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Grace Eiko Thomson. Collage by Kathy Shimizu.



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Welcome to Nikkei Images



2020 is a milestone year for Nikkei Place. In 2000, the Japanese Canadian community was eagerly anticipating the September grand opening of the National Nikkei Heritage Centre which included the Japanese Canadian

National Museum (JCNM) therein. Many years and name changes later, and as we find alternative ways to commemorate our 20th anniversary in unprecedented pandemic times, we devote this issue of *Nikkei Images* to Grace Eiko Thomson who was JCNM's intrepid Director/Curator and part of this publication's editorial committee in those early days.

Even before I assumed the Director/Curator position at the Nikkei National Museum in 2015, Grace Eiko Thomson's legacy was already firmly in place. She had helped advise my predecessor, Beth Carter, who shepherded the museum for six years before moving on to the Bill Reid Gallery. Grace took me under her wing early on, and has remained a constant mentor, advisor, constructive critic, and friend.

In this issue you will read stories of Grace's many accomplishments from those who have worked closely with her over the past many years. Her dedication to honouring, preserving, and sharing Japanese Canadian history and heritage, which remains this museum's mandate, is tireless despite Grace's constant annual resolution to retire. I look forward to many more years filled with Grace.

— Sherri Kajiwara, Director/Curator, Nikkei National Museum

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Leading by Example in the Japanese Canadian Community: Honouring Grace Eiko Thomson

by Dr. Arthur Miki, CM, OM



“Art” Miki, former President of the National Association of Japanese Canadians.

I have known Grace Eiko Thomson for decades. I know of her community leadership, her interest in the preservation of Japanese Canadian history, and her work as an advocate for human rights. She has shown her dedication to and engagement with the Japanese Canadian community by taking on leadership roles, as President of the National Association of Japanese Canadians, and with local British Columbia organizations in the arts and human rights. She encourages the participation of young and old to be proud of their heritage and culture to ensure that the Japanese Canadian community will continue to be relevant, and contribute to multicultural Canada.

As a young child in the 1940s, Grace became the translator and spokesperson for her family when they were torn away from the confines of a comfortable Japanese-speaking community in Vancouver, British Columbia and were interned in Minto, British Columbia and at the end of the war moved to Manitoba. The hardships the family encountered and the responsibilities helped to shape Grace to be a determined, persistent, strong-willed individual with a strong sense of social justice.

After her children had grown up, Grace returned to school to graduate with her Master's Degree in Fine Arts.

Editorial note: A grassroots community group has nominated Grace Eiko Thomson to be inducted into the Order of British Columbia in 2020. In preparation, we required letters of support from individuals who could speak to her amazing history. This is edited from a letter of support by Dr. Arthur

This paved the way for her to experience travelling north to Nunavut to assist Inuit artists and to become Director at Prince Albert Art Gallery. Twenty years ago, Grace became the Executive Director of the newly established Japanese Canadian National Museum in Burnaby, British Columbia, and was curator for the inaugural exhibit, *Reshaping Memory, Owning History: Through the Lens of Japanese Canadian Redress*. This was followed by her work to recognize the Vancouver Asahi baseball team which began by curating the exhibit, *Levelling the Playing Field*. Her passion for the preservation of Japanese Canadian history demonstrates to me the importance of remembering our history and helped in the development of the Japanese Canadian community as it exists today in Canada. When the Canadian Museum for Human Rights was established in 2014, Grace provided the text for the Japanese Canadian exhibit. She is currently working on her memoirs to ensure her experiences will be remembered.

Much of her work has been influenced by the racism and discrimination suffered by Japanese Canadians before, during, and after the Second World War. Grace has made it her mission to counter the effects of racism by supporting others facing discrimination and by participating in the rallies and hearings for Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation.

Grace Eiko Thomson is a tireless volunteer who serves as an outstanding role model. She has mentored many young people in the arts community in British Columbia. Her energy and enthusiasm is evident today as she continues to influence the Japanese Canadian community, creating historical legacies by documenting the Japanese Canadian experience and fighting for the deserved respect and recognition for those who suffered injustices. Grace Eiko Thomson is truly a worthy candidate to be a recipient of the Order of British Columbia. 🌸

Grace Eiko Thomson: A Model of Service

by Tenney Homma



On December 10, 2017, Parks Canada and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) invited the extended Homma family to the unveiling of the plaque commemorating the national historic significance of our grandfather's court case *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma*. His landmark legal case challenged the law that denied Asian Canadians and First Nations from voting and sparked the pro-democracy movement in Canada. This was a proud, memorable occasion for our family.

