

Nikkei **NIKKEI** national museum & cultural centre **IMAGES**



Participants of *The Suitcase Project* based in Seattle, Washington, pose for a photo after a meet and greet on Saturday, July 14.

Photo by Kayla Isomura.



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Welcome to Nikkei Images



Nikkei Images is a publication of the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre dedicated to the preservation and sharing of Japanese Canadian Stories since 1996. In 2018, the 30th anniversary of Japanese Canadian Redress, we look to the next generations for the continuation of these stories. In this issue, whether the content is historic, contemporary, or creative, all of the authors are students, researchers, or individuals who are themselves 4th/5th generation Japanese Canadian or *yonsei* adjacent. We welcome proposals for publication in future issues between 500 – 3500 words. Finished work should be accompanied by relevant high-resolution photographs with proper photos credits. Please send a brief description or summary of your proposed article to ireid@nikkeiplace.org. Our publishing agreement can be found online at centre.nikkeiplace.org/nikkei-images.

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& cultural centre

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Minidoka Pilgrimage by a Canadian *Yonsei* by Kayla Isomura

On a dry July morning, large white tents shaded me, and two hundred others, from the desert sun. We were at the end of a three-day journey in southern Idaho on the Minidoka Pilgrimage. Minidoka, also known as Hunt Camp, was one of 10 concentration camps in the United States during the Japanese American incarceration, which began in 1942, the same year as in Canada. The pilgrimage is an annual event including educational workshops, talk-back sessions, a tour of Minidoka – which originally spanned 33,000 acres –and a closing ceremony. Each year, more than 200 individuals and families attend.

Small tags were distributed to the participants – most of the tags were white, though some were shaded in red and blue, representing the colours of the American flag. I sat alone as the tags were distributed. Hunched over, as if guarding a secret, I neatly wrote the family names of my Japanese Canadian grandparents in block letters on a white tag: ISOMURA and MURAMATSU. Around me, over a hundred strangers did the same, silently replicating a fragment of Japanese American history. A few minutes earlier, I had hurriedly searched emails for the correct spelling of my grandmother’s

family name. Sometimes it slipped away from me, like the family names of other relatives I’ve met only a handful of times.

During the weekend, *nisei* shared their memories from Minidoka and other camps, struggling to hold back tears. Passion-fuelled comments acknowledged ongoing injustices. I watched as multi-generational families huddled together. Witnessing the intimacy of these moments, I often reflected back to my own family, and I wished my Canadian parents and sister were experiencing the Minidoka Pilgrimage with me. Thinking about the internment and incarceration of Japanese Canadians and Americans, I wanted to honour each individual and family who experienced that hardship during the Second World War. With over 22,000 Japanese Canadians, and 110,000 Japanese Americans, interned and incarcerated, that amounts to over 132,000 different stories and experiences – 132,000 people who faced injustices caused by two separate government bodies out of unjustified fear.

My body stirred with anger and sadness. I let the notion pass.



A Mixed Legacy

After the Second World War, Japanese Canadian and Japanese American families were intentionally scattered across the country and even to Japan, a foreign country to those *nisei*. That experience led my grandparents to small towns in Ontario and later to Montreal, QC, to raise a family. Eventually they returned to the West Coast, laying new roots in Richmond. They never shared their experiences within our family. Only recently, one of my aunts told me this about my grandma: “I remember asking Emma about the experience [of internment] and she would always minimize it saying she didn’t want to depress us.”

It’s a strange feeling to honour people you have little connection with. My grandparents died before I was born. Yet, without them and their own parents enduring the hardships that they did, many of us wouldn’t be where we are today. It’s a bittersweet history with loss in many forms – and, at the same time, a new



sense of community and reclamation. Many of us in the *youngsei* generation grew up without the stories of our grandparents. We were often isolated from the Japanese Canadian community and others of Japanese ancestry. Through the Minidoka Pilgrimage and other events, I hope that narrative is beginning to change.

The New Canadian's poetic spirit

by Carolyn Nakagawa

The Japanese Canadian Artists Directory, an online digital resource at www.japanesecanadianartists.com, was built on the foundation of a former print directory, *Japanese Canadians in the Arts: A Directory of Professionals*, compiled and edited by Aiko Suzuki in 1994, and an accompanying document, *A Resource Guide to Japanese Canadian Culture*. The digital iteration updates and expands on the original. It enshrines the legacy of Japanese Canadian artists in various disciplines whose creative works may not be known, either because they were made prior to the internet era or because they have been lost to time. The site allows current, practicing artists an opportunity to connect with peers and discover other artists' work. This article was originally published on the artists directory website as a feature, and is republished here with permission by site managers, the Powell Street Festival Society.

