2017: 75th Anniversary of the Japanese Canadian Internment

Children running along the dirt road at the Bay Farm internment site, about a mile south from Slocan City.
Bay Farm, circa 1942. NNM 1996.178.1.9

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Our Journey: Revisiting Tashme and New Denver After 70 Years
by Micki Nakashima

As part of our 2017 commemorations of the 75th anniversary of Japanese Canadian internment, Nikkei Images will be printing Micki Nakashima’s story of her 2015 visit to former internment camps, along with her childhood recollections, in instalments. Part 1 is printed below. Look for Part 2 in our next issue, Vol. 22, No. 2

Invariably whenever Japanese Canadians first meet, the question, “where were you during the war?” is asked. After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and Canada declared war against Japan, all people of Japanese descent in Canada were rounded up and sent to various internment camps in the interior of BC, their possessions and assets confiscated and auctioned off. Our family was interned in Tashme (1942-1945) and in New Denver (1945-1952).

Although I had spent the early 10 years of my life in internment camps, it was not until recently, in the summer of 2015, that I felt a desire to make the trek back to New Denver. The trip started out, not as an internment re-experience, a pilgrimage as my daughter called it, but as a simple trip to revisit New Denver, my childhood home, which just happened to be an internment camp. I merely wanted to see and photograph my mother’s name inscribed on a plaque in the Nihonkai Internment Memorial Centre in New Denver.

As we made plans for this trip, I felt an overwhelming desire to see Tashme, our first internment camp. I knew what remained there would have no resemblance to what I remembered as a child – there’s nothing there I would come back in the afternoon when I would have the swing to myself. After lunch I went to the school and was swinging happily, when suddenly the door flew open and several big boys ran out to claim the swing and chased me away. I had not realized there was a class in the afternoon for the five year olds.

A pot-bellied stove was our source of heat. I used to stand near it to warm my hands and feet. I fell against the stove one day and had second degree burns on my left arm from wrist to elbow. Dr. Shimokura, the camp doctor, dressed my burn. My uncle came over almost daily to help mother deal with me and comfort me. I must have been impossible for my mother. I have a six inch scar to remind me of that fateful day. Coincidentally, many years later Dr. Shimokura became my sister Jane’s father-in-law.

In the evenings, I would on occasions hear a man outside singing very loudly. I always stood near it to warm my hands and feet. I fell against the stove one day and had second degree burns on my left arm from wrist to elbow. Dr. Shimokura, the camp doctor, dressed my burn. My uncle came over almost daily to help mother deal with me and comfort me. I must have been impossible for my mother. I have a six inch scar to remind me of that fateful day. Coincidentally, many years later Dr. Shimokura became my sister Jane’s father-in-law.

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The war was over, yet the BC Security Commission continued to dictate where we could make our homes. As early as 1944 the federal government had already planned to remove all people of Japanese descent from British Columbia.

"It is the government's plan to get these people out of BC as fast as possible. It is my personal intention, as long as I remain in public life, to see they never come back here. Let our slogan be for British Columbia: 'No Japs from the Rockies to the seas.'" - Ian Mackenzie, MP

We were given two options: to move east of the Rocky Mountains or be "repatriated" to Japan. Around 4,000 Japanese Canadians chose the latter. My uncle was one of them as he was anxious to return home to his family.

Those who opted to go to Japan were brought to Tashme from other camps to be held here while awaiting a freighter to take them to Japan. Internees living in Tashme who were remaining in Canada were relocated to other internment camps further in the interior to make room for the deportees. Our family was part of this shuffle.

Drive to Nelson

In the summer of 2015, the drive to Nelson from our home in Richmond took about nine hours. That summer, over 100 forest fires were ablaze in the interior of BC. The area around Rock Creek was devastated by fire. Evidence of the forest fires was everywhere – blackened trees, some fallen and some still standing as well as huge areas of blackened ground. It was distressing to see. Around Christina Lake the smell of smoke was very strong and the haze was so thick we could not see across the lake.

Even in Nelson the smell of smoke and a haze greeted us. A fine dinner at a nice restaurant where we sat outside was followed by a stroll to the beach where I showed Sam how to skip stones on the lake. Skipping stones was a favourite pastime for children living in New Denver and I was quite good at it.

The Route

Starting in Nelson we planned to drive the loop around Valhalla Provincial Park with stops at Kaslo, Sandon, New Denver, and Greenwood with quick drives through Silverton and Slocan. A quick stop atown of Kaslo. The Kaslo Hotel and the Langham Hotel, were reconditioned for the internees.