The Hommas would like to formally acknowledge the work and dedication of Grace Eiko Thomson; she was instrumental in having Parks Canada and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada officially recognize our grandfather's contribution in the struggle for political and equal rights for every Canadian citizen.

It has been Grace's commitment to authenticate and document the heritage of the Japanese Canadian community that prompted her to participate in the plaque nomination process regarding my grandfather and his lawsuit. She embraced her leadership role in this project with vigour and spirit and worked in a thorough, professional manner, overcoming challenges, and at times, sacrificing her personal life. It should be noted that Grace devoted over ten years to this endeavour.

In 2006, Grace was initially invited to attend a Parks Canada Ethnocultural Workshop hosted by Parks Canada and the HSMBC. The seminar focused on the nomination and designation process for national historic commemorative plaques. Grace presented a description of my grandfather's contributions and achievements and then she forwarded his application to the HSMBC for designation consideration. Her initial submission proposed the designation of Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma as a person of national historic importance. The HSMBC requested that the nomination be changed to a historical event, *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma*. This amendment

required Grace to prepare a written supplementary report on my grandfather's landmark legal case.

As you can imagine, the nomination for the designation process required immeasurable time and an extensive skillset to create an accurate, detailed submission regarding my grandfather's political endeavours. Grace methodically sought out individuals for guidance, interviewed many, and comprehensively researched and examined all the available resource material. The collected information was integrated and organized to effectively highlight aspects of Tomekichi Homma's contributions while serving the early Japanese Canadian community and advocating for their rights.

During her involvement with this project, Grace had contributed during each step of the nomination and designation process. In fact, when the draft of the plaque inscription was revealed, she diplomatically suggested to HSMBC to change the text to better explain the historic significance of my grandfather's court battle. It was a heartfelt moment for our family to read the inscription on the plaque during the unveiling ceremony.

Personally, it has been a privilege working with Grace. She made a concerted effort to consult with me in a collaborative manner, informed me with updates from HSMBC, and ensured I participated in the decision-making process for the site of the *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma* plaque. I valued how Grace fostered a respectful, cooperative working relationship and incorporated the importance of ongoing communication.

We are fortunate and grateful to have an individual such as Grace Eiko Thomson who has made it her mission to serve the Japanese Canadian community. From the beginning, I witnessed this disciplined academic work tirelessly with fortitude and patience on the HSMBC project. She has been a committed advocate, motivated by a selfless sense of purpose to achieve a goal that required persistent effort and focus. Upon reflection, I believe Grace has been driven

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Amazing Grace

by Cindy Mochizuki and Daien Ide



Daien In the fall of 1999, I was a shy young individual from Ontario and new to British Columbia. Luckily, I was armed with a Master's degree in Anthropology and an eagerness to be part of a community actively getting ready to open a new facility called the Japanese Canadian National Museum. It was then that I met its first amazing executive director, Grace Eiko Thomson – amazing, because she took me under her wing and showed a world of curatorship and dedication that I remember and carry with me still. Her own childhood memories of Vancouver and internment dovetailed with my memories as we remembered those like my great uncle Tadasu Ide, an early leader for the Japanese Canadian community whom she recalled with high regard.

Cindy In the spring of 2010, in the last year of art school, I took a Directed Studies course and created my first multi-media three channel video installation on an autumn ritual of picking *matsutake* (pine) mushrooms through the lens of my family, told and performed by my own body. Sometime during this year I met Grace and invited her to see my first public art event at the Bartlett Space on Alexander Street. Grace showed up and spent careful time viewing the video which

was experimental and complex – as I remember, two channels were projected on large screens and one on a small monitor on the floor. I was nervous for what she might say. But to my surprise, I was encouraged when her response was positive and supportive. I remember her enthusiasm towards my work and how her words of support nudged me to keep going in this very daunting and precarious field. As a young Japanese Canadian woman artist I felt that from that day on, a wide net was cast below me. That an invisible/visible support as powerful as can be would be there when I needed it. I can say that this was the beginning of meeting one of my mentors and this was one of the individuals who made my journey as an artist possible.

