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Picture bride photograph of Kinori Shinohara Oka, sent to Sanzo Oka when arranging their marriage, 1922 NNM 2001.28.2.4

Picture groom photograph of Sanzo Oka, likely sent to Kinori when arranging their marriage, ca. 1922 NNM TD 255



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Canadian history and culture for a better Canada. We invite you to tell us your *nikkei* story. We accept submissions of memoirs, short stories, or short academic papers relating to Japanese Canadian history, culture, and arts. Our values include inter-generational leadership, community, and professionalism; to respect and honour Japanese heritage: to nurture, build, and honour our commitment to community involvement; to embrace humility and compassion; and to encourage innovation and inclusiveness.

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Picture Brides – An Introduction

by Howard Shimokura



Prior to 1928, many Japanese women immigrated to Canada as picture brides. The majority are no longer alive and their remarkable stories are largely untold. From the small number of stories written, and some that are still emerging, it is clear that they led extraordinary lives filled with surprise, disappointment, sacrifice, isolation, hostility, and extremely hard work. What was it that motivated these women to leave their immediate families and ancestral homes, to join husbands they had not met, in a strange country, to begin a new life?

Japanese prospective brides on ship to Canada, ca. 1905 NNM 1997.200 Midge Ayukawa writes in her article, "Good Wives and Wise Mothers," that the pioneer women were Meiji women, often "better educated than the average Japanese girl and their future spouses, having graduated from girl's high school, normal school, or midwifery school. These women had been taught that the ideal woman was modest, courageous, frugal, literate, hardworking, and productive."

would only be granted if the spouse had successfully

immigrated to Canada and had either returned to Japan

to marry or had been married by proxy.





Oikawa women and children on Don Island, ca. 1913 NNM 2009.2.36

Japanese picture brides emigrated for a variety of reasons. Some did so to meet parental obligations of the parent families, or were forced by their elder brothers to marry and leave the family. Others left their ancestral homes due to their fear of spinsterhood, some because they felt they were unattractive, or because they were divorced. Still others sought independence or adventure. All accepted the risk of an unknown future over the conditions of their present circumstances.

Japanese passports to emigrate to Canada took about a year to process. Using the fare sent by the prospective groom, the marriage intermediary arranged for passage and clearance on landing in Victoria, B.C., where the brides sought out their husbands often using the photographs. Some found disappointment, refused to disembark, and sailed back to Japan. Others accepted their fate with varying degrees of excitement. Following a formal marriage ceremony to ensure legal recognition in Canada, sometimes immediately upon landing, they traveled to their new homes, which were located in cities but more often located in isolated lumber, fishing, or mining camps, or wilderness farms where they began their married lives under harsh economic conditions.

During the initial years, the women faced huge adjustments and challenges. As wives of husbands who struggled hard to earn a living, start and support families, and improve their circumstances, these women worked very hard. The stories of their struggles to overcome

enormous hurdles are under-reported and often left out of the history of the Japanese in Canada.

By 1924, the number of picture brides who immigrated to Canada stood at 6,240. In 1928, pressured to respond to public alarm over the increasing number of Japanese immigrants and the number of Japanese children entering the B.C. school system, the government of Canada called for a revision of its original Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan, which was established in 1907 to restrict the number of Japanese males entering Canada. The new agreement reduced the total quota of Japanese immigrants to 150 per year. This figure also applied to the number of women and children allowed into Canada. The picture bride system in Canada ended with the acceptance of the new Agreement.

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A Tale of Two *Baa-chans*

by Raymond Nakamura

For better or worse, marriage can change your life. The arranged marriages of my *issei baa-chans* (first arrived grandmothers) completely transformed theirs. Even though my grandmothers did not know each other, they shared experiences in common. Both were eldest daughters, born during the Meiji era of Japan, and immigrated to Canada as teenagers to marry older men they had never met.

Both of my *baa-chans* discovered life in Canada was not what they expected.

My father's mother, my Nakamura baa-chan, was born Taki Kinoshita in 1889, the year a new constitution for the Empire of Japan was established under the Meiji emperor. It was a time of great change. Her family had business interests that included silkworm production, vegetable oil refining, and shipping. She grew up with fine clothes and servants to dress her. By the time she was about ten, the family's fortunes had begun to decline through misfortune and mismanagement. In her late teens, Taki migrated to Korea, which Japan had recently taken over, to help her uncle run a taxi business.

While in Korea, Taki received a marriage proposal from a supposedly successful farmer in Canada named Shinkichi Nakamura. He was originally from Agenosho, a village on Oshima Island, a few miles from her home village of Shitata in Yamaguchi prefecture. His photograph showed a handsome man in a three-piece suit, next to an impressive brick building. What more could she ask for? Unfortunately, she contracted malaria, and lost her hair during treatment, thereby delaying the start of her new life by one year.

Taki arrived in Port Hammond, B.C. in 1908, not long after an anti-Asian riot in Vancouver led to the



Taki Kinoshita, the author's paternal grandmother photo courtesy the Nakamura family

Hayashi-Lemieux Agreement, that specified that Japan voluntarily limit the number of Japanese men permitted to emigrate to Canada. She found that the mansion she had imagined was in fact a one-room wooden shack. One year later it would burn to the ground with all their material possessions. She had to work in the strawberry fields, as well as conducting household chores, like cooking and cleaning, not to mention making babies. My father was the seventh of their eight children.

Taki became a widow in 1938, when her husband died of throat cancer in his fifties. She would spend the rest of



her life, including internment in Popoff near Slocan, under the care of her eldest son, Bill, who eventually had a large family of his own. As a child growing up in Toronto, my conversations with her were mostly limited to her offering me a cherry-flavoured cough drop or my thanking her for the chocolate bunny she had sent for Easter. She lived to be 91, smoking roll-your-own Export A cigarettes.

My mother's mother, my Yamashita baachan, was born Yoshiko Tarutani in 1906, a year after Einstein published his theories on General and Special Relativity. She grew up in Hiroshima, that would later suffer the practical application of e=mc² in the form of the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima and her family home. Her family ran a prosperous business selling charcoal. Her father died from eating inadequately prepared fugu (poisonous blowfish) when she was only four, at the one-hundred-day celebration for her younger brother.

