studio. We divided up the necessary tasks and since I was the only photographer, I was designated as project director and curator of the exhibit. Thanks to the trust built up by **Tonari Gumi** and **Language Aid** we received the full cooperation of the Issei and once we had our first small collection of historic photos, I mounted a mini exhibit at **Tonari Gumi**. The seniors had a great time, especially the women who would giggle at the photo of Mr. so and so who used to be such a lady's man. Michiko explained the project and asked for further donations of material which, from that point on, arrived in a steady stream.

We met frequently to review new material. I remember Randy Enomoto whom we used to call our Buddha because of his gentle and calm demeanor, red faced and spluttering with anger as he related the latest example of our wartime betrayal by racist politicians. It was an exhilarating time of awakening through the discovery of an often-painful history that had affected our lives so profoundly. Ironically, even though I had been fully involved in

the upheavals of the 60s, I had never used my growing consciousness to question my own life growing up as an Enemy Alien. But now, in this dusty studio on Powell Street, it was all coming together. We were finally reclaiming our past and together we began to shed the wartime legacy of ignorance and subconscious shame.

We mounted the first version of our exhibit at the Centennial Museum in June of 1976 with a gala opening. Kuniko, an architect from Japan, had designed these beautiful cedar walls for additional hanging space and the show looked great. The exhibit itself was well received and our granting sources were eager to continue their support, which was fortunate for the ad hoc committee coordinating the Japanese Canadian Centennial, was about to invite us to become one of their two national projects. We agreed to expand the exhibit to include the post war period of resettlement in all parts of Canada and immediately went to work on the second phase of our project that was to eventually produce *A Dream of Riches: The Japanese Canadians 1877-1977* which has been seen in nearly 40 venues in Canada, the U.S. and Japan.

It was around that time that the idea of the festival first arose. I'm not sure but I think it was Take who first came up with the concept but the idea spread like wildfire. To all of us in the new coalition on Powell Street, it made perfect sense: what better way to celebrate our centennial than to come together for a grand party which would symbolize all that we were feeling in those heady days of renewal and affirmation. But more than celebration, the festival would be a firm, political statement that we, the Nikkei, had survived a century of racial oppression and that we were still very much alive and kicking. Our choice of Oppenheimer Park, the vital center of the prewar community

of Little Tokyo, was also significant for it gave us a strong sense of recapturing conquered territory.

In our minds the festival concept had a certain noble grandeur but, in so many ways, it was doomed to failure and to this day I'm amazed that it ever came to be. The main thrust of the festival was to cut through all generational, religious and organizational lines to be a true celebration of the entire community. Surely it would work for, after all, weren't we the living embodiment of the Nikkei ideal of four generations working in perfect harmony? Unfortunately, when we went to apply this worthy vision to the real world we ran head first into a polarization that we had helped to create.

On one side of the communal fence, were the new kids on the block represented organizationally by **Tonari Gumi**, **Language Aid** and the **JCCP** (the membership was interchangeable). We had come through the upheavals of the 60s imbued with the sense that we were at the forefront of a new and enlightened millennium. We were the chosen ones and in order to establish the new order we first had to bull our way through the reactionary old establishment which, on Powell Street was presented by the **JCCA**, the **Buddhist Church** and just about everybody else. Of course, we regarded the old leadership as overly cautious and impossibly unimaginative - definitely not cool. We were about to pay heavily for our insufferable arrogance. And for their part, the old Nikkei order was alarmed by the invasion of these brash young upstarts into their traditional stomping grounds. Who are these people? Probably radical hippies or out and out communists and besides they have no manners.

This schism had been

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developing for a number of years. When **Tonari Gumi** and **Language Aid** first began operating in the area, they were greeted with skepticism by the older Nisei who were unwilling to admit the Issei, who were, after all, their own parents, needed help and even if there were problems, it was strictly an internal family matter and not something for complete strangers to meddle in. Take recalls that before opening **Tonari Gumi**, he and Jun wanted to get a feel of what life was like for the regular denizens of skid row so they joined the long lineup for the free lunch organized daily by the Franciscan Sisters on Dunlevy Street. Unfortunately they were seen and when word got back to the community many were appalled that these two unknown beggars had brought such shame upon the good name of Japanese Canadians. There were other incidents but as long as the various organizations could function within their own spheres they could maintain an uneasy peace. Organizing an all-inclusive festival, however, was a completely different matter.