Daien Most remarkable was Grace's passion for creating the space for people of any age and background to come together and share their stories. Her humour gave staff joy. Her passion as our director inspired us and she always encouraged us to follow our dreams. She has always provided unwavering support. Even ten years after working with her, I applied for another Master's degree at UBC (because one does not seem to be enough these days) and without hesitation, Grace was there to write her glowing recommendation. Now an archivist, officially anointed, I am mindful of what an indelible mark she has left on me.

Cindy Now ten years later it is the year 2020, and Grace is still one of my mentors but through time has become also a peer and a friend. Her experiences as a contemporary art curator, as a museum curator and as an artist alongside her life wisdom, humour, and strength have given me and countless others many long, long hours of meals, coffee, phone conversations where we have talked about our worries, struggles, confusion, doubts, the successes, and the losses. She continues to support a community of growing emerging generations, providing long hours of advice and wisdom. Grace continues to be a pillar of strength

There was never a shortage of food at the table or nourishing conversations. And on it goes into the next generation; Daien's five-year-old has a fondness for 'Bachan Grace' and her pies. These special moments have been memorable and life changing to us and have made great impact on our lives.

also in the area of our history as a Japanese Canadian historian, activist, writer, and knowledge keeper. She guides her peers and those younger who are struggling to understand their identities and experiences.

Daien My few years working with Grace may have been short relative to the decades of her numerous accomplishments, but they are not to be forgotten. The Museum's inaugural exhibition *Re-shaping Memory, Owning History: Through the Lens of Japanese Canadian Redress* (2000) and *Levelling the Playing Field: Legacy of Vancouver's Asahi Baseball Team* (2004) made sure that Japanese Canadian history had due recognition as an important part of Canada's development as a nation. She continues to speak on the importance of that history and the need for people to tell their stories so that the reality and consequences of what happened are understood. I can only hope that I am able to impart a fraction of the skill, knowledge, confidence, and wonder Grace has demonstrated over her many years. She used to say she was working nine days a week during the most deadline-driven moments. She is creative whether it is art or mathematics, but the gravity of her statement is true. That dedication and advocacy for communities whose voices have yet to be heard, are what really make her an outstanding individual.

Cindy Grace is a lifetime mentor for many. Her outstanding achievements both in the public institutions systems including galleries and museums in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan (1991) where she worked with Canadian and First Nation artists, the Burnaby Art Gallery (1995), the Japanese Canadian National Museum (2000 – 2002, now the Nikkei National Museum), and her years working in Winnipeg as an artist, curator, and art history instructor are also of major significant value. Her ongoing work and dedication in the community, fostering a space for growth, education, and mentorship to countless individuals is tireless, and with such spirit is an enriching aspect of our community. It is because of her character that there are several of us working and leading in the fields that we are in and continuing to survive in our chosen fields. I am indebted to her friendship and knowledge, guidance and wisdom as a significant individual who is recognized both nationally and internationally.

Cindy + Daien We both remember warm meals made by Grace at her home. A chicken cooked with saffron, a fruit pie made from scratch, glasses of wine, cups of tea. There was never a shortage of food at the table or nourishing conversations. And on it goes into the next generation; Daien's five-year-old has a fondness for 'Bachan Grace' and her pies. These special moments have been memorable and life changing to us and have made great impact on our lives. ✨

Early Days at the JCNM: Grace Eiko Thomson as Scholar, Mentor, and Friend

by Dr. Andrea Geiger



More than two decades have passed since the day in 1998 that I first climbed the narrow staircase to the second floor of the small building on East Broadway in Vancouver BC, that was the first to house what was then the Japanese Canadian National Museum. I had

driven up from Seattle where I was a graduate student in history at the University of Washington to begin my dissertation research. Broadly interested in ways that law had been used in western North America on both sides of the Canada-US border to create and maintain racial boundaries, my particular interest in the historical experience of Meiji-era Japanese immigrants stemmed from my own experience of living in Japan with my family as a child. I recognized the importance of relying not just on English-language sources but on Japanese-language sources in retelling their stories and had decided that I wanted to begin my research in Canada at the JCNM. It was there that I first met Grace Eiko Thomson, who would be named founding director of the Museum.