In 1943, British Columbia M.L.A. Mrs. F.J. Rolston called Japanese Canadians "unimaginative, unromantic and steeped in a cult of deceit" in an address to the Port Arthur Women's Canadian Club in Ontario. Commenting on this in *The New Canadian*, columnist K.W. lamented: "We've been so many things before, it doesn't faze us a bit. But 'unromantic, unimaginative'! Mrs. Rolston, you cut us to the quick!"^[1]

At this time, Japanese Canadians had already been treated as enemy aliens: banished from their homes, and effectively condemned as saboteurs by their own government when the reason for their forced removal was given as "national security." So by late 1943, the writers and editors of *The New Canadian* did not bat an eye at the accusation that they were "steeped in a cult of deceit." But to call Japanese Canadians, and particularly the idealistic young *nisei* who had founded *The New Canadian*, unimaginative or unromantic, must have appeared not only novel, but downright strange. As evidence to the contrary, K.W. cites "a few lines of verse a *nisei* student group once framed on the wall," entitled "Higher Education":

Let them forget their Euclid, Donne and Kant,
If, in long years to come they hear and see,
And call at need,
A wise man's quiet voice,
A marble arch,
A line of poetry.^[2]

The New Canadian newspaper was first printed in 1938 with two issues, and began publishing regularly in February 1939. The purpose of the newspaper was

to be a voice for "the second generation"; that is, for the young Canadians born to Japanese parents who were just coming of age at the time. The declared purpose of the newspaper was primarily a political one: to provide "some medium through which the *nisei* might speak his thought and his hopes to the Canadian public at large" in the face of rising anti-Japanese discrimination and to "rally a wavering minority group to a firmer consciousness of its peculiar position and the goal to which it must proceed in the land of its adoption."^[3]

From the beginning, however, arts and culture also played an important role in *The New Canadian*. The column "Odds and Ends" in the February 1, 1939, issue includes several poems, both previously published and originals from the author(s), pen-named "Deborah and I," and closes with an invitation to "send me some of your own poetry."^[4] Several readers evidently took up this invitation, as *The New Canadian* frequently published both longer and shorter poems by a number of authors. Though they were often only credited with initials such as "M.M.M." or "E.H.," or pen names such as "Dana" or "Asagao," some contributors, particularly Miyo Ishiwata, gained popularity with readers.

There are two clear reasons for *The New Canadian's* poetic tastes: the first is simply the inclinations of the editorial staff and contributors. *The New Canadian's* first editor-in-chief, Shinobu Higashi, was the first



Muriel Kitagawa, circa 1943. NNM 2017.7.1.1.1

Japanese Canadian to enroll in the English Honours program at UBC, graduating in 1937.^[5] Although Higashi left the paper in the spring of 1939, the staff and contributors continued to show an enthusiasm for literature, not only publishing poetry, but discussing contemporary writers such as John Steinbeck and William Saroyan, and speculating on the plot and eventual author of the "*nisei* novel." Eiko Henmi, another UBC English Honours graduate who would later join the editorial staff, wrote in 1939, "The great Canadian novel is as yet unwritten. Sugita, O Haru, Mark, Mariko – these people are in search of an author. This is an opportunity for someone to weave a tale shot with sunlight and shadow – to write a story significant of that stratum of society who are strangers, and yet not strangers, upon the Pacific coast. Why cannot that someone be you?"^[6]

Indeed, many writers and contributors were members of the "Scribblers' Circle," an informal group of "aspiring *nisei* writers and embryonic poets and poetesses"^[7] that met in Vancouver in 1940-1941. Usually hosted by Muriel Kitagawa, a frequent columnist for the paper, other staff and contributors who attended include Eiko Henmi, Miyo Ishiwata, Mark Toyama, Roy Ito, and the editor-in-chief himself, Thomas Shoyama.

The second reason for *The New Canadian's* support of poetry is more ideological. The newspaper stated: "Cultural, economic, and political assimilation are

During the summer of 2017, I was contracted as content coordinator for the Japanese Canadian Artists Directory. I found that my experience searching for information on Japanese Canadian artists was in most cases defined by generation: *issei* artists were obscure and worked in Japanese, and it was usually not possible to find more than a few hints about them within the tight timeframe of my contract. There were a few legendary *nisei* artists, but many others who were almost as obscure as the *issei*, even though they worked mostly in English. *Sansei* artists were mostly still living, reachable by email, and happy to update their information for me, often name-dropping other *nisei* and *sansei* artists who mentored or collaborated with them in their profiles. *Yonsei* artists are my peers, and many of them were invited to the directory through my personal contacts.

At that time, my own artistic practice was consumed by archival research into the early years of *The New Canadian* newspaper for a stage play, which I am now writing. My research showed me that the networks of mutual influence that I was seeing among the *sansei* artists and experiencing myself among *yonsei* artists had also been present in the *nisei* generation, and that although my play was about a group of journalists, literature and art played an important role in their social and political lives.

My artist profile:
japanesecanadianartists.com/artist/carolyn-nakagawa

– Carolyn Nakagawa

mutually inter-dependent and any advance which the *nisei* make in the one, will aid their advance in any of the other two."^[8] Since *The New Canadian's* vision for the *nisei* was based on political assimilation (i.e., equal citizenship rights, namely the same right to vote as white Canadians) and economic assimilation (i.e., equal job opportunities to enter all professions), it then

follows that they also encouraged cultural assimilation by publicly celebrating nisei achievements in Western art forms including music, theatre, and literature.

Another example of politicized support for *nisei* literature is the Japanese Canadian Citizens’ League (JCCL)’s Short Story Contest, announced in *The New Canadian* in the fall of 1940. While *The New Canadian* denied the charge that it was an organ for the JCCL, rather than for all *nisei*, many of the newspaper’s staff sat on the executive of the JCCL or were closely associated with its leaders: for example, business manager Yoshimitsu Higashi was in National JCCL president Harry Naganobu’s wedding party.^[9]

The JCCL, an organization which, like *The New Canadian*, declared *nisei* loyalty to Canada and lobbied for the franchise, also shared the newspaper’s respect for literature. In 1940, the JCCL replaced its annual essay contest with a short story contest, in the belief that “dramatic presentation of the stir of human emotion is often more effective and convincing than the most logical and reasonable analysis.”^[10] Certainly this was true for many readers of *The New Canadian*, both Japanese Canadian and otherwise. Watson Kirkconnell, reviewing poetry appearing in *The New Canadian* during its first full year of publication for “Canadian Literature Today,” felt that he was viewing “an invaluable record of the character and experience of diverse peoples...To read it is to see our newer citizens, not as mute coolies brought in to build our railways and toil in our mines, but as human beings as sensitive as ourselves to all the fundamental emotions and experiences of life.”^[11] In essence, this was the core of what the writers and editors of *The New Canadian* desired.