The Canadian government had shut down all Japanese language newspapers. The English language newspaper The New Canadian added a Japanese section to serve the community, and during internment was printed here in Kaslo.

Kaslo was also one of the first camps to open a school for the interned children. The federal government funded education for the children in camp when the provincial government refused. So it seemed fitting that we came to get in touch with my brother's childhood memories.

Kaslo, originating as a sawmill site, became a thriving centre with the discovery of silver in this area. After the silver rush the town declined into a ghost town.

At the Kaslo Japanese Canadian Museum which is located in the Langham Cultural Centre, we learned that the first group of internees arrived by steam ship, the SS Nasookin. Almost 1,000 Japanese Canadians were ultimately interned here. Old abandoned buildings, such as the Kaslo Hotel and the Langham Hotel, were reconditioned for the internees.

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Nikkei Images

Editors’ note: This story will be continued in the next issue of Nikkei Images, Vol. 22, No. 2.
mensch.
by Erica Isomura

I used to work across the street from a Jewish deli. As one of the newer, more hip-looking establishments in a quickly changing working-class neighbourhood, I held some reservations about the place. It was a bit pricier to eat at and a little aesthetically out of place, fitting in the storefront between two of my favourite lunch spots: a 24-hour convenience store/donair shop and a cramped Filipino restaurant with sticky floors, kitschy bamboo walls, and often loudly playing singing reality game shows.

The first time I walked in, I ordered a half-size pastrami on rye. The shop was empty and the butcher was eager to welcome me inside. “We’re new,” he explained, as he went on to carefully describe how he personally brined, smoked, and hand cut the meat himself. Jars of pickled goods and loaves of fresh rye lined the shelves behind him. Keeping with a minimalistic look, the white walls were decorated simply with a chalkboard sign to display daily specials at the door and opposite to that, a framed photograph of a boy sporting a newsboy cap. I sat upon one of the low wooden benches, adjacent to the wide floor-to-ceiling window, and waited.

The young assistant at the counter, the only other person in the deli, was excited to draw attention to my red Asahi baseball t-shirt. It was the shirt I’d recently earned from the tribute game at Oppenheimer Park, an annual community baseball game to honour the legacy of the Japanese Canadian Vancouver-based professional baseball team and the role they played in bringing segregated communities together across difference.

As I waited for my food, she eagerly chatted with me about the baseball team, asking where I’d gotten my shirt from and if I had gone to the tribute game this past year. She’d been to a tribute game in Kamloops before.

She’d learned about the Asahi baseball team in a university course on the history of concentration camps. The professor had covered camps both in Europe and in North America during World War II and the history of the team really interested her. “I know because the Japanese Canadian internment camps split up the team,” she said before pausing. “Ah – oops, maybe this is a sensitive topic to bring up in a Jewish deli.” Her voice trailed off as she noticed the shifting movement of the butcher working beside her. Lips pursed, he grimaced and kept his head down as he swiftly brought a knife down to sever my sandwich in two.

“Your food is ready,” he announced, quickly putting an end to our conversation. He handed me a brown box with a pastrami sandwich on rye and a homemade pickle on the side. “Thanks for giving us a try,” he said with a nod, pointing his stoic and earnest face in my direction.

“Of course,” I replied and lingered for a moment or two. Not knowing how to acknowledge our overlapping clashings of memory and grief, I walked out the door, wearing my Asahi baseball t-shirt and with my Jewish friends and family wearing our Japanese Canadian internment camp uniforms. I thought about our people, on different sides of the ocean, across differing imposed borders and different margins of history. Such different silences and yet, unknowingly, a deeply intertwined sadness.

“Mensch is a Yiddish word for a person with integrity and honour.”

Author’s note: While there are clear differences between the histories of the holocaust of Nazi Germany and Japanese Canadian incarceration in Canada, there are also many similarities in the impacts and legacies of our fractured communities and families, intergenerational trauma, and assimilation and survival amidst anti-Semitism and anti-Asian racism. Both of these experiences are a result of systemic racism as enabled by white supremacy and compliance of bystanders.

These discriminatory issues that once so predominantly impacted our families and communities still exist. In the wake of 9/11, the Trump election, and rise of the alt-right, we are witnessing the explicit rise of discriminatory policies and violence targeted at brown and black communities, particularly migrants and Muslim people. As communities who have survived such harsh impacts of these histories, I believe we have a responsibility to stand together, support other marginalized communities, and speak out to state we will not allow this to happen to anyone else. More than ever, I believe we need to be critical and vigilant of the media we consume and the leaders we entrust with power and influence over our society and communities. Through inaction and silence, we remain compliant with what wrongfully happened to our people in the past. We have the chance to stand on the right side of history every single day and say, “never again.”
My name is Karl (Kaoru) Konishi and I was born April 10, 1928 in Port Moody, BC. My father, Kunizo, came to Canada via Hawaii, where he spent one year. Dad was from Kanagawa, Mitsu-gun, Okayama prefecture and my mother, Kuni Khan, was from Fukuwati, Mitsu-gun, Okayama prefecture. Mom came over to Canada as a picture bride.