In the early 1920s, when Yoshiko came of marrying age, she received a letter from an uncle on her mother's side living in Vancouver recommending as a prospective suitor an enterprising man from Hiroshima named Shintaro Yamashita. He ran a successful taxi company in the Powell Street Japanese community. Yoshiko saw this as an opportunity to escape the tyranny of her overbearing mother. In 1923, wearing a fancy bridal kimono, she was married in a proxy ceremony at the Yamashita family home, without the groom present.

Yoshiko arrived in Canada in 1924 to a comfortable apartment off Powell Street that included a sewing machine. Immediately, she had to learn to cook Canadian style to feed the taxi drivers and other business guests who boarded with her and her husband. Life was difficult, though she never admitted this to her mother back in Japan. Her first child died before reaching the age of two from unknown causes. She had four more



Yoshiko Tarutani (centre), the author's maternal grandmother photo courtesy the Nakamura family

children, my mother being the second of these. Life was busy, but the Yamashitas were able to pay for help.

Yoshiko become involved in the cultural life of Powell Street, teaching music and performing in concerts, until World War II, when she and her husband had to sell all they could and move to a self-supporting camp in Minto. The family was later forced to move east of the Rockies, which led to them establishing the home I would later grow up in in Toronto. I never met my mother's mother as she died of a heart attack in her fifties in the 1950s, before my mother met my father.

Stories of my family have given me a deeper understanding of the remarkable history of the Japanese immigrants in Canada. My baa-chans faced many of the same challenges as other pioneer issei women in moving to a new country to start a new life. \bullet



Leaving Home: The Lives of Japanese Picture Brides

by Lane McGarrity



Sakakibara family in Vancouver, 1926. Left to right: Mrs. Sakakibara (Ayano's mother-in-law), Kaiji, Torajiro, Kiyosuke, Ayano. NNM 2011.5.1.4

When I was nineteen years old, I moved to Japan for a year to work with no life experience outside of Canada. Japan was a whole new world for me. I encountered many new experiences, a new language, and – by far the most intriguing and impactful – a completely foreign culture.

While researching the lives and stories of Japanese picture brides, I tried to relate their experiences to my own. My experience in a new culture was full of awkward conversations and some uneasy restaurant experiences, but I could not help but realize the extreme sacrifice the Japanese picture brides made in their decision to leave their homes, often times with nothing more than a dream, to immerse themselves in a way of life entirely foreign

to them. Each woman had her own reason for leaving Japan, but they were often surprised when they arrived in Canada to harsh working and economic conditions.

Ayano Sakakibara left her family behind in Miyagi prefecture in 1926, and travelled to Yokohama to board the Arizona Maru, to sail for Victoria. Four years earlier, Ayano had been married to Kiyosuke Sakakibara, a man she hardly knew. Kiyosuke, the son of a Torajiro Sakakibara, was also from Miyagi Prefecture. Two weeks after the wedding, Kiyosuke and his brother left Japan to join their father in Canada, arriving in Victoria on March 17, 1922. Ayano's voyage was relatively pleasant as her father-in-law Torajiro had returned to Japan to bring his new wife back to Canada as well. On October 24, 1926,



the three Sakakibaras arrived in Victoria and then to Vancouver for the Toyo Rooms, a boarding house at 358 Powell Street, where Kiyosuke was residing. The next few years would see Ayano working in the boarding house with Kiyosuke, until 1929 when Torajiro sold the boarding house and moved the family to Vernon. In Vernon Torajiro used the funds from the sale of the boarding house to buy 45 acres of land. The Sakakibaras divided the land evenly among the family members, and Ayano

and Kiyosuke began clearing their parcel of land and started farming in 1930. By 1935, the land began to become depleted, and Kiyosuke and Ayano began planting apple trees as well as building green houses to raise tomatoes and cucumbers. Ayano worked day and night next to her

husband to raise hot house tomatoes which they sold to all of the local stores, and even shipping some outside of B.C. to such places as Banff, Lake Louise, Jasper, and Calgary. At the onset of World War II, the Federal Government imposed import taxes on such commodities as vegetables, thus the Sakakibaras and other farmers made substantial profits from their crops.

Ayano and Kiyosuke were very involved in their community. Kiyosuke was actively involved in the Japanese Farmers' Association, and especially in the Centennial Japanese Project. Ayano served as president of the Japanese Women's Auxiliary (fujinkai) for many years in Vernon. Ayano and Kiyosuke had seven children: four boys and three girls. The Sakakibaras were fortunate, they had many friends and relatives from Japan join them. Kiyosuke's

younger brother Kaiji joined the family farming business, and Ayano's brother Chiyoshi arrived in 1935 to help on the farm as well. Ayano passed away in Vernon in 1980.

Kiyoko Tanaka-Goto was born in 1896 in Tokyo, but grew up in Kyushu where her mother was from. Kiyoko's childhood was filled with hardship as she was required to help on the farm from a very young age. Kiyoko's father had left the family for San Francisco when she was four, and when her father sent a letter asking the family to join him in San Francisco, Kiyoko's mother refused as she did not want to live with strangers. Her father was quite

upset and stopped sending money home to the family. In order to make ends meet, Kiyoko and her mother did whatever they could. They farmed, gathered firewood in the mountains, and sold bean curd and flour in a town four miles away — a distance they had to walk. When Kiyoko was nineteen, however, she came to Canada as a picture bride. She did not know her husband, only that he was from Kyushu as well. Her plan was to stay in North

him home, and to save some money then go back herself. She managed to send her father home, but she never returned to Japan.