References

^[1] *The New Canadian* “Mountain Hermitage” November 13, 1943, page 1.

^[2] Ibid.

^[3] NC “Editorial” Feb 1 1939, page 1.

^[4] NC Feb 1 1939, page 5.

^[5] Ito, Roy. *Stories of My People*. Hamilton: Promark Printing, 1994. pp 184-185.

^[6] NC “Romance in Vancouver” May 27 1939, page 13.

^[7] NC “Town Topics” Jul 24 1940, page 4.

^[8] NC editorial “Music Hath Charms” May 1 1939, page 2.

^[9] NC “Town Topics” Apr 11 1941, page 4.

^[10] NC “Writers Wanted in Short Story Contest” Oct 2 1940, page 4.

^[11] Reprinted in NC as “New Canadian Poetry” Dec 22 1939, page 2.

^[12] NC April 2 1942, page 2.

^[13] Email with the author, June 25, 2017.

Literature and literary appreciation played many important roles in the various functions and aspirations of *The New Canadian* as a voice for the *nisei* generation and Japanese Canadians. During some of the darkest and most pivotal times in the 1942 period of forced uprooting from the coast, *The New Canadian* on multiple occasions published inspirational excerpts from established poets of the English canon such as Robert Browning, as well as uncredited short poems by Japanese Canadian contributors that responded to the political climate. Columnists occasionally expressed their sentiments in verse, often humorously, and on one occasion in 1942 an editorial took the form of a poem, satirizing “That Latest Story You Heard.”^[12] *Nisei* contributors such as Muriel Kitagawa and Mark Toyama published poems and stories that expressed their emerging identity as Japanese Canadians.

The practice of publishing poetry in *The New Canadian* continued for many years after the war. Helen Koyama, who worked for the newspaper in Toronto one summer in the 1970s, recalls: “Over the years I would occasionally submit poetry which [editor K.C. Tsumura] used to fill in blank spaces.”^[13] It is a tradition, then, that carried on for decades in the Japanese Canadian community, and survived its greatest period of upheaval with minimal interruption. It may seem like a modest gesture, but by utilizing precious print space for young Japanese Canadian poets, *The New Canadian* was most likely the first English-language publisher for Japanese Canadian literary writers, and as such played an essential role in the founding of Japanese Canadian literary expression.

JETsetting in Japan

by Emiko Newman

Emiko Newman graduated from Simon Fraser University with a major in English and minor in Sociology. In 2017 she moved from Vancouver, B.C., to Japan to work as an Assistant Language Teacher in the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme. Her great-grandparents were born in Miyagi, the prefecture next to Yamagata where she currently resides. One year later, she is still happily teaching and enjoying her life in Yamagata. Here is her story.

I had spent only two weeks in Japan prior to moving here to teach, so I was curious to see how that initial experience would compare to moving to the country for a minimum of one year. Would I feel culture shock? Would I fall in love with Japan and never want to leave?

To be completely honest, I was disappointed to hear I would be placed in Yamagata. I had hoped to live in the south where I had friends, and could experience a milder winter. The day I arrived in Yamagata, however, looking out at the lush green mountains through the Shinkansen window, I felt an immediate relief. Although I would be far from the ocean, being surrounded on all sides by mountains provided a great comfort.

It’s now been just over one year since that day. And I would never have wished to live anywhere else! Living in Yamagata has been a whirlwind of thrilling moments. With a population of 250,000, Yamagata city is not overly *inaka* (rural), but it is small enough that I run into people I know almost every time I leave my house.

Photo: Enjoying world’s biggest *sembei* in Matsushima Bay.
Photo by my dad.



As an ALT (Assistant Language Teacher), I teach at a junior high school about 15 minutes away from my house by bicycle. I had no prior classroom experience, so naturally I was nervous about teaching. On the day I was to give my welcome speech in front of the school, the gym was silent with over 800 perfectly behaved teenagers. The moment I stood up and walked towards the stage, the entire room erupted in excited whispers. To this day I’m not sure what they were saying, but it was shocking to have caused such a reaction before I even started speaking!

As I came to know the students and teachers over the next few weeks, I felt amazed by their kindness and hospitality. One teacher even went to Costco and bought me peanut butter and popcorn to make me feel more at home. The vice principal makes a huge effort to speak English to me, and I often find little treats left on my desk.

Of course, those first few weeks and months were also filled with isolation, confusion, and frustration. Despite working with seven Japanese English teachers, communication was often difficult. I constantly worried whether I was “ALT-ing” the right way. Was I contributing



Welcome to my school!

enough to lessons? Was I interacting with the students enough? Was I dressing appropriately? (Guidelines are very strict.)