Upon arrival in BC, Dad obtained employment at Flavell Cedar Mill in Port Moody. There were three cedar mills in Port Moody, but now only Flavell remains. One of the mills was jokingly called “Hindu mill” because most of the employees were South Asian and wore turbans.

The other mill was McNair on the north shore, which the employees were South Asian and wore turbans. The mills was jokingly called “Hindu mill” because most of the employees were South Asian and wore turbans. Our immediate neighbours were the Fujioka family, who operated a logging business.

Our house was on Maude Road – there were only three houses there. Our immediate neighbours were the Fujioka family, who operated a logging business. It was country living – four miles to town and another four miles to a store near Ioco. A salesman would come around to take orders for Japanese food and whatever else Mom wanted. For a time, we attended Japanese language school after regular school, which was taught by Mrs. Tokitsu.

As kids, we used to collect hazelnuts, blueberries, loganberries, salmonberries, and some mushrooms. At that time I did not know anything about matsutake mushrooms. We collected the bark from castor trees – the bark was used in the making of castor oil. We would dry the bark and Mom would take it to the local drug store. Dad used to scour the forest for old fallen cedar trees, covered in moss and shrubs. He would remember the location of the trees and return later to cut into a desired size. It was easy money without the work we had put in. The hill behind our old property is now covered with hundreds of homes – I never thought people would be living there.

After Hastings Park, our next destination was Popoff in New Denver, since my aunt was there. We went to Pitt Meadows to pick berries, then to Surrey to pick more berries. Following that, we went to Chilliwack and Sardis to pick hops. After running out of jobs, our family was incarcerated at Hastings Park for four months. I was separated from the rest of my family and lived with the men in another building. I worked for 10 cents an hour stuffing straw into mattresses to be used by internees.

After Dad was taken away, we ran out of money to buy essentials. We went to Pitt Meadows to pick berries, then to Surrey to pick more berries. Following that, we went to Chilliwack and Sardis to pick hops. After running out of jobs, our family was incarcerated at Hastings Park for four months. I was separated from the rest of my family and lived with the men in another building. I worked for 10 cents an hour stuffing straw into mattresses to be used by internees.

After Hastings Park, our next destination was Popoff in the Slocan Valley. We lived in a two-story building. Being short of money and food, Mom was worried about how we were going to survive. She had a nervous breakdown and ended up in the hospital. At this time, my sister Kay, my brother Fred, and I received help from neighbours, who provided us with food.

Our next move was to New Denver, since my aunt was
received boxes of sporting equipment to use. My next move was to Tashme, where Mom started to make tofu again. I worked at the local saw mill with Tak Kobayashi. Later I moved to another mill about five miles away. Once while I was at the mill in Tashme, I was sent to fight a forest fire outside of Tashme. Since I was the youngest I was detailed as a water boy and had to carry water in the canvas bags to the men on the fire line. In my spare time I went fishing. It was a remote area so fishing was great. I would go to the mess hall and obtain salt to pickle the trout to take home.

After the war, I did not want to go to Japan, a country foreign to me. The Ayukawa family volunteered to take me in, but eventually it was time to make the dreaded trip to Japan and I was not looking forward to it. We landed in Uraga and it was shocking to see so much destruction from the war. I met my father dockside in Vancouver, after not having seen him for four years. We travelled on a US troop ship and the food they gave us was terrible. We later learned how bad things were.

My dad owned a fairly large farm, a house, and a hill (yama) so we were probably a little better off than most people. The reason why everything was in place was because my sisters, particularly Mary, worked the farm and paid the taxes. To this day, I don’t know how she did it – farming in Japan is all physical labour. This was the first time I met my sister Aguri. She had gotten married to avoid compulsory factory work for labour. This was the first time I met my sister Aguri. She wore my hip waders and the locals had a good laugh. I sure was not going into the paddy knowing what they used for fertilizer – human feces!

While in the country I took part in the local fishing, scuba diving, setting eel pots, and night time spear fishing using the carbide lamp. I remember a couple of times going out with the villagers looking for matsutake mushrooms. Everything found was put into a pot and divided among the participants. Once again money was a problem, so I went off to the big city of Okayama to find work with the US occupation forces.