America for five years to find her father and send

Kiyoko and her new husband started out together milking cows on a farm on Vancouver Island. After a year they moved to Salt Spring Island where her husband worked for another farmer. Kiyoko cleaned out chicken coops for three or four hours a day, and on her way home would pick up the laundry at a hotel and wash it at home. She slept only for four or five hours a day and worked the rest of the time. After about four years, Kiyoko left her husband and moved to Vancouver. With \$2000 she had saved, she bought a brothel on the corner of Powell and Gore with three other women and turned it into a restaurant, but it turned out to be mainly a place for people to drink! The restaurant was frequented by fisherman and loggers who spent their money fast, so Kiyoko and her partners made a lot of money. In 1922, Kiyoko fell ill and moved to Kamloops with a man she had met who offered to pay for her medical

him and his crew for five years, washing their clothes and cooking for them.

expenses. In return, Kiyoko worked for

In 1927, when Kiyoko was thirty-two years old, she returned to Vancouver. She bought a lease on the second floor of a hotel at 35 West Hastings, and turned it into a brothel. Kiyoko was good to her girls. She charged her clients less than her competitors and she made sure the clients were not infected. Business went well after a new police chief whom she had known in Kamloops arrived. While other people were arrested for operating similar sorts of businesses, Kiyoko was allowed to continue, and so she



ran the business successfully from 1927 through to 1941 when Canada declared war on Japan.

Kiyoko was first sent to Oakalla, and later transferred to Greenwood, where she stayed for four years. After the war ended, Kiyoko moved back to Vancouver and opened a series of gambling clubs. Kiyoko passed away in 1976, one month shy of what would have been her only trip home to Japan since she had left. She was 80 years old.

The stories of Japanese pictures brides have largely gone untold, but the power and emotion of those stories we do have, allow us a certain insight into the lives of the others. While the stories of Ayano and Kiyoko were certainly full of hardship and hard work, there are many stories of women who faced much harsher conditions. Women often gave birth in remote logging camps with



Portrait of Ayano Sakakibara before leaving Japan for Canada, March 1926. NNM 2011.5.1.3

Kiyoko Goto broke social norms by leaving her husband, a very unusual step for women at that time, and by venturing into businesses predominantly run by men. There is no shortage of stories of Japanese picture brides who remained strong and courageous in the face of adversity. Leaving behind their traditional Meiji upbringing they became strong women determined to exert control over their own lives. With hard work and optimism, the majority of these women endured and lived happy lives in Canada.

no medical support. Women like Maki Fukushima were required to cook meals for entire camps in the rain and snow with very little protection from the elements. There are stories of husbands losing all of the family's wealth to gambling and drinking. But the women in these stories continued on and never seemed to regret their decisions to leave Japan for a new life.

Kiyoko Goto broke social norms by leaving her husband, a very unusual step for women at that time, and by venturing into businesses predominantly run by men. There is no shortage of stories of Japanese picture brides who remained strong and courageous in the face of adversity. Leaving behind their traditional Meiji upbringing they became strong women determined to exert control over their own lives. With hard work and optimism, the majority of these women endured and lived happy lives in Canada.

I leave you with a quote from Yasu Ishikawa, a Japanese picture bride who immigrated to Canada in 1919.

"When I was young, I wanted to do everything by myself. I wanted to succeed. So I had lots of incentive. I never forgot that I'd come all the way to Canada, and I couldn't stand still. I think I've done pretty well for myself. Nowadays, I don't want for anything."

The Nikkei National Museum's summer exhibit, *Arrival*, features stories from Japanese picture brides including Ayano Sakakibara. Personal items belonging to Kiyoko Goto can also be seen on the second floor of the Nikkei National Museum as part of her own temporary exhibit. •



Picture of a Bride

by Carolyn Nakagawa

If there's one thing we have a lot of here at the Nikkei National Museum, it's photographs - we are always sifting through our database, scanning more images, and taking in new donations and loans from different families. That isn't to say we don't also have a lot of fascinating artefacts - from old dresses and uniforms to musical instruments, tools, and even swords – as well as artwork, books, and documents, though for me, the photographs feel like the heart of the collection. They're usually the thing that ends up telling me the most when I'm doing research, and often spark questions that continue to feed my curiosity about the history of our community. A picture can tell you a lot, as the old saying alludes to; it can also both

tell and not tell something – it can hint at a possibility without stating something outright. Quite often these possibilities are things we never would have considered before seeing the photograph.

The picture accompanying this story was shown to me by longtime museum volunteer Mary Ohara. I went to visit her one day in June to ask her about picture brides — since Mary is a *nisei*, I thought she might have gotten to know some of the *issei* picture brides of her mother's generation. Mary confirmed my sense that "there were a lot of picture brides in my mother's day". Though she knew this to be true in a general sense, she didn't learn many



Lily Shishido on her wedding day in Lemon Creek, 1944. NNM 2010.23.2.4.611

personal details from the *issei*, saying "unfortunately, they didn't talk too much [about] their life and all that".

Mary's mother was not a picture bride herself, though her parents were married in a way that wasn't much different from most picture bride marriages. The bride and groom were cousins, and the bride's father was already living in Canada. "It was a paper marriage, a certificate marriage in Japan," Mary explained: her parents each registered their marriage on paper from their respective continents, and Mary's mother then joined her father in Canada as his wife. This was normal in those days: combining the continued on page 14





Grandmother



"My father was Nitaro Hamaguchi, born on March 18, 1879, in Kumamoto, Japan. My mother was Maki Teramoto, born on April 12, 1893, in Kumamoto, Japan also. My father immigrated to Canada in 1900 and received his Canadian citizenship in 1907. My father was a salmon fisherman who travelled up and down the coast of British Columbia. He spoke several native languages as he communicated with the Aboriginal peoples he met along the way.

"My mother arrived in Canada in 1913. She was a "picture bride". I don't know how a woman could go alone to a country she did not know to marry a man she had never met. But this was the common practice in those days. Marriages were always arranged by the family. It's amazing when you think about it. But women did not have the freedom of choice they have today."