Recognizing the contributions made by both the old and new Nikkei organization to the impoverished downtown eastside, city council approved the grant application. In addition, the festival concept fit perfectly with a city plan to restore Oppenheimer Park which had deteriorated into a physical and sociological swamp. The Centennial Arts Workshop, which had been formed to administer the grant, hired Rick Shiomi, a young Sansei from Toronto, as festival coordinator. One of the **Tonari Gumi** staff, Mayu Takasaki, a Steveston Sansei who had just returned from a self-confessed two-year stint in Japan to find her identity, agreed to be the volunteer coordinator. Rick was living in a dilapidated house on Cordova Street and up to then, had only been

peripherally involved in the community through his volunteer work with a support group of the victims of Minamata disease. Poor guy didn't know what he was getting into and it wasn't long before he was floundering in a sea of opposition. I remember after one particularly contentious meeting at the Language School, Rick, Take and I were involved in a heated exchange with the head of one of the martial arts schools. The sensei who was one of those macho, ultra nationalistic types in the Mishima mold, punctuated his vicious harangue by accusing Rick, who spoke no Japanese, of being an 'Indian', which I guess, meant someone who has forsaken his cultural heritage. At that point I jumped in and said if he was an example of Japanese manhood I would much rather be an 'Indian' or just about anything else. Take who was desperately trying to interpret all this polyglot gibberish, managed to restore enough calm so we could leave before coming to blows but on the way home we were all terrified that our lovely festival was about to implode.

At the eleventh hour Rick went to see Gordon Kadota at his downtown office and what followed was an epiphany for our beleaguered coordinator. In near tears, he explained his frustrations in rallying community support and after calming his distraught guest with reassurances that he would see what he could do, Gordon picked up the phone to call one of his Nisei cronies. For the next ten minutes the conversation meandered around the health and sanity of mutual friends, the state of their golf games, the disastrous Canuck's season, the weather, their respective businesses and then finally, Gordon segued smoothly into the festival - how it was such a great idea for the Centennial, how these kids from **Tonari Gumi** weren't all

that bad and since they were so hard working and so obviously sincere, maybe we should pitch in and give them a hand. When the call finally ended Rick, for the first time, realized that the Nisei had a special way of relating involving almost a totally different language and without these vital keys, his mandate to gain the support of the older generation was hopeless. However, all was not lost for Gordon continued to work the phones and the walls of resistance slowly began to crumble. The rest, as they say, is history.

The festival did indeed happen on a brilliant summer's weekend filled with plenty of hot sun and even warmer spirits. In the days preceding the event, I remember walking by Oppenheimer Park on my way to the project studio and watching the magic transformation as the green space began to fill with the huge main stage with its brightly colored Centennial banner and all those back braking 2x4 booths, and when I saw the city workers in their cherry pickers stringing festival banners from Powell Street lamp posts, I had a sense that we, the Nikkei, had finally arrived. From the blur of activity of the festival weekend, two memories vividly remain - the unbridled joy of the Issei and the visceral beat of *Taiko* which gave us our first brief glimpse of the powerful role this ancient form would play in the growth of our community. In the end we were exhausted but immensely pleased for the complex festival had run like a fairly well tuned machine and more importantly, we had achieved our principle objective of a strengthened united community that had come together to celebrate and reaffirm a worthy heritage.

I leave the final word to two leading players in the festival drama that was to eventually include a cast of thousands. The event could have

died stillborn in its first year but there was so much more that could be mined from the rich mother lode. Mayu and Rick volunteered to coordinator the festival in the following years until our fledgling creation was strong enough to survive and grow into the giant that it is today. But more importantly, they firmly rooted two essential principles that determined the festival's vigor and validity: that it shall be inclusive of all elements of our community and that it shall be an authentic expression of our contemporary life and culture whether it be a traditional *odori* or the insane antics of Koko and Garbanzo or the intriguing installation art of Bart Uchida or *tako yaki* and *teriyaki* salmon in the food booths but no hamburgers and hot dogs. I have asked these two to share with us their most memorable

moment of the first festival. I thank them for their words and their many contributions to the Powell Street Festival that has given all of us so many joyful moments and so many reasons to take pride in being Japanese Canadians.