After about two years, the US occupational forces left Okayama and my sister Kay returned to Canada. In Osaka, I was fortunate to have a place to stay. I worked as a house boy until one day I got a job as a sales clerk at Shinodayama Post Exchange. My sister Mary also got a job there. It was a medical training school, as they needed to train their troops for the Korean War. My boss was a sergeant married to a Japanese girl and as he was going home, he made a recommendation I take over as Post Exchange manager. This was also backed by the camp commander, so I was now in charge as manager of the Post Exchange, where I oversaw the snack bar, bowling alley, and barber shop.

One day, a Pepsi cola salesman, a goajin, mentioned that the Canadian army was taking volunteers for the Korean War. I thought about it for a while, then decided to check it out and went to Hiro where the camp was. Lo and behold! Most of the enrollees were guys I knew from either New Denver or Tashme.

Editors’ note: This is an excerpt of Karl Konishi’s memoirs. Continue reading in a future issue of Nikkei Images.
When talking about deportation of Japanese Canadians after the end of World War II, there is one picture that cannot be overlooked. It’s the photo taken in May 1946 showing people waiting at Slocan railway station for the train bound for the west coast. Ever since appearing on the cover of The Enemy That Never Was (1976) written by Ken Adachi, the same photo has been used repeatedly.

In fact, every time I see the photo, I murmur “Oh, that’s Kitamura-san...” The lady standing second from the right and looking towards the direction of incoming trains is Misako Kitamura, the wife of Taka-aki Kitamura (hometown Kuchinosu, Nagasaki). He steadfastly declined being uprooted and remarked, “I believed (hometown Kuchinosu, Nagasaki). He steadfastly declined being uprooted and remarked, “I believed

Having so declared, he was confined at the 101 POW camp at Angler in Ontario until July 1946. He was a reticent, faithfully loyal, and spiritually strong Meiji-era man. However, unlike most of the other issue, he was a strong supporter of the NAJC’s Redress Campaign for individual compensation. The Kitamuras, having been reunited soon after this picture was taken, moved to Tokyo in July 1946. Therefore, my belief was that the people in the photo were all moving to eastern Canada. This apparently has been incorrect. Very recently, I received other information.

That took place in December 2015 when I returned home to Sapporo. Namita-san (Hokkaido University Professor Emeritus), accompanied by Sapporo resident, George Sadao Kawabata, came to visit my hotel for an interview. The interviewee, George, upon seeing this picture that cannot be overlooked. It’s the photo taken in May 1946 showing people waiting at Slocan railway station for the train bound for the west coast. Ever since appearing on the cover of The Enemy That Never Was (1976) written by Ken Adachi, the same photo has been used repeatedly.

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So this is the story of how the Kawabata family “repatriated” to Japan. George was a 10-year-old boy. After seven decades of blank memory, in early 2013 George happened to view NHK’s TV documentary program titled Chinmoku no Dengon (Message Told in Silence). This film was to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and focused on the experience of Japanese Canadian internment camp life. It was there that George discovered a photo of his Slocan-days school class photo!

Setting down in the adopted land

His father, Teiichi Kawabata, was born in 1890 in Negoro, Wakayama Prefecture. In 1906, he was supposed to head for the United States mainland via Hawaii but it was a decision to “repatriate” on their way to Japan in 1946. Nearly 4,000 people went to Japan in 1946, many of them embittered and disillusioned after their wartime experience in Canada. (PHOTO ARCHIVES OF CANADA)

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Setting down in the adopted land

His father, Teiichi Kawabata, was born in 1890 in Negoro, Wakayama Prefecture. In 1906, he was supposed to head for the United States mainland via Hawaii but the next available ship that was bound for Canada. That period coincided with a storm of adverse racism and discrimination against Asians/Orientals raging on the west coast of the US.

The following year, 1907, the anti-Asian activist group called the Asiatic Exclusion League, originally formed in the U.S., extended their reach northward into Vancouver. They organized an informal white labourers’ group and agitated to prohibit the influx of Japanese immigrants. In September, this group provoked a riot in Vancouver.

It was in the year 1908 that quotas of Japanese immigrants were limited to 400 per year with the exception of so called female “picture brides” that were not counted in the immigration quota. So George’s father belonged to one of the last group of Japanese immigrants into Canada before the restrictive quota was introduced. Henceforth, with the influx of the “picture brides” the Japanese communities which were previously comprised almost totally by male immigrants shifted into family-style settlement units. Vancouver’s population in 1908 was approximately 100,000 with Japanese counting just under 1,700.