Outside of work, too, the language barrier remained one of my biggest anxieties. Tasks that would have been simple at home, such as going to the post office or visiting the doctor, turned into time-consuming ordeals that left me exhausted. I often felt guilty at my lack of Japanese fluency. Over this past year I have had to continually remind myself that language improvement is a slow process – for both me and my students! – and to put less pressure on myself.

One thing that separates me from the other ALTs is having a Japanese name. I am met with confusion every time I introduce myself to both foreigners and locals. I explain that my grandmother was Japanese and that I



Yamadera, a nearby ski resort and onsen, in winter.



JET Programme

The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme seeks to enhance internationalisation in Japan by promoting mutual understanding between the people of Japan and those of other nations. The Programme aims to enhance foreign language education, and promote international exchange at the local level through the fostering of ties between Japanese and foreign youth. JET Programme participants serve in local authorities as well as in public and private elementary, junior high, and senior high schools. Generally, participants are appointed by a contracting organisation within Japan for a one-to-five year period.

For more information, visit jetprogramme.ca

am a *yonse* (4th generation), and the locals are usually excited. Although I have Japanese heritage, however, I will always remain foreign in their eyes. I have found the cultural boundaries here to be very rigid – but that is a topic for another day!

The locals in Yamagata have been nothing but friendly. I joined a local gym, where I'm always approached by people curious to know where I'm from and why I moved to their city. During traditional *enkais* (drinking parties) with my fellow teachers, a few reveal their desire to learn English. Their interest is heartwarming, but I've also encountered many mistaken myths and beliefs about foreign countries. One teacher told me he had never left Japan because he was a vegetarian, and was concerned that other countries wouldn't cater to his needs. Others have told me that foreign countries are too dangerous to visit. Each time I encounter such beliefs I attempt to persuade them otherwise. In all of these situations I feel grateful for the JET Program and its opportunities for cultural exchange.



Elementary school graduation ceremony.

My students are possibly the greatest part of living here. Going to work each day and seeing their energy and enthusiasm is incredible. Here are a few of the funny highlights from last year:

- One day I read out Japanese words for a test and the students wrote down the English translation. I mispronounced the word 顔 (*kao*), meaning face. All the students wrote “cow” and got it wrong. Oops!
- Correcting students' work one day, I learned that “Brazil's population is only two hundred seven million six hundred thousand eight thousand million.”
- Sometimes I get to teach funny English expressions to students. I taught one class the word “foodbaby” and spent the entire year hearing this yelled at me every time I passed them in the hallway.
- Luckily I have had to endure *natto* day for *kyushoku* (school lunch) only once. Most of the students ended up stacking their uneaten *natto* boxes on the teacher's desk in a towering pile of smelly beans.

- One class calls their teacher “asparagus teacher” because he's very tall and thin. After learning this I spotted asparagus-flavoured chips in the convenience store and brought them to the teacher as a gift. Unfortunately they tasted more like grass.
- One day after *kyushoku* I witnessed an epic *janken* (rock-scissors-paper) match where all the boys participated. The loser had to drink all seven leftover milk cartons. And he did!

This year I was selected for the role of Regional Advisor, in which I support the incoming JETs and help the ALTs with their lives in Yamagata. When I arrived here last August I attended the famous Hanagasa Matsuri, feeling dazed by all the newness. Just last week I led the new JETs at the same festival. I plan to stay in Japan for at least one more year, and I'm proud and grateful to be living in an incredible Japanese city I can now call home.

“you aren’t nice”:
On kinship, home, and being angry

by Nicole Yakashiro and Angela Kruger

This series was born from ongoing conversations between two good friends about the settler colonial politics of place and home. What are the stakes of calling a place home? Of finding home—or refuge, or sanctuary, or reprieve—in particular places? As settlers, how do we build better relationships to the land from which we benefit? These lands which we exploit, tend, name, and come together on? In an effort to build such relationships and enact our inheritance, these reflections seek to more intimately, carefully, and thoughtfully relate to places to which we (or our ancestors) have laid claim, however tenuous these claims have been, and continue to be. On a smoky day in August, this is what happened.

into the valley



I could say that it was when your grandpa showed us around the farm, our hearts syncing into a single, steady beat and following him like real deep everyday common forgot-to-bring-boots can’t-do-any-work love, with the soft, cool, messiness of the earth that we walked on, extending its reach beyond and through us—in shallots,

pumpkins, blueberries, daikon, squash, garlic, onions, and \$10 dead plants, in his little hat, his sweet smile, his smooth, strange joy—and in daffodils, despite their absence, because what else could rise up in full blown blasting yellow, reigning us in, keeping us kept, paced, pacing, and yet open to these new cardiac rhythms.

I could say that it was a car door (closed), an iced latte, your mom’s voice, and the way you looked at me when she said *You guys could be sisters* that told me once again that I love you, that you are my sister, and that I will always be home where you go, if I follow—which I will—but it was actually another archive that reeled me in—



The Yamadas lived in Bradner before 1942, ten years before Nicole’s family Library and Archives Canada, RG33-69, Volume 6, File 99.

—or like, multiple archives, each of them always one permeable membrane away, utterly plural and black and white, in their smiling, labouring rapture: the Yamadas, wherever they were then, are now, could be; the Hildebrandts, here and there, eating, talking over *paska*, *borscht*, watermelon, *rollkuchen*; and the tumult of other nameless, spaceless voices rising up in golden brown bakes, in flaxen fields, in happy sunflowers, and painted-on, grown-up daffodils, pushing us down, up, sideways, on, like it’s all they can do to force a recognition.

out to the sea



Souvlaki nights are Wednesday nights, here. And then there's chubby salad. But most of all, there's mom. I usher them into the backyard to take a photo together. They smooch their bodies together like they've endured the world like this—holding each other, molding, protecting, and maintaining home.