Surprised as she must have been both to see me appear at the top of the stairs and by my request to access Japanese-language sources, Grace welcomed me kindly and responded warmly and generously as I explained my research interests. It was immediately apparent that she herself was a scholar who

understood my underlying concern with developing a broader understanding of the kinds of prejudices that we as human beings seem so adept at directing at one another, the ways in which they come to be reflected in law and policy, and their impact on those who are the object of those prejudices. Grace quickly turned to Reiko Tagami, the other volunteer researcher there at the time who, with Grace, had begun the long and painstaking process of cataloguing the materials that the museum had begun to acquire, and asked her to pull the Homma file for me. The Homma case, Grace said, was one that I might be interested in researching in greater depth. At the time, there were just four or five sheets of paper in the file. Three or four of them were a genealogy of the Homma family, which traces its ancestors back to retainers of the Ashikaga shoguns. The only other sheet of paper in the file at the time was the first page of a decision by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in England upholding British Columbia's denial of the vote to naturalized Canadians born in Japan. Grace's kindness and professionalism in directing me to the Homma case led to the publication of my first academic article¹ and, during the months and years that followed, gave me a chance to contribute to the Museum's collections in turn by donating copies of materials I located, including copies of the lower court decisions and newspaper articles, for others to use in their own research. Grace's insight and understanding of what would ignite a deep and abiding interest reveals

Grace's insight and understanding of what would ignite a deep and abiding interest reveals the critical role that astute curators and archivists play in shaping fields of history and public understanding on a day-to-day level not always visible to others.

the critical role that astute curators and archivists play in shaping fields of history and public understanding on a day-to-day level not always visible to others.

It was Grace, as well, who made me aware of the rich collection of oral histories in the Museum's possession, many of them interviews with Japanese Canadian elders who were the sons and daughters of Meiji- or Taisho-era Japanese immigrants. During the weeks and months that followed my first meeting with Grace, I spent many days and hours listening to these tapes, sitting at the table in the center of the single large room that then comprised the JCNM. To this day, I think of those whose voices I listened to on those tapes – some speaking in the warm, rough dialect of Hiroshima that I had become familiar with while living in Japan – as my first teachers of Japanese Canadian history.

During the years that followed, I had the pleasure of watching Grace's efforts to launch the JCNM take root and grow. Now known as the Nikkei National Museum and housed in the beautiful building in south Burnaby that is the Nikkei Centre, the Museum's archival collections have also expanded to a degree that would

have been hard to imagine during those early years. This is thanks to the efforts Grace and others have made to collect and preserve documents, artefacts, and photographs related to the history of Japanese Canadians – from the journeys of the earliest immigrants who arrived in the late 1800s to the challenges they endured following their forced removal from the coast and beyond. The Museum's invaluable collection of oral history tapes, in turn, has now been digitized and is available online.

All of these achievements speak to the importance of the quiet conversations in which Grace, like many others, has engaged as museum director, curator, and archivist – conversations that have played a critical role in facilitating the development of the field of Japanese Canadian history as well as public understanding of this history in ways that are not always apparent. We are all her students and indebted to her for her inherent kindness and lifelong commitment to protecting and preserving the stories, artefacts, and history of the Japanese Canadian experience in all its complexity and humanity for current and future generations. ✨

¹I chose to use the title of the case as it was originally framed – Homma versus Cunningham – in the title of my essay, published in 2005 in *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest: Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians in the Twentieth Century* (University of Washington Press), in order to emphasize Homma's courage in challenging the discriminatory provisions of B.C.'s Provincial Voters Act. Often forgotten is that Homma prevailed in B.C.'s lower courts and that it was only by borrowing and distorting a legal concept rooted in U.S. history and law that the Privy Council was able to piece together a "rationale" for overturning the lower courts' decisions.

Grace Matters

by Naomi Sawada



I met Grace Eiko Thomson in the late 1990s. I was finishing my time as curator at the Japanese Canadian Museum and Archives (then located on East Broadway by St. George Street in East Vancouver), and she was just beginning her formative involvement there. I

liked her instantly: I liked her enthusiastic optimistic nature, her intense interest in Japanese Canadian identity, her desire to correct the shocking lack of information available about our history; and I liked that she was (as she still is) an engaging storyteller. There was sparkle when she talked about childhood experiences, compassion when she shared memories about the internment of Japanese Canadians, and ironical laughter when she relayed stories about being an unsuspecting model for a full-page fashion spread of “exotic... Kabuki and Obi” spring fashions in an April 1959 Winnipeg Hudson’s Bay advertisement.

When she talked about her studies at the University of Leeds with Griselda Pollock, the renowned scholar of post-colonial and feminist studies in visual art and culture, Grace exuded a confidence that history matters, that the way language is used matters. Echoing Linda Nochlin’s famous essay of 1971, “Why Have There Been No Great Woman Artists?” she gave urgency to a crucial question raised by many in our community: “Why have Japanese Canadians been omitted from British Columbia’s and Canada’s history?” She made that question matter.