Meanwhile, a Japanese community of similar size was established in Steveston, BC. The core of this group consisted of migrant labourers coming from Wakayama prefecture. However, Teiichi, who was still a 16-year-old youth, did not settle down there. He must have been a person that due to his personal character found it easy to assimilate into Canadian society from the start. He referred to himself by his English name, Tom Kawabata.

“My dad hated physical labour and worked for a long time as a bell-boy at a well-known summer resort facility, Chateau Lake Louise Hotel in Alberta. For his hard work and diligence, he received awards from the hotel”, said George. It was then that a wealthy hotel guest from New York noticed him and wrote in his appreciative letter addressed to the hotel management in 1924. “That Jap [unchanged original expression] serving your hotel is unmistakably Bell-Boy No. 2. I personally wish to hire him should he be ready to work as my household servant in New York”.

What an arrogant attitude with the scent of prejudice disguised in words of praise! The expression and wording can be said to be a typical reflection of the white person’s thoughts at that time. By the way, this hotel was heralded as a famous resort hotel in the scenic Rocky Mountains, where the late Showa Emperor during his youth as Crown Prince of the Imperial Family is said to have lodged on his way to the United States.

Teiichi was not the only Japanese national working near the Lake Louise Banff area. According to one issei’s memoir, another was the pioneer immigrant Manzo Nagano’s first son, George Tatsuo. He was
once active as an outfitter on the "Victoria Nippons" baseball team. The memoir says: "After a marriage in 1920 which ended up resulting in a bad family relationship with his mother-in-law, he chose to work at a resort hotel in Banff. Being in the same age bracket, he might have been friends with Teiichi.

To continue, the two of them had fine physical statures that made them very attractive wearing their hotel uniforms. Teiichi surely must have had pride in this job at the hotel. To underscore that thought, according to son George's testimony based on his recollection, dad Teiichi even after returning to Japan very often wore a dressy tuxedo matched with a tall silk derby hat. In the eyes of surrounding neighbors, his style reflected "an odd eccentric person."

Teiichi returned temporarily to Japan in 1928. After having married his wife Sei, he was blessed with three children. Until the outbreak of the war, Teiichi spent summers working at Lake Louise while spending winters in Vancouver. There, at 371 Hastings Street, next door to Patricia Hotel, he operated/managed a grocery store with his wife Sei. At the ripe age of 45 and with two daughters, he was joyfully blessed with Sadao, his first son.

Little Tokyo village was the environment in which the three children were brought up and nurtured during their infancy and childhood. The Japanese community in Canada, while exposed to racial discrimination, was beginning as a whole to climb the ladder towards middle-class society. Despite this, the Manchuria Incident caused by Imperial Japan and its aftermath provoked the global turmoil that ultimately resulted in World War II, and terrible consequences for the entire North American Japanese community. In 1933, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations and bid farewell to the western world powers. Simultaneously, the military assumed the League of Nations and bid farewell to the western Japanese community. In 1933, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations and bid farewell to the western Japanese community.

On December 7, 1941, just after George's entry to Lord Strathcona Primary School, Japan's Imperial Navy bombed Hawaii in what was said to be a "sneak attack." Henceforth, Japanese Canadians were treated as the enemy. In March of the following year, the Kawabatas were herded into the livestock exhibition ground at Hastings Park. No doubt for a still playful naughty boy, born under the zodiac sign of the boar, the horse barn must have been a perfect playground.

"Tumbling down, I suffered a terrible cut on my skull." Saying this, he showed me the big scar that was still visible. While the wound must have been quite deep, the scar itself seems to have changed into his good luck charm from his days of trial. He continued speaking with misery in his voice: "The entire building, being a horse stable, was Stink, Stink, and nothing but Stink! How could the Canadian government act that way, might you know?"

Meanwhile, his father Teiichi, then already 52 years of age, was exempt from deportation to road camps. The dragnet swept up all of the adult males of Japanese ancestry under the age of 45 for road camp work. Nevertheless, having declined the Hastings Park confinement option that he was given, Teiichi chose to become a POW Camp detainee which separated him from the family. Whatever made him do so? "Dad was a typical Meiji-era-born Japanese who was deeply patriotic." After the war, he was the one who decided that the family would repatriate to Japan. Until the ship carrying the family arrived in Uraga, Kanagawa Prefecture, Teiichi believed Japan had won the war.

Editors' note: This story will be continued in the next issue of Nikkei Images, Vol 22, No. 2.
A Remarkable Man: Soi Isomura

by Kim Kobrle

Dr. Soi Isomura’s life came to an end on August 22, 2015. There wasn’t a ripple in the community, no fuss and no fanfare. That is exactly how this multi-gifted physician lived and died. However, we would be remiss if we did not record his life and times in the annals of Japanese Canadian history.