Excerpted from MY STORY by Lillie Reiko Yano (daughter of Nitaro and Maki Hamaguchi)

Illustrations by Lillian Michiko Blakey (daughter of Lillie Reiko Yano)

Reprinted with permission from Lillian Michiko Blakey



Wedding, Roy Hisashi Yano and Lillie Yano, 1943

LEFT: Wedding photo of parents of Lillie Reiko Yano, nee Hamaguchi Father: Nitaro Hamaguchi, born March 18, 1879, Kumamoto, Japan Mother: Maki Teramoto, born April 12, 1893, Kumamoto, Japan Married: 1913

Had three daughters: Eunice, born May 31, 1915

Lillie, born May 26, 1922 Rosie, born 1924







Maki and Lillian in front of Model A Ford

Maki Hamaguchi, 1940



Extended family, Innisfil farm, ON 1995 (Lillie in Centre)



Picture of a Bride continued

traditional Japanese practice of arranging marriages with some logistical accommodation and legal issues associated with the groom being in Canada. The only thing special about picture brides, says Mary, was the picture: "In those days, there were hardly any pictures taken."

Most people today think nothing of having their photograph taken or even taking one of themselves, with some people taking photographs of themselves daily. We see photographs everywhere in newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and throughout the internet. Talking to Mary reminded me that just seeing a photograph would have been a special occasion in the picture bride era.

To make the best possible impression on prospective grooms, picture bride photographs were formal studio portraits of the prospective brides, where they wore their best kimonos with immaculately arranged hair. Most of the portraits look rather solemn, though I think in many a glint of hope and adventure is apparent. Today, few of these photographs remain: after all, many of them would be over a hundred years old.

Mary had her photo album ready to show me when I went to visit her, wanting to show me a picture, not of a picture bride, but of a bride of Mary's generation. That photograph turned out to be Lil (Lily) Shishido, whom Mary knew, and who was married in Lemon Creek.

The Shishido family was one of the few in Lemon Creek that were allowed to own a camera to capture special moments like this one. Mary remembers that her own family's camera was confiscated when they were ordered to live in Hastings Park. The Shishidos had special privileges because the father, Masajiro, was a veteran of the First World War. He was a member of the famous Fighting Tenth Battalion that was a key part of the force that took Vimy Ridge. Lil's father was wounded in a subsequent battle with shrapnel in his right shoulder and chest, and he never recovered the use of his right arm. He re-established himself after his discharge from the army by working as a barber on Powell Street in Vancouver.

In addition to their camera, Mary recalls that the Shishidos also had a record player and albums of Japanese and English-language music. Mary was friends with Lil and her younger sister, the latter who taught Mary how to jitterbug. The three of them would all go to the Lemon Creek dances, and it was there that Lil met and fell in love with her husband. According to Mary, Lil was a good-looking woman with plenty of admirers, and she chose the one she loved and had a beautiful wedding in the midst of internment.

In the Nikkei National Museum (NNM) database, this photo is titled "Lily Shishido About to Enter a Car On Her Wedding Day". It is described as follows: "The image shows a bride about to get into a car and there is a woman holding her long veil off the ground. The bride is Lily Shishido". I think the photo says much more than that. This is a portrait of a *nisei* bride, who was able to marry a man she fell in love with at a dance, even if the dance was in an internment camp. Lil was more fortunate than many others of her generation: Mary remembers admiring the fashions of the older girls at Lemon Creek, and Lil was the only bride that Mary recalled wearing a white wedding dress. I feel, in this photo, that she represents the joys and hopes of the young people in the camps: she's stepping into a car, and it's as if she might be going anywhere.

After they were married, Lil and her husband moved to Toronto, while Mary went with her family to Japan in 1946. They corresponded, and Lil sent Mary some of her old clothing, as well as sugar, which was heavily rationed in post-war Japan.

When asked about picture brides, some seventy-odd years later, Mary thinks first of the picture of Lily Shishido. This picture represents a sequel to the story of picture brides: the new bride embodies both a continuation and reiteration of the hopes of the picture brides and other *issei* women who joined their husbands in Canada. The sequel is that this new bride is in love with her husband, and she can enjoy a romantic wedding in a beautiful white dress, an experience that any picture bride might have hoped for, for herself and her daughter. And yet, like the picture brides of the past, the bride in this photo, Lily, is preparing for a journey, stepping into a vehicle that will take her to an unfamiliar place where she will build a new life. \P



Memories of Itoko Imada

as researched and translated by Midge Ayukawa compiled by Linda Kawamoto Reid for Nikkei Images

Inspired by the summer exhibit in the NNM gallery entitled 'Arrival' by Chino Otsuka, this story of Itoko Imada was chosen to be told in the context of the theme of 'picture brides' in this issue of Nikkei Images. Adapted from research conducted by Midge Ayukawa on the history of immigrants to Canada from Hiroshima, Japan, the full translation of Itoko Imada's story was the basis of a paper in her fourth year at university. The guotes are directly from Midge Ayukawa's paper entitled 'Memories of Itoko Imada'.

Itoko Nishida, who lived from 1891 to 1987, was originally from Hiroshima-ken before she left Japan to become a picture bride to Kaichi Imada, who was living and working in Vancouver. The Nishida and Imada families lived about 2.4 miles apart in Hiroshima, so when the proxy marriage was complete on October 20, 1910. Itoko was required by tradition to live with her in-laws, Heitaro and Hisa Imada, in the next town.

"I thought I would like to go at least once to a foreign land, and insisted. My mother finally relented and gave her permission. It was necessary to hurry and get registered in the family records (koseki), so I entered the Imada family on November 11, 1910."

But unfortunately, Itoko's father had just passed away, so out of mutual respect, she was allowed to stay with her own family unless the Imada house needed her. A year later, her new husband provided her with money and a passport for her travel to Canada.

"I still remember clearly the happiness of that moment. After the wedding, there had been no letter from my husband and neither had I written to him and all I had been able to do was wait. When I think of it now, I think that in the past, farm girls were all like this. The picture bride marriages of 60 years ago were all like that. The young rural women of that era usually left marriage matters to their parents and decisions were made on the word of the marriage brokers. It was handled as if

we were material commodities. just saw the photos and really had no what type of men we were marrying."