Pictures of her—from baby-hood, grade 3, grade 9, graduation—cover the house like polka dots and to mom, they're like trophies. I laugh at a tiny photo of her in a bowl of paperclips in the office. They are literally everywhere. I poke fun at these little presences, all the while tracing the path they create for me, tethering me from room to room, and tying me to memories that are not my own. But this feeling is familiar.

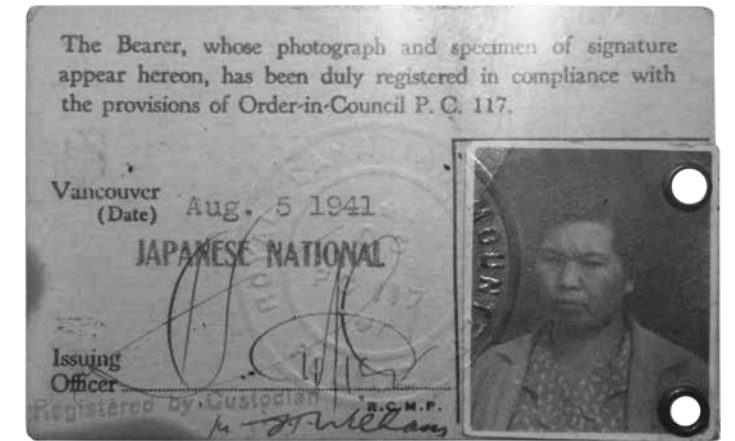
to the riverside



Refuge. Sanctuary. Yet, peppered with precarity and haunted by ghosts that scream a million different stories, from a million overlapping and intersecting times. Home is never unproblematic, here (or anywhere). The past breathes through these photographs, this vanity, that little tub of cream, and the post-it note reminder for her to “GET YOUR L”. This piece of stolen land. It cannot be solved, explained away, easily inhabited, or easily abandoned.

Later. A reflection. She cries. Tears that are patient, and kind, and unwavering. (So do I.) And we remember that our search for place(s), our mapping, is troubled. And we think, for a moment, that maybe that is the point.

in a map of this place, i would put
a road, with properties along one side
a cherry tree, on the side of the road
two dark cows, by the road by the tree
two old white men, who own the tree and the cows
one big field separating the cows from the men
and us, standing on the side of the road
like “what are we even doing here”
like “i don’t even know”
like “oh shit, there’s people here”
lol k bye hahaha



but you, who’ve got yourself out of the car and down the road and onto the grass and standing on it as if this dead grass border between road and field is your place to be, or as if it could be, or as if it was, or as if it might be, at least more than the road and more than the field, you who are worlds to me, you tell me shit, there’s people here, and go quiet, which is fine

but i don’t care that there’s people here, or well i do, but i don’t, and i’ll fight them both if i need to, because i don’t know but i do know that there’s such a thing as angry japanese canadian women and i’m one of them and they can’t stop you from standing on this dead grass border and looking for a cherry tree and they can’t stop me from standing here with you.

into town



It took us thirty-some minutes to find somewhere to park. But it could have just felt that way. Between heritage development signs and hungry colonial lines, Steveston was bustling and peopled with curious eyes—and she didn’t know how to feel. There’s a big toy store down on Moncton street—I imagine “down on Moncton street” meant something different seventy-five years ago, and something even more obscure before the street ever invaded this landscape. The shop is vibrant, colourful, and menacing. At least, it felt that way.

“Is this the original building?”

“Oh! Yes, yes it is – and it has all the flaws of a 100-year-old building too!”

“Do you know by chance of a Japanese-Canadian family who used to own a store here?”

“Oh, you mean the Nikaido owners? The store next door? I’ve been here for almost thirty years. I know a lot of the people who have been here.” (They didn’t know.)



Businesses now occupy rooms above the toy store. Among these rooms was one that her grandma, as a young one sometime before 1942, slept in quietly at night and muddled during the day. Sterile hallways enveloped by the smells of old and evicted pasts mark the space now. Closed doors, and more closed doors, hail us to search for what is beyond them. Maybe this was their home? Was it this one? Does it even really matter anymore? She's tired. So am I. Leaving felt necessary. Without words, we are shown an open door. This one leads us out and readily, we depart.

onto this street

Take Steveston Highway across #1 heading west, hang a left on... I don't know what it's called, uh, maybe four streets in, go left... and at the corner of Richmond and... you know what, gimme a second, let me look at a map. I'll send you a text.

"This one?" I ask, as we pull up.

"Yeah."

We're tired. We get out of the car and really we just stand there, looking at this house.

"Someone's home." (She's uncomfortable.)

"Yeah." (But not wrong, probably.)

"She built this house when she was like, 95."

"Wow."



Library and Archives Canada,
RG33-69, Volume 29, File 592.

"There's no stairs, so it's good, because now someone else, hopefully, probably a senior, can live here and not have to worry about stairs."

"Yeah, that's great."

"Yeah."