Soi Isomura was born September 17, 1923 in Vancouver. His early days were marked by his inability to keep pace with his friends due to a congenital anomaly, ‘a hole in the heart’ he called it. It was probably at this time that he developed an insatiable love of learning which never left him as he had more quiet time on his hands than his playmates. He felt that as he grew and with the passage of time his heart corrected itself. During the unsettled days of World War II, he and his family relocated to Greenwood. It was here that he first noticed his future love, Frances Imai. After a year and a half, he moved to Belleville, Ontario where he attended Albert College. On graduation, he was awarded the Governor General’s Medal for the highest aggregate. He went on to study physics at Queen’s University in Kingston. In 1951 was an eventful year in Soi’s life. He married his sweetheart, Frances and was one of the first Japanese Canadians to be accepted to study medicine at McGill University. As a struggling and hardworking student, he became a father in 1952. He recalled this period of his life with fondness.

He decided to spend his residency at Montreal’s St. Mary’s Hospital. In spite of his heavy load of intern’s duties, with the help of his colleagues, he developed a method of calculating ‘blood volume loss’, vital information in emergency situations. As his breakthrough methodology became known he received inquiries from hospitals around the world.

Dr. Dinan, Chief of Surgery at St. Mary’s Hospital, recognizing Soi’s potential, designated a room at the hospital for his experiments. His next project was to develop an apparatus for underwater gas exchange (like an underwater lung). Dr. Dinan helped Soi get a patent for this invention which ensured that he got the proper recognition for his work. The American Navy was interested and followed his progress closely as evidenced by the extensive correspondence between them. Soi took this research as far as he could.

Soi’s plan now was to become a member of the World Health Organization (WHO). To this end and with Fran’s blessing, he decided to take two more years of surgery and a year of pathology. It was while doing some complicated surgical procedures that he made quite a name for himself as a skilled surgeon.

Years later, having moved from Montreal to BC, I remember going to the Royal Columbian Hospital’s Rehab Unit in New Westminster, where we were waiting to meet our new Director of Physiatry (specialist in Physical Medicine). When Dr. Feldman saw me, an Asian, he asked if I knew Dr. Soi Isomura of Montreal. He said, “Dr. Isomura did the most delicate and intricate surgeries with the most deft fingers.” When I told Fran about this she recalled Soi saying that some of the surgeons had asked to see his hands.

With his qualifications and experience, Soi knew that he was now equipped to work in many capacities anywhere in the world. About this time, Dr. Duffy, a now elderly physician nearing retirement, was encountering problems in finding a doctor to take over his practice. He told Soi that he didn’t need to go far afield to minister to the most needy patients of this world. In fact many lived in the most neglected area of old Montreal, Point St. Charles, long ago settled by the first immigrants fleeing Ireland during their infamous ‘potato famine’. Looking after the marginalized was always Soi’s objective and so he took on this new challenge.

Following Dr. Duffy’s retirement, Soi, Fran, their two daughters, and Fran’s mom moved into Dr. Duffy’s old house in the ‘Point’ among the row houses. The doctor’s office was downstairs and living quarters were upstairs. It was here that they welcomed their son, John, into their lives. As in all of his previous projects, he set a high bar for his work in the ‘Point’ neighbourhood. Soon his practice was thriving. With long hours, “on call” nights and weekends, often with little or no remuneration, Soi felt this was where he was meant to be. He said when these tough folks say “they have a gut ache, they have a gut ache.” He upgraded their medical care and records to the point where he could then think about their social needs. He and Fran formed a group and, using their church-centred venues, they organized community events such as clothes drives, seasonal, and religious events. This forgotten part of Montreal once again became a viable community. Soi’s accomplishments did not go unnoticed.

Montreal’s daily newspaper, the Montreal Gazette, wanted to do a profile of Soi. This he strongly declined. He never wanted any recognition or accolades.

In July of 1968 the Federal Government of Canada decreed that all Canadian residents were entitled to Medicare and by 1972 it was to be implemented Canada wide. This sounded great as Soi would finally be paid without problems but there was a caveat. The political climate in Quebec was changing and French was to be the official language in Quebec. Soi felt it was time for a change for him and his family. After much thought and discussion with Fran and family, they decided to pull up stakes and move back to the West Coast. Having left Vancouver in 1942, Soi decided to return to BC with his family after nearly 30 years in Eastern Canada.