Being volunteer coordinator for the first festival was far from easy. Since I was responsible for finding and organizing over 100 volunteers, I called every friend and relative I had, some of whom I hadn't spoken to in many, many years. And then once the festival actually began I remember feeling exhausted and exhilarated all the time. Everything that we did was for the first time and mistakes were made. I can remember very clearly sitting in Rick's living room across the street from the park

*on Saturday evening, counting tickets and money. We looked out at the park and suddenly the stage lights went out and all was black. Of course, we were frantic because that evening a famous *odori* sensei from Japan was performing and now she was standing alone on a very dark stage. That was the one and only time we have ever attempted an evening show at the festival.Mayu Takasaki.*

*My strongest memory of the first Powell Street Festival is of the people I got to work with, from Takeo Yamashiro and Noriko Hirota to Gordon Kadota and so many of the *sansei* like Mayu Takasaki and Ken Shikaze. My encounters with them transformed my world and gave me a mother lode of characters, emotions and perspectives that fed my own creativity.Rick Shiomi ●*

Mary Hirano: Cultural Events Coordinator for the Steveston Salmon Festival by Mitsuo Yesaki



Mary Hirano (Mary Hirano photo, 2000)

The Japanese Cultural Show has become a prominent attraction of the annual Steveston Salmon Festival, due primarily to Mary Hirano. Mary spends countless hours the weeks before Canada Day coordinating the many exhibits and demonstrations for the festival. A special attraction of this year's

Japanese Cultural Show was a demonstration of kimonos by Tsugie Takabayashi, one of Japan's leading teachers in traditional clothes. Besides this attraction, there were twelve craft exhibits, with demonstrations of *origami*, *nihon ningyo*, *kami ningyo*, senior's crafts and bread dough creations accompanying these exhibits. There were also demonstrations of *obon* dancing, *taisho koto* playing and *judo*, *kendo*, *karate* and *iaido* techniques. These exhibits and demonstrations were held in the Martial Arts and Japanese Canadian Cultural Centres.

Mary Hirano has been teaching traditional Japanese dance in Steveston for the past 30 years. She was asked about 11 years ago to assist in coordinating the Cultural Show for the Salmon Festival. At that time, the entire Cultural Show, except the martial arts demonstrations, was confined to the Kendo Hall. Since her

involvement, Mary has been instrumental in expanding the Japanese Cultural Show by inviting other cultural and crafts clubs to participate. As the number of participating clubs increased, the hall became too small, but more space became available with the completion of the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in 1992. The martial arts demonstrations of *judo*, *kendo* and *karate* are now given in the Judo Hall and the *ikebana*, *bonsai*, *pottery*, *calligraphy* and *boat models* are exhibited in the Kendo Hall. The *origami*, *nihon ningyo*, *kami ningyo*, bread dough flowers and the seniors' handicrafts are now displayed in separate rooms in the Cultural Centre. The Japanese Cultural Show adds a distinct ethnic flavour to the Steveston Salmon Festival, underscoring the long history of the Japanese in this fishing village.

The crafts and martial arts

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club members volunteer their services for the Japanese Cultural Show. Mary has arranged for the Steveston Community Centre Society to give participating clubs a small honorarium in lieu of expenses incurred to present the exhibits. Also, the Society presents **Friends of Steveston** certificates to all clubs and annual stickers for every year of participation. A few of the craft clubs sell their wares during the festival with any profits reverting to the

Steveston Community Centre Society. These mementos of appreciation and the popularity of the Japanese Cultural Show have spurred greater numbers of participating clubs and volunteers. Fifteen clubs and three individual craftspersons participated in the 2001 show with well over 200 volunteers.

Mary volunteers her time each year in organizing the Japanese Cultural Show for two reasons. First, she is extremely proud of her

Japanese heritage and the Festival is a popular venue where she can share her enthusiasm with the general public. Second, coordinating the show gives Mary an opportunity to meet the many talented people practising their esoteric arts and crafts in Steveston. She finds satisfaction in drawing out reticent artists to show their handicrafts and to watch them improve with public appreciation of their talents. ●

Does Anyone Know?

Japanese Language and Community Centre in Chemainus, BC.

A letter was received this October from Emily Holmes of Chemainus, BC. She presently lives with her family in the former Japanese Language and Community Centre, the only building left of the once thriving Japanese community. The original building was remodeled into a residence by previous occupants. Mrs. Holmes appreciates the historical significance of the building, but as no one is interested in preserving it as an heritage site, the Holmes plan to renovate it to more comfortably accommodate their family. She has included photographs as well as line drawings of the west, east and south views of the house with her letter.

We would appreciate



A recent photograph of the Japanese Canadian Language School and Community Centre in Chemainus. (Emily Holmes photo, 2000)

receiving any information and photographs of this Japanese

Language and Community Centre. ●

Special thanks to our supporters. Your generosity is much appreciated. We gratefully acknowledge the following donations received during the period May 10 to July 20, 2001.

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