As the Executive Director|Curator of the Japanese Canadian National Museum, Grace was a gifted curator, an enthusiastic collaborator, and a vigorous and tenacious administrator. Establishing a program for exhibitions, collections, publications, and educational activities – not to mention organizing a staffing plan –

she drew on deep wells of charisma, scholarship, and creativity, and she put in more hours of hard work than one can imagine.

Her exhibitions worked to fill the gaps in our community’s history, taking up the stories of Japanese Canadian Redress (*Re-shaping Memory, Owning History: Through the Lens of Japanese Canadian Redress*, September 2000-2005), of Japanese Canadian photographic studios in Cumberland, New Westminster, and Vancouver (*Shashin: Japanese Canadian Photography to 1942*, November 2007–March 2008), and of a group of young Japanese Canadian ball players who dazzled the Vancouver minor-league baseball scene (*Levelling the Playing Field*, October 2005–September 2006). Through research, interviews, and displays of photographs, objects, correspondence, and memorabilia, these exhibitions told stories that had fallen into distant memory and been made invisible by racism. She helped to shape the history of Japanese Canadians by allowing the voices of people in the community to be heard and seen. She has also enriched the histories of British Columbia and Canada.

Grace built relationships with directors and curators in the local and national museum scenes. She connected with researchers, scholars, and professors. She facilitated collaborative research projects between university departments and the museum. In turn, she was invited to present papers at conferences, participate on museum advisory committees, serve as a guest lecturer, and co-lead programs at the major universities in the province: Simon Fraser University, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Victoria. Under her leadership, the museum was not only a repository of information for students, it was a place where they could be mentored and participate in the creation of new knowledge; it was the start of a community-based research program.

Echoing Linda Nochlin’s famous essay of 1971, “Why Have There Been No Great Woman Artists?” she gave urgency to a crucial question raised by many in our community: “Why have Japanese Canadians been omitted from British Columbia’s and Canada’s history?” She made that question matter.

During the period she was Executive Director|Curator, 2000 – 2002, Grace wrote more than 20 grants, raising over \$310,000 for exhibitions and programs. She secured grants from (among others): the BC Arts Council, British Columbia Millennium Fund, Canadian Race Relations Foundation, Consulate General of Japan, Heritage Canada, National Association of Japanese Canadians, National Nikkei Heritage Centre Society, University of Victoria, and Vancouver Foundation. This was an astonishing accomplishment for a new museum that had the equivalent of less than three full-time staff positions. Her peers, the members of the juries who decided those grants, recognized the significant contributions of the museum to provincial and national discourses.

Despite Grace’s significant role at a crucial moment in the history of the museum, her contributions to its formation have been noticeably under-recorded. In the struggle to persuade people about how a new museum should be organized, how long-term plans are made and put into action, and how to manage the day-to-day operations of a growing organization, Grace came up against a battle for power and influence inside

the local Japanese Canadian community, and very real prejudices against the perspectives and leadership of a woman. We are familiar with the stereotypes. In general, we are not raised with the idea that a woman can be opinionated, charming, determined, expect others to be progressive, and at the same time be admired, supported, and keep her job. We are born as individuals but are raised to be deferential and polite; the cultural imperative is to be agreeable to others. We rail against inequality and bias, but these continue to be the reality of many women.

Grace’s training at Leeds gave her the tools to analyze historical discrimination and to write Japanese Canadians into history – but the story of her own time during the early development at the museum has been silenced. Grace’s achievements have been remarkable. Her story matters.

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*Parts of this article have been adapted from my letter to the editor, *The Bulletin*, Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens’ Association, October 10, 2002. 🌸

Part 6: The Final Straw

Grace Eiko Thomson and the Exile of Japanese Canadians from BC

by John Price



Grace Eiko Nishikihama (Thomson) was eight years old when her family was forced to leave the coast in March 1942. It would be decades before she could return.

Even today she recalls the plaid, pleated skirt and knitted sweater her mother had made and that

she wore for her last day at Strathcona Elementary when she said goodbye to her classmates.

She also recalls how stressed her mother was: Expecting her fifth child, Sawae Nishikihama had been forced to sell the new electric stove the family had just purchased.

How do you move a family when allowed to pack only a few bags on short notice?