There were two teenagers living with the Isomura family at that time. Their mother, a Japanese war bride, had separated from her French Canadian soldier husband and was dying from cancer. She died in peace when assured by Soi that he and Fran would care for them until they became adults. Now that they were leaving Montreal, their aunt, their dad’s sister, offered to provide

Soi Isomura’s life came to an end on August 22, 2015. There wasn’t a ripple in the community, no fuss and no fanfare. That is exactly how this multi-gifted physician lived and died. However, we would be remiss if we did not record his life and times in the annals of Japanese Canadian history.

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A home for them. Earlier they sponsored a young Kenyan man (a student in mechanical engineering) who wanted to stay longer in Canada. Soi and Fran provided a home for him too until he found employment and was able to support himself. Soi and Fran, whenever there was a need, never hesitated or questioned but stepped forward and helped. This was repeated many times during their days in Montreal.

Leaving Montreal was surely a momentous decision, to move to an unfamiliar city and an unknown future. In 1971 they drove across Canada and settled in Richmond, BC where coincidentally, there was a sizable Japanese community.

Registration with the BC College of Physicians and Surgeons was easily processed. Setting up a practice was thriving as his practice was thriving as his registration became known to all in Richmond. Another bilingual staff member was hired to help Soi and Fran.

Once his work was going smoothly, he turned his attention to what was being discussed a lot at that time like the need for renewable energy. He spoke about the need to look into hydrogen fuel cells. His quest for learning would be front and centre of the important topics of the day. He also started taking lessons in Argentine tango. He also enrolled in courses at BGIT to upgrade his knowledge in the latest electronic advances. This active lifestyle continued until his childhood heart problem reared its ugly head. Now in spite of feeling he could continue his medical practice beyond the usual retirement age, he now had to pace his activities as his strength and stamina would allow, especially after many tests and procedures proved that the “valve problem” in his heart was inoperable. He accepted his limitations with his usual realistic attitude. He asked his husband, “Why back did we think we’d make it to our 90s?”

When his rest times increased he surrounded himself in bed with reference books on new discoveries and theories in physics and science. One local doctor described him as a “brainiac.” Yes he was, until the very end.

Before his last time in hospital, when he phoned and wanted to come for a visit, I reminded him that we no longer lived nearby and had problems with strength in her right arm, poor self esteem, and no confidence in going back to her former work as a paediatric nurse. Her doctor thought she was an associate with a group of young physicians who owned a medical building and an adjacent parking lot. Soi intuitively sensed her problem and was a need, never hesitated or questioned but stepped forward and helped. This was repeated many times during their days in Montreal.

**“Life is not to waste for it is God’s greatest gift” Soi Isomura.**

You, Fran, and your family were my surrogate family for all my years in Montreal. Even during your lean student years, I’ll never forget the many pleasant visits and delicious craved-for Japanese meals.

During our last phone conversation, you said, “I hope they won’t bring me back again (referring to being resuscitated). I want to check out the mysteries in our cosmos, dark matter and stuff. The only thing is that I can’t come back to tell you about it.”

Well, Soi, I hope you sailed through our galaxy, got same answers, then soared through the stratosphere and universe to be with the angels.

What a legacy you left your family, friends, and community to cherish. Remembrance always.

Kim.

It’s difficult to compress a lifetime of achievements in these few pages. My sincere hope is that I was able to adequately portray a humanitarian, scientist, researcher, thinker, and physician who once walked this earth among us.

There were valued members in our community who spoke of Soi’s humanity and his brilliance. Unfortunately many have predeceased him. His close colleague Dr. Dick Reeve who studied with Soi at McGill University and St. Mary’s Hospital, and practised as a cardiologist in Hawaii, is now living in California. Dick too is now ailing and when he last phoned Fran, she found his speech difficult to understand. Testimonials from his many friends would have been so welcome and would have enhanced this bio.

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Yuriko Obayashi Barrow: A Life History

by “Vicky” Yuriko Barrow, (nee Obayashi)

Vicky (Yuriko) Barrow wrote this life history at age 69. Vicky passed away on June 25, 2005 at the age of 74. It was submitted to Nikkei Images by Hollis Ho, daughter of Vicky Barrow. Hollis has added names for clarity, and made two brief additions of facts shared with her by her mother that are relevant to the story.

My father, Fusajiro Obayashi, immigrated from Shika-ken, Japan to Canada in 1906. He managed to find employment at the Rat Portege Sawmill. After five years of long, hard labour, he saved enough money to go back to Japan to marry my mother, Toyo Matsumoto. Together, they returned to Canada to make their home and settled in the Kitsilano district in Vancouver, BC.