Itoko Imada in kimono ca. 1980 NNM TD 992

"It was exactly one

year after my wedding on October 20, 1911 when I went to the Imada house and on the 21st my Nishida mother came. That night my mother and I slept together. But my mother is said to have greeted the dawn without having slept at all, so full of sad thoughts and tears to be sending her daughter to a far away land. Not knowing parental emotions, I was only of one mind: to go as soon as possible to my husband."

"I left by train on the morning of October 21. My husband's brother had just returned from Canada with his family, so he went to the hotel with me in Kobe and bought me a complete outfit of western clothes."

"The ship, a small one, the Canada Maru, made four stops before resting briefly at Yokohama. It was November, the time when the seas are the roughest. We rolled from side to side and not a soul escaped seasickness. It seemed as if everyone had died. I couldn't eat anything for about 20 days, and only slept."

"I wondered why I had wanted to go to Canada when it led to so much misery. I felt even more miserable when I thought that in the future I would have to endure such a trip back to Japan. Eventually we were informed that the ship had reached Victoria and everyone was happy. There was much excitement on board, with some people rushing to the deck and others packing their baggage, forgetting the seasickness that they had suffered."

"After the ship reached port and we disembarked (in



Victoria), a man called Kuwabara was there to meet us. This person was an interpreter for the Japanese. He led us to the Immigration building. The Japanese who landed were six males and two women — Mrs. Irizawa and myself. Inside the immigration building, everything I saw was completely strange and puzzling. In a large room there were many bunk beds and we were told that everyone was to sleep there. Then a white person who was as big as a giant came into the room and taught us how to use the window blinds. Then this person led us to the toilet. In that era, the water tank was the type that was overhead. There was a chain hanging from the tank and if you pulled this, the water came out. We were startled. It was very strange."

"The next day, Mr. Kuwabara came and cleared all the immigration arrangements for everyone. After clearance, the six men and Mrs. Irizawa were taken to the Ishida Hotel by someone who came to fetch them. Mr. Kuwabara said that he had been asked by the older brother of my husband to look after me, so I was taken to Kuwabara's. At that time there were no automobiles, so the people who went to the Ishida Hotel went by streetcar. I went on a small horse and buggy to the Kuwabara's."

"As I had telegraphed my husband earlier, he came shortly after on November 17 about 10 pm. How embarrassing and awkward it was. There was no one to even introduce the new husband and wife to each other. My husband's job at the time was at a Japanese sakaya (saloon) in Vancouver. His job was to wash bottles and put sake into them."

"On the 18th, Mr. Kuwabara took us to a church and we were married. It was just a formality and was conducted by a white minister. After shopping and taking care of some business we headed to Vancouver by boat on the 20th."

"In those days, most of the Japanese men worked in lumber camps or sawmills and the women living in Vancouver usually worked in the homes of white people. The job was to clean homes and do laundry. Soon after I came to Canada, I too was introduced to a home of a white family by a Mrs. Yamashita who was staying at the same rooming house."

"After that I was asked to help at the Taniguchi Hotel, so the female boss and I made the beds, cleaned and cooked. It was unsanitary. I was shocked at the many lice in the beds where the white men stayed. I

encountered these only after I came to this country. At that time, we did not have the convenience of running hot water. We had to use cold water for our cleaning."

Mrs. Imada did this work for only two months in exchange for room and board, and gave it up when she was offered a job doing laundry in a logging camp, a job in which she had limited experience.

"At that time, there was a shortage of women so if a bride came from Japan, she received urgent requests from various camps to go and cook and do the laundry. So on Feb 2, 1912, led by boss Kato, with 13 people who were perfect strangers, my husband and I left Vancouver docks at 3 am. We went on a small gas boat to a place called Indian River, and from there got on a small rowboat and after two hours we reached a white man's camp."

"Boss Kato came and said to me that since I am a good cook, it was a waste for me to do laundry here. 'I will pay your ship passage if you come with me to Seymour Creek camp. The male cook there is quitting, so I want you to go there and cook.' So reluctantly, since I could not refuse, my husband and I packed our meagre baggage and went to North Vancouver. From there with food and luggage, we got on a two-hour horse wagon ride, went about 10 miles and reached a place called Seymour Creek."

"I came to this camp in August and four months later, I gave birth to a baby girl. It was a difficult experience and I suffered for 12 hours. In this area, there wasn't a single woman and the doctor was said to be 10 miles away. With no female beside me, in the woods without a doctor nearby, I gave birth like a cat or a dog."

Kaichi had been in contact with his brother and had secured employment north of Nanaimo on Vancouver Island.

"We left on December 20. We hiked along the three-mile stretch of bad road, my husband carrying the baby and I the baggage. After one night in Vancouver, we went by boat to Nanaimo and after a day's trip by train, we reached our destination in the evening. One half mile along a bad road from the station was the shingle camp of Mr. Heiichi Imada (older brother of her husband). Twenty-seven men worked here. I was brought here to cook for these men. This time since I had a child, I did not have to do any laundry, I just cooked. However, 27 people meant a lot of work for a





Itoko Imada family photo ca. 1950 NNM TD 992

woman with a child, but I worked while weeping. I had to get up at five in the morning."

Mrs. Imada continued living like this for another nine years, moving two or sometimes more times per year, subject to her husband's whims. She continued to find it difficult to work and care for her ever increasing family, birthing a son in 1917.

"After my husband returned from the city, he told me that he had lost all the money gambling. When I heard that the big amount of \$1000 for which I had worked every day like a man from dawn to dusk, leaving my two young children at home, slogging through 4-5 feet of snow, had been all lost by gambling, I don't know how much I cried. But there were children to look after, so again I went into the woods and worked. I knew my husband's weaknesses — his love of gambling, his drinking and his fighting — and told myself that I would have to accept them. I vowed that I would do anything to raise my two children. I worked hard without complaining."

Eventually, in 1922, the Imadas bought land in Haney and settled there, beginning a farm growing strawberries and raspberries. Eventually they expanded to rhubarb, asparagus, white radish, Chinese cabbage, and hens. They built a large home, expanded the farm, and bought a truck to deliver their produce. They tried to

grow hops and their five sons worked the farm too. The Imadas even went to Japan on the Hikawa Maru in 1939, on a well-deserved vacation.