Tsuyu-san TSU-YU-SAN (Steveston girl) decl.

d/ 15 Aug 18. Evac. 18

Apr 42:

Tsuyu YASUI (wife) decl.
d/ 2 Apr 42. Evac. 18
Apr 42:
Bed (4 complete)
Sewing machine
Bureau
Gramophone & records,
Trunk,
Dolls
All at Cdn Pac Cannery
No. 1 House

Kitchen utensils at No.
2 House

The last time I saw that house, the last time I saw my grama, she was so tiny, and like, waving... When I see that house, that's what I see... There's like, this one connection that I had to [REDACTED] and I do miss that... a lot.

down to the inlet

But there were and are people before her and her family, after them, still here, and that is (in different ways and for different reasons) important. I found myself angry at something or someone else in those other places we visited, but here is different. I'm angry at me, and the very fact we're standing at this crossroads. Confusion and discomfort sit differently on this streetscape... why are we here, taking pictures of a neighbourhood

that is no longer “Japanese Canadian,” was perhaps never “Japanese Canadian,” and cannot—must not—be “Japanese Canadian.” Like a bad walking tour, we hurriedly did what we said we'd do, take a few images, like “good citizens.” Grandpa. Ferrera Court. Great Grandma. The Lion. Jackson. Powell. We love you both—but we're late to listening:



you aren't nice
you are mean
and secrets
usually mean
guilt¹

And you are entangled in threads of fragility and rage, weaving inside and outside, going on, over, and under, and trying to listen for the answers—stories beyond loss, us, and beyond “Japanese Canadian.” Inside, outside. Inside. Outside. An endless, angry inheritance.

all photos are provided by the authors or their families unless otherwise indicated

¹ Anonymous, found poetry on east wall of 315 Powell Street, 15 August 2018.

Japanese Omurice

by Yumi Nakatsu-Ariura | Age: 12

Yumi was a participant in The Suitcase Project exhibit by Kayla Isomura that was on display at the Nikkei National Museum from June to September 2018. With a mother from Japan and yonsei father, Yumi is a hybrid gosei interested in participating in the Nikkei community. Here is her favourite recipe.

Omurice! Originally from Japan and now known globally, *omurice* is a tomato flavoured rice wrapped in a yummy and soft omelette. *Omurice* grew in popularity because it's easy to make and can be made with any recipe but I think the main reason it's so popular today is because of the artwork that Japanese restaurants serve with the *omurice*. *Omurice* is usually served with ketchup. Sometimes, chefs and servers are able to draw characters or shapes with ketchup to your plate.

I will share my own recipe for this simple yet delicious *omurice*. And you can try to make it at your home.



For the rice

- 2 bowls of cooked rice
- half an onion
- 1 carrot diced
- 2 boneless chicken legs
- 3 teaspoonfuls ketchup
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- dash of salt and pepper
- 10 g butter
- 1 vegetable cube

1. Prepare the onions, carrots and chicken by cutting them to bite size pieces. Preheat the pan on medium heat with the butter.
2. Add in the chicken and season with salt and pepper. Cook the chicken until it is not pink.
3. Add the rice, ketchup, soy sauce, and the vegetable cube and mix!

For the omelette

- 2 eggs
- 1 tablespoon milk
- 10 g butter

1. Mix milk and eggs in a bowl
2. Melt butter in a pan over medium heat, then pour in the eggs. Once the egg is set, add the rice and wrap the rice with the egg.

A *Yonsei* Foodie Comes to Vancouver

by Kara Isozaki

I am Japanese Canadian on both sides of my family. Following the World War II injustices suffered by the community, my grandparents moved to Toronto, hoping for a better future. Two generations later, my extended family is humongous. Since we all live in Toronto, I grew up surrounded by my family and their food. Sometimes we meet at our go-to restaurants (usually Japanese places). But usually we have potlucks with family favourites that have been passed down through generations, like my grandmother's chicken *chow mein*. We share our latest discoveries of hidden gem restaurants and make plans to try them together.



Well trained by my family, I carry my love of food wherever I travel. I plan my itinerary based on the number of meals in a day and the distance between food places. So when I moved to Vancouver for the summer, I equipped myself with a list of food recommendations and made many promises to friends and family to post on Instagram.

I was hired as an archives research associate with the Landscapes of Injustice project, which uncovers the history of the Japanese Canadian dispossession. I saved money by packing lunches for work at the Nikkei National Museum where I was based and eating at home during the weekdays. On weekends, I ate my way through my list. Among the most memorable foods were a grated radish veggie dog from Japadog, a salmon burger at Hi Genki, shrimp *ceviche* at Guu, salmon from the Powell Street Festival bake, steamed clams in *sake* at Miko Sushi, and a shrimp *katsu* burger from Mogu (twice).

As with all my trips, when I came across unbelievably delicious food, I tried to imagine what life would be

like if I could eat that food every day. In Vancouver, these musings were particularly meaningful. In an alternate world, I could have grown up on this food. In that imagined history, Japanese Canadians were not forced from the coast, my grandparents finished their degrees at the University of British Columbia and found work in their birth city. Vancouver's food would have been just part of my family's tradition.

Growing up in that ideal history, I could have gone to the Powell Street Festival every year with my parents and eaten Japanese street foods. With access to cheap, fresh, melt-in-your-mouth *sashimi*, perhaps I would have chosen to become pescatarian sooner. My grandmother might have passed on a recipe for salmon rather than her chicken *chow mein*. My parents could have sent me to buy Japanese groceries at *konbiniyas* instead of searching for similar foods in Korea and Chinese supermarkets. My grandparents might not have been embarrassed to teach my parents Japanese and they, in turn, would have taught me. Simple, everyday things might have been different, like being able to read *furikake* packages to know what flavour I am buying.