My parents had nine children – four sons and five daughters. I am the eighth child, born Yuriko Obayashi on September 8, 1930. We were all born at home on West 2nd Avenue in Vancouver, with the help of a mid-wife.

Mom and Dad were of the Buddhist faith and we all attended church regularly. They were both warm and caring, and instilled in us the importance of keeping family ties strong. Though our parents are no longer with us, we continue to be a close-knit family.

In Vancouver, after years of long hard work, my parents managed to purchase a two-storey, ten-unit apartment building at 1661 West 2nd Avenue, and, also, a house which they rented out. Our family occupied three units in the apartment building with father tearing down walls as the family grew. My parents also owned and operated a barber shop in this building for 20 years prior to the relocation to the interior of BC.

With the onset of World War II, my father was immediately ordered to Gosnell (50 miles north of Jasper, Alberta) to work on the railway. My mother was left to fend for herself and children until September 1942 when we were relocated to New Denver, BC, which was one of the many internment camps scattered throughout the interior.

In March of 1942, the evacuation of all the citizens of Japanese ancestry to various camps began and was completed by October 15, 1942. It was soon after my twelfth birthday in September 1942 when my mother and siblings boarded the train to New Denver. At the time it seemed like an adventure to me – little did I know what hardship this was for my Mom. In later years, I began to realize this anguish, humiliation, and pain my parents endured during this ordeal. Uprooted from their secure environment and not knowing what to expect in the future must have been utterly devastating. I know they suffered immeasurably.

In New Denver, we were finally reunited with Father after nine months of separation. As Dad knew carpentry, he had been sent to New Denver to assist with the building of the “shacks” for living quarters.

In the spring of 1945 when the war was all but over, the government issued a “Repatriation Order” to go to Japan or move east of the Rockies. My father stood firm in his decision to remain in Canada.

In 1945, Nakusp was a thriving logging and sawmilling town. My father and brothers found employment in the mill. Mother, my younger brother, and I remained in New Denver until I finished my schooling and joined the rest of the family in 1947.

On April 1, 1949, the ban was lifted and Japanese Canadians were permitted to back to the West Coast. My father was not eager to move to Vancouver as all their personal possessions and properties were lost and their former life was completely obliterated. He opted to settle in Nakusp, a small village just 30 miles west of New Denver.

When I first arrived in New Denver there was much hostility among the Caucasian community. This is when I became fully aware of discrimination. Verbal abuse and bruised spirits were experienced almost daily. It was truly a traumatic time.

My formative years were spent happily in Vancouver where I attended Henry Hudson Elementary School, and I also attended the Japanese Language School daily from 4:30-6:00pm. In September 1942, I was looking forward to attending Kitsilano Junior High, but it was not to be.

Once settled in camp, we faced another obstacle. Japanese children were barred from attending regular schools. Fortunately, the Catholic nuns learned of our plight and started Notre Dame High, converting a large house into classrooms. As there were too many students, the United Church missionaries also came to our aid and opened Lakeview High in the local Odd Fellow Hall. I completed high school at Notre Dame.

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When I first arrived in Nakusp I was totally lost – my school friends and their families were dispersed to various parts of the country and I missed them. My parents were concerned that I was not mingling with children my age and encouraged me to join “Teen Town.” This was the best advice I got. I was pleasantly surprised that the members were warm and friendly.
and accepted me whole-heartedly. To this day, I remain friends with many of the people I met as a teenager. I met my husband, Bill Barrow, then.

In late 1947 I found employment at the Leland Hotel which was owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Barrow who later became my in-laws. Their son Bill and I were married in January 1953. Inter-racial marriage was quite uncommon in those days but we were fortunate to have the blessings of both families. We travelled to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho to get married, but were turned away as interracial marriage was illegal in that state unless one was from Hawaii. We then had to travel to Spokane, Washington where interracial marriages were legal.

We were blessed with two sons and one daughter. We are now also blessed with two beautiful grandchildren.

After our marriage, I did not work until all my children were in school. I began working part-time at a local food store for several years until management changed hands. I left to work full-time in the Payroll Department for a logging firm. I stayed with this job for 15 years but unfortunately when the company began down-sizing, I was among the many who were laid-off. I then went to assist my sister-in-law at a Men’s Clothing Store which I co-owned with her for 22 years. We sold the business in 1993 and I have been enjoying retirement since.

Yes, I have seen many, many changes throughout my life. I vividly remember using washboards to do the family laundry. We certainly didn’t have the luxuries we have today. It’s difficult to keep pace with technology as it is constantly and rapidly advancing and much too quickly for a senior like me. 🌟