"In 1941, we decided that we were going to get a bride for my eldest son since he was now 25 years old. Following Japanese custom, many families still arranged marriages for their children in those days. We therefore decided to fix the house from top to bottom. We hired a carpenter and a paper hanger and we bought the best quality furniture for the living room, dining room, everywhere. However, in December Japan bombed Pearl Harbour and the following months were filled with worries, rumors, and problems."

Midge Ayukawa concludes the story by writing 'Mrs. Imada and her family subsequently suffered the hardships and indignities of the wartime forced removal of all Japanese Canadians from the coastal area. They chose to move independently to the Caribou – Taylor Lake. Although they eventually lost all their Fraser Valley land (85 acres) and most of their possessions, they managed to survive.'

Some of these quoted passages were included in the summer 2016 exhibit at the Nikkei National Museum. Audio from the exhibit can be found online at: centre.nikkeiplace.org/chino-otsuka-arrival/



KINORI SHINOHARA AND SANZO OKA About Their Marriage

by B. Masako Stillwell

My mother Kinori Shinohara, born February 22, 1904, left Fukuoka prefecture, Kyushu, Japan when she was 23 for an unknown Canada, the wife of a man she barely knew. Her husband Sanzo Oka was 37, and a farmer in Abbotsford, British Columbia. He had come to accompany her on the ship back to Canada. Although Kinori was just joining her husband, the marriage had been registered in Japan for several years.

Sanzo Oka first came to Canada in 1905 to join his father Tsurukichi and older brother, Shigeta. His family settled in Canada after some travel to and from Japan by his father.

Tsurukichi, the second son in his family, left Fukuoka in 1902, during the expansion of Japan's Meiji era. He went to Seattle via Hawaii, and boarded a ship going north with other Klondike gold seekers. He decided to disembark in Victoria instead, and travelled on to Gastown (as Vancouver was called) where he found work for several years before returning to Japan. He came back to Canada with his teenaged son Shigeta, and Sanzo followed a few months to a year later.

Grandfather observed the Canadian Pacific Railway bringing booming progress to the west, and saw this as his opportunity to make his fortune in the New World. There was a hopeful future here for him and his family. After two or three years of hard work together with his sons, Tsurukichi arranged passage for his family, and on April 16, 1909, his wife Tsuruyo, their four daughters, Masayo (Ikeno), Kikuyo (Muraoka Iwama), Yukino (Nakamachi), Shizuyo (Kawano), and reluctant oldest son, Hideo arrived. Hideo hadn't wanted to leave Japan because he had fallen in love; also, as a recent

graduate of Keio University, he thought his prospects were better in Japan. Differing reasons are given for why he came: either his parents wanted the family to remain together; or secondly, that his family, who were of samurai rank, disapproved of his girlfriend who worked in an office and was of a lower station. Hideo did emigrate, but could not withstand the rigours of hard labour in Canada. Contracting tuberculosis after two years, he returned to Japan to recover his health and marry his sweetheart, but his health broke down again, and he died, whereupon his childless widow returned to her family.

At first Grandfather and his family prospered as they settled in Vancouver, buying property at 854-7th Avenue, where they lived as the city grew. Tsurukichi was adventurous and entrepreneurial, but he was headstrong, and not very good at financial management. His ventures failed, so although he had never farmed, Tsurukichi put his remaining assets into eight acres of the Ball estate in Abbotsford, a beautiful place with orchards full of fruit trees. He turned to growing strawberries and raising poultry, with just he and the men working the land at first. Tsuruyo, who had been against this venture, refused to go. She stayed at the house, saying the girls had to finish their schooling. By the time Kinori came however, all the family had gathered together again.

This was the setting for Kinori's arrival into the wilds of Canada, and it really was that way in those days, according to Tsurukichi's granddaughter, Rose Nishimura. She emphasizes the Abbotsford area was very much wilderness as she was growing up. Neighbours lived far from each other, bears, coyotes and other animals roamed nearby, and many birds lived





NNM TD255-3-2. Their Marriage, Fukuoka Japan, 1926. Kinori Shinohara 22, Sanzo Oka, 36. Oka Family Collection.

in the area. Coyotes howled by the back fence at night. There was much hardship for people then.

The idea of Canadian wilderness didn't seem to concern my mother, and she had always liked horses. Her father had been the kind of samurai who rode horses, and after feudal lords stopped fighting and disbanded, her father was granted some land. He and a neighbour who also used to be a samurai raced their horses after the rice harvest. When her sister's husband was posted to Taiwan (which she called Formosa) as a governor or official, Kinori, at age 15, went for a year, to help her sister with the children. Kinori liked the notion of foreign countries after that experience.

Mother met Sanzo, her future husband, through her older sister Kikuyo, who was then living in Canada. Kikuyo and her husband Masami Taguma (of the Takashimaya department store family) lived in the Fairview district



NNM TD255-3-4. Kinori and Sanzo Oka, About late 1920s. The photo was taken at Main Studio, Powell and Main Streets, which was owned by Sanzo's brother-in-law, Gunji Nakamachi. Oka Family Collection.

of Vancouver. Tsurukichi's granddaughter, Dorothy Nakamachi, remembered the Tagumas well because they were so kind to her, especially Mrs. Taguma: they "always brought me a present". During a family visit to Japan, Kikuyo told Kinori about a neighbour who wished to marry a Japanese woman, and wondered if Kinori would like to live in Canada. Mother liked the photographs of my father, and as well, the idea of living in a foreign country. Perhaps farm life was something they had in common. So Kikuyo and her husband became the intermediaries — Mother called them the baishakunin. When they returned to Canada, her sister took Kinori's photographs with her to show Sanzo.