Toward the end of my summer work contract, my cousin, my mother, my uncle, his partner, and I all found ourselves in Vancouver for one overlapping evening. We met to eat, of course. We went to Momo Sushi for *sashimi*. As we made plans to shop at the *konbiniya* afterwards, I was struck by a thought. Our serendipitous get together could have been a regular Wednesday night check in with my family.

As I pack my souvenirs (all *sembei* from Daiso) to travel home to Toronto, it's just some food for thought.

A Summer at the Nikkei National Museum

by Kaitlin Findlay

I spent the summer of 2017 in the Fuji Room at the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, along with fellow interns Nathan Yeo and Joe Liao. The three of us spent hours sorting through archival donations, housing them carefully and entering their descriptions into the museum database. We sat at the centre of an accumulation of boxes and joked that we worked in the "Fuji Room Vault," a second, unofficial archival storage area where collections manager Lisa Uyeda, our supervisor, stacked new donations as they came in.

Lisa appeared to be caught in an unending game of Tetris. She explained that as people were becoming more familiar with the institution, and as Japanese Canadians aged, donations were becoming steady and generous. While I worked at the table, she would wheel donations—old orange crates, dozens of pillbox hats, stacks of letters, and framed family photographs—to and from the actual archival vault downstairs.

One day, Nathan and I helped to stack an elaborate, heavy contraption of wood, wool, and cast iron into the room. We had no idea what it was. It turned out to be a homebrew *sake* set-up, preserved from the pre-war Steveston community.

Later, while Lisa was vacuuming the spider webs from this donation, I was struck by a wave of nostalgia. "The smell of rust reminds me of my grandparents' place," I said with a laugh. Lisa agreed, and we speculated on the correlation between growing up with your grandparents—surrounded by faded photographs, slightly moldy books, and stories—and becoming an archivist.

I had always intended to do a summer co-op as part of my Master's degree. The opportunity at the NNMCC wove together aspects of my research, my employment

with the Landscapes of Injustice project, and an interest in archival studies and museum curation. My time at the museum also allowed me to place the focus of my study (the dispossession of Japanese Canadians) into the broader context of Japanese-Canadian history and the many ways it has been told.



Nathan Yeo and Kaitlin Findlay cleaning a donation. Photo: Elisabeth Czerwinski.

Getting into the archives

When I started my co-op in May, I began working with the Tonomura Family Collection. A single box held the story of an entire family and their settlement—and re-settlement—in Canada over the course of the 20th century. It was preserved in glimpses through certificates, agreements, guestbooks, and photographs.

Senjiro Tonomura immigrated to Canada at the turn of the 20th century, and soon he and his wife, Kuni, had a small family: two sons and two daughters, two born in Japan and two born in Canada. After owning a boarding house in Vancouver for several years, the family purchased land in Mission and began farming in 1914.

Federal orders uprooted the Tonomuras from their homes in 1942, and then deported them from Canada in 1946. After a decade of exile, the Tonomuras slowly returned to North America and rebuilt their lives in British Columbia. As I processed their records, their story became vivid: an urgent letter from Moichiro, the oldest son, when he was imprisoned in Angler after refusing to leave his property; desperate appeals for refugee status in Japan when they were deported; congenial Christmas cards to John, Senjiro's grandson, when he returned to Vancouver after graduating high school in 1956. To fill in the gaps between documents, I referred to a biography of the family lovingly compiled by Marlene Tonomura, John's wife, who wrote with understandable admiration for this remarkable family.

Marlene had married John later in life and, amazed by the family's remarkable resilience, compiled the family collection. John passed away in 2015, and Marlene donated the materials to the NNMCC, believing that their story was worth remembering and sharing. Her plastic-ring-bound family history records the story as it was told to her—with wry humour and an eye to the serendipitous in life.

Understanding the stuff on the shelves

Making sense of the donation required quick learning. At least half of the Tonomura Family Collection, for instance, is in Japanese. Yoriko Gillard, an artist and translator, sat patiently with Nathan and me to provide cursory summaries of the material that we could provisionally enter into the database, until she would return later to read them more closely.

The collection also required lessons about Japanese culture. "These are shoes," I said one day, holding what I thought were shoes and ready to enter them into the database.

"No!" Yoriko said, explaining that they were more likely a decoration used in the hospitality industry, where miniature shoes were hung in an entranceway for good luck.

Like the shoes, the holdings at the NNM can have unexpected meanings. The most mundane item will have a surprising story, depending on who made it, who used it, where it started, and where it ended up. Inevitably, the objects are understood in relation to the forced uprooting, incarceration, and dispossession of Japanese Canadians in the 1940s. It is hard to avoid the disjuncture: this is an item from *before*, that was carried *to*, or that was used right *after*. It casts the most mundane belongings in a different light; they become remnants, testaments, and witnesses of lives that were so suddenly disrupted.

"Everyone kept their RCMP horse blanket," Lisa explained to me, referring to the blankets that the British Columbia Security Commission distributed to Japanese Canadians when they arrived off the trains in the Interior of B.C. I imagined the blankets being



A photograph of Jack (right) and Kaye (left) Kagetsu flanking an unidentified woman, from the Tadashi Jack & Kanaye Kay Kagetsu fonds. Photo: Kaitlin Findlay.

kept in a basement cupboard, and wondered if, for decades, they were saved less for the moment they symbolized (that first frigid winter of internment) than for their more ordinary, practical use of keeping warm.