Either in 1922 when Mother was 18, or two years later in 1924, a marriage ceremony was held in Fukuoka without Sanzo Oka the bridegroom, and the marriage



was duly registered. Sanzo was to send a ticket as soon as possible for the passage to Canada. However it took a long time, either five years or three years. Mother says the wait was difficult for her, as she was teased about this, probably by her siblings, and undoubtedly noted by others. Sanzo could probably have sent a single ticket earlier, but had decided to wait until he saved enough to accompany her to Canada, and from the port to Abbotsford.

Kinori's first morning in Canada did not start well. She had never seen nor heard of the oatmeal, strawberries, and milk that was served for breakfast. The bright red porridge was so unusual that she could not eat it. Left alone, eating her oatmeal with salt later, Kinori felt overwhelmed and began crying, wondering how she had ended up like this, what was going to happen to her in this strange country, and feeling very alone, as her sister's family had returned to Japan. She was completely

reliant on her husband's family now.

Kinori pitched in with work on the farm. The circumstances were quite different from her home, where her family had domestic help. After strawberry season, she and Sanzo went to a logging camp in Ocean Falls. Kinori got a job there too, as a cook, but not having done this type of job before, could not manage it. She came back to Vancouver instead, and found work as a maid for a "Canadian couple".

Kinori quit her job when she became pregnant, although she had worries about money. Nancy Miyuki was born June 13, 1929, and while she was nursing Nancy, Kinori learned Western sewing. On the farm, it turned out there was little supply of water left in the well, and it being prohibitive financially to dig deeper, Sanzo and Kinori found other means to make a living.

NNM 2001.28.2.17. Sanzo and Kinori Oka, New Denver BC. ca. 1947. Oka Family Collection.

Sanzo obtained work in 1930 as a crane operator at Britannia Mines, and lived there with Kinori and their small daughter. Sanzo's salary was "\$40.80 and they deposited \$15 for saving." In 1932 Sanzo went to work in Powell River, and Kinori again did housework for a Vancouver family, while Nancy lived with Grandmother Oka and Nancy's cousin Kaneko in Abbotsford. Grandfather had died, and Grandmother was growing flowers on contract for sale in Vancouver.

> with tuberculosis. It was while she was in hospital that she developed a liking for poetry, having written some poems during her illness. When she recovered, she rejoined husband, was now working in Woodfibre, B.C., and they had another daughter,

> > Betty Masako. While she

was pregnant with their third

child, the proceedings called

Kinori worked hard, but became ill

"the internment" began. Living in a climate of fear and mistrust, the consensus of the unrepresented Japanese Canadian communities was against defiance of the

government orders for Japanese Canadians to leave the coastal area. Those who dissented, or passionately sought justice, were imprisoned in Petawawa and

Angler camps in Ontario.*.

Kinori, about to give birth, was very worried, not knowing when they would be called upon to move. Her mother-in-law, Tsuruyo, who was a midwife, was staying with her until the birth, but Tsuruyo was also very concerned about receiving notice to leave for the assembly centre** in Vancouver before she could go back to Abbotsford, where her sixteen-year-old granddaughter, Kaneko, had been left on her own. Kinori used the sewing-machine treadle constantly in an attempt to hurry the birth. Peter Eiichiro was finally born a few weeks before they were required to leave for Hastings Park, but Peter became very ill there, and had to go to hospital. Mother also became ill soon after. After four months, the family moved to 48 Fir Avenue,



Lemon Creek, where we lived in a partitioned house next to Grandmother Tsuruyo and her granddaughter, Kaneko. While there, Kinori succumbed to illness again, and went to hospital in Lethbridge, Alberta.

My sister Nancy finished school in Lemon Creek, and left for Toronto to do nanny "schoolgirl" work, and continue with her schooling. Father and the two children

moved to Bayfarm, while Mother was away. I was five and desperately missed my mother. I prayed as hard as I could that she would come back to me. We had lost most of Father's family, as they were in Ontario trying to start new lives. I really missed them, especially when I was an insecure minority teenager in a confused world. Thankfully Mother returned safely, and we moved to New Denver, and then again to another house. Temporary homes became the

norm.

My parents made the best of their situation during their required stay inland. They made friends and began going to the strong United Church congregation in New Denver. Mother made use of her early education by taking minutes for the women's group. In 1947 the whole family, including Masako and Peter, were baptized. My father took a name from the Bible, Paul, and my brother was christened Peter. Mother was not fond of domesticity, but she dutifully performed her expected tasks, from growing and canning vegetables, cooking, and looking after her family and house. When she could, though, she loved taking our rowboat out onto Slocan Lake and fishing. She continued her interest in poetry and joined a tanka poetry group in Lemon Creek, which later became scattered across Canada and Japan. The Kisaragi Poem Study Group's collection, MAPLE: Poetry by Japanese Canadians with English Translations, was published in Toronto in 1975. Father built a swing for us, an ofuro for our baths, and a chicken coop. He drove an ambulance for the sanitarium in New Denver.

During our stay in New Denver, a church missionary suggested to my parents that, in accordance with current thought, perhaps my brother Peter, who was intellectually disabled, would benefit by education at Woodlands School in New Westminster. After thinking it over, my parents decided to do this, and we drove

to New Westminster with Peter. Peter stayed in Woodlands School for 34 years with only the periodic visits our family could make.

He was later able to have a more natural life for many years in group home settings with caring staff members. We moved to Vancouver during that time, and were fortunate we could have more family visits with him, and enjoy many good times together.

People started moving away from New Denver after war's end. Father and Mother were no longer

young, and were unsure whether they should stay in New Denver, go to Japan like some were doing, or start anew. They finally decided to make a new start in B.C. Father, 62, got a job in Nelson, B.C., looking after the large agricultural grounds of a seniors' care facility. Mother, 48, also worked there as a kitchen aide. In the new world I was thrust into, at school and with friends, I also had to unlearn camp ways, and acculturate to a new environment, often through trial and error.

Having saved some money, one of Mother's first wishes was to make a trip to Japan. She was so excited while making arrangements and gathering together *omiyage* (or gifts) to take to her relatives. Her father was no longer living, but she was looking forward so much to seeing her mother, whom she had not seen for nearly thirty years. Mother had stopped writing to her family

NNM 2001.28.2.20. Baptism Day, New Denver BC, March 16, 1947. Sanzo 57 years, was christened Paul, Kinori 43, Masako 7, Eiichiro 5 years, was christened Peter. Oka Family Collection

regularly since the war stopped mail service to Japan, and we had changed addresses several times. As she was completing her preparations, Mother received the devastating news that her mother had died. Mother could not go in to work for several days. Eventually, however, Mother did take her trip to Japan.

My parents missed their friends in the Japanese Canadian community, and after four years in Nelson, they decided to return to Vancouver. An old friend, Mr. Toyofuku, gave Father, 65, work as a gardener. We stayed, like some Japanese families, at the Roosevelt Hotel, located at Main and Hastings Street. Father had hurt his back at the Britannia Mines, and after work, Mother applied medicated plasters to his back. Eventually gardening became impossible, and Mother and Father decided to buy a grocery store, the Colonial Confectionery at Commercial Drive and East 3rd Avenue.

The store stayed open long hours, and Mother and Father spelled each other off from 7 am to midnight. Father went to Kelly Douglas every morning to buy boxes of canned and other goods.

We lived in the two rooms behind. In one, a pot of strong tea always sat on the potbellied coal stove, our single source of heat. Intermittent customers made it difficult to do much cooking, and we ate poorly in those days. I remember Father suggesting to Mother that they consider selling the store and buying a farm to live on.

Those were hard times, perhaps more so than what my parents had already gone through. The store was held up two or three times. Both Mother and Father had illnesses and were hospitalized, and eventually my father died in 1960.

Mother felt unable to handle the store's affairs on her own after Father died, and called upon her eldest daughter, Nancy, to return and help her. Nancy had established her own life in Toronto, had friends, and was a well-respected supervisor at the Continental Insurance Company. She was reluctant to give all of this up to come to Vancouver, but felt duty-bound to return. Nancy's assistance with the sale of the store, in helping Mother find another place to live, and her strength and emotional support helped Mother immeasurably. Nancy later had a happy marriage in Vancouver.



NNM TD255-3-1. The young matron, early 1930s, with their daughter, Nancy Miyuki. Oka Family Collection.

Towards the end of her life, Mother lived in the seniors' homes Sakura-So on Powell Street and Cooper Place on Cordova Street. While there, she enjoyed taking trips with my husband and me, to Toronto and to the United States. Mother was a good traveller and a good sport, always willing to fall in with any plans. She also asked us to take her to Japan after receiving redress funds. We did, but on my part it was with great trepidation, what with meeting Mother's relatives for the first time, as well as with the inadequacy of my language skills. My husband met the situation with equanimity and was fine, even taking the train on his own once, despite there being no English signage. It was a good visit, albeit with



Mi-to-se-go-shi
Ma-do-be no ha-chi ni
Da-i-ri-n no
Nip-po-n ki-ku sa-ki
Wa-re- wo na-gu-sa-mu.

After three years
In the flower pot by the window,
The large flowered
Nippon 'mum bloomed.
It fills me with pleasure.

Kinori Oka MAPLE, Kisaragi Poem Study Group***

some communication gap, between Mother's hearing and my language difficulties; but we were treated very well by her younger sister, younger brother, and their families.

Mother led a life full of upheavals and hardship, but I am grateful for everything that she was able to do for us, and for providing the stability in my life that was so often lacking in her own. Mother did the best she could for the people she loved, and provided kindness to many, in her unassuming way.

Mother died at Mount Saint Joseph Hospital of pneumonia and heart failure at the age of 87, on March 27, 1991. Periodically, Mother would say she never thought she would achieve such an age, as she had always expected to die young. Mother is buried next to Sanzo now, the man for whom she had travelled so far. They are interred with other Oka family members at Aberdeen Cemetery, Abbotsford, B.C.



NNM 2001.28.2.5. Kinori Shinohara, 1922, Age 18. Probably the photo sent to Sanzo Oka before their marriage. Oka Family Collection.

^{***} p.155, MAPLE: Tanka Poem by Japanese Canadians, © 1975 by Kisaragi Poem Study Group, *The Continental Times*, Toronto, Ontario, Canada &



^{*} p.243, The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians © 1991 The Estate of Ken Adachi, McClelland & Stewart Inc. Toronto, Ontario

^{**} p.246, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of the Japanese Canadians*. An area in Hastings Park is named as the "assembly centre."

The Brown Suitcase: Arrival

NNM TD255-2-1c. Kinori Oka's Suitcase, circa 1920s. Oka Family Collection.

by Jessica Gerlach

This plain and simple brown suitcase carried the weight of two young women's hopes and dreams into the unknown.

This suitcase is believed to be the very one that Kinori Shinohara Oka used when she crossed the Pacific Ocean to begin a new life with a man she had

only known through the exchange of pictures. Kinori Oka was a picture bride, and is the woman who inspired Chino Otsuka's summer Nikkei National Museum exhibit entitled Arrival. In 1927, Kinori Oka left her home in Kitano-machi, Fukuoka prefecture, Japan to embark on a new life in Canada, her belongings packed into this brown suitcase.

The brown suitcase was then passed on to Kinori and Sanzo Oka's daughter, Nancy Miyuki Oka.

In 1945 Nancy made a journey of her own from the Lemon Creek internment camp in British Columbia with



displaced during the Second World War, she traveled to Toronto to seek further education. her

women

parents, Kinori Oka and her husband Sanzo,

left Lemon Creek to establish a new life in Vancouver. They bought and operated the Colonial Confectionary at 1832 Commercial Drive.

After Sanzo Oka's passing in 1960, Nancy returned to B.C., and her belongings were once again packed into this brown suitcase.

This plain brown suitcase has since been passed on to B. Masako Stillwell, who graciously donated the suitcase to the Nikkei National Museum.

Thank you, Masako. &

Jessica Gerlach is a 2016 Young Canada Works summer student assisting in the digitization of collections important to the Landscapes of Injustice project. She studies Anthropology at Simon Fraser University.