Lives disrupted and re-assembled

Over the course of the summer at the NNMCC, however, I realized that I was also learning about re-assembly: the re-assembly of life after the war, of research projects, family histories, and new communities.

Near the end of my term in August I helped copy-edit Jack Kagetsu's biography of his father, *Eikichi Kagetsu, The Tree Trunk Can Be My Pillow*. It's a detailed profile of one of the most successful Japanese-Canadian businessmen before the war who may have lost the most money of all Japanese Canadians in the forced sale of his property by the Canadian state.

In the biography, Jack interwove his own memories with the archival records he meticulously assembled in the final decade of his life. The personal touches are arresting: glimpses of the small history of the everyday (New Years' celebrations, fishing trips, recitals, graduations) amidst the big history of political decisions and persistent racism that derailed the Kagetsu family's lives.

At the end of the manuscript, Jack included a complete version of the 1942 Canadian Security Commission report on his father, and reported being appalled at the Security Commission's misrepresentation of Eikichi. Jack says that his father was so much more than what the Security Commission reported; he was a businessman, an adventurer, a careful gardener, and a loving parent. The 300-page biography stands in conversation with—and in defiance of—the state record of Eikichi Kagetsu, which, in certain ways, justified his dispossession.

Things that my thesis will not be

I've spent months in government archives conducting research. Those institutions could not feel more different from the NNMCC. Rather than simply preserve material, the museum archive reflects and serves its community. Lisa is endlessly in conversation with donors and volunteers. Donors chose what stories to preserve. Researchers, artists, and community



Kaitlin digitizing records from the Ebisuzaki and Morishita family business at Library and Archives Canada. Photo: Kaitlin Findlay.

builders pass through its doors, creating projects in conversation with the past, whether as a reckoning, a reflection, or interjection.

As I went back to writing my Master's thesis, I had a clearer idea of what it would not be. It would not be a family research project like that of Marlene Tonomura or Jack Kagetsu. It would not be a creative production like the *Spatial Poetics* performances or *Japanese Problem* (two plays that ran during my summer in Vancouver.)

My thesis was different from these projects in that I was working within academia, a fraught realm that privileges certain knowledge over others, and different because I am not of Japanese Canadian descent. But it was similar to them also, in that it was an instance of someone relating to the past, inevitably in their own way. It's a humbling thought, but also an exciting one: rather than proposing to make a final claim about a history, I am instead joining a larger conversation.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to join the museum team for the summer and learn how archives can function as a lively hub of community. I thank the staff for exemplifying the patience, hard work, continued enthusiasm for learning, and attention to detail required to make an archives come to life.



Treasures from the Collection



Marie Katsuno's Pin

by Nathalie Picard



NNM.2001.6.3

Marie donated this Tashme Youth Organization (T.Y.O.) lapel pin to the Nikkei National Museum. Born in Vancouver in 1923, Marie, née Kawamoto, was interned in Tashme at 19 years of age. She was among the many Tashme residents aged 16 to 35 to join the T.Y.O., a group that organized community events in the camp during the internment. Living in Tashme and the other camps scattered around British Columbia, Japanese Canadians had limited freedom of movement and were cut off from the world where they grew up. Youth organizations in the camps gave them the chance to hold social events and create a sense of community.

Formed in 1942, the T.Y.O. consisted of four departments: service, education, athletics, and entertainment. Through these departments the members established Boy Scout and Girl Guide groups and organized baseball games. They also opened small libraries to share books and *The New Canadian* newspaper.

Among the most prominent community events that the T.Y.O. organized were holiday concerts. Functioning like variety shows, the bilingual concerts were wildly popular. The 1944 Easter event featured a famous blind pianist from Vancouver named Ronnie Matthews, a skit, and a dance performance by the “Tashme Beauties.” In a letter to *The New Canadian*, a T.Y.O. member named Bernadette wrote, “Really, this benefit concert soars highest in the field of entertainment.” Indeed, it was so popular that the concert ran for four nights to meet demand and, according to Bernadette, “the majority of Tashme-ites attended [the concert] no less

than two [times].” Through events like these, the T.Y.O. helped keep up spirits through difficult times for the families living in the camp.

By the end of the war, after spending over four years together, the Tashme community had grown close. The T.Y.O. members had lapel pins made as a souvenir of the friendships made during the internment. Years after life in Tashme, Marie kept her T.Y.O. pin. It served as a marker of identity and belonging. Those who wore the pins shared in that belonging – they were “Tashme-ites.” Having worked together to shape Tashme’s community, their pins showed a sense of pride in what they had built.

In the same way that the T.Y.O. organized themselves as young Japanese Canadians in Tashme, contemporary young Japanese Canadians are meeting and organizing today. From the Japanese Canadian Young Leaders Conference on a national level to local groups like the recently-formed Kikiai (聴き合い) Collaborative in Vancouver, young people are attempting to build bridges and start conversations about what Japanese Canadian identity means to them. Writing plays, curating exhibits, and engaging in difficult conversations, the modern-day community reflects the efforts of their predecessors. Some sport *yonseï*, *goseï*, and *youngseï* pins, signaling a belonging and pride in their identity as Canadians of Japanese origin – and echoing Marie Katsuno’s experience in Tashme 80 years before, and the T.Y.O. pin she held on to all that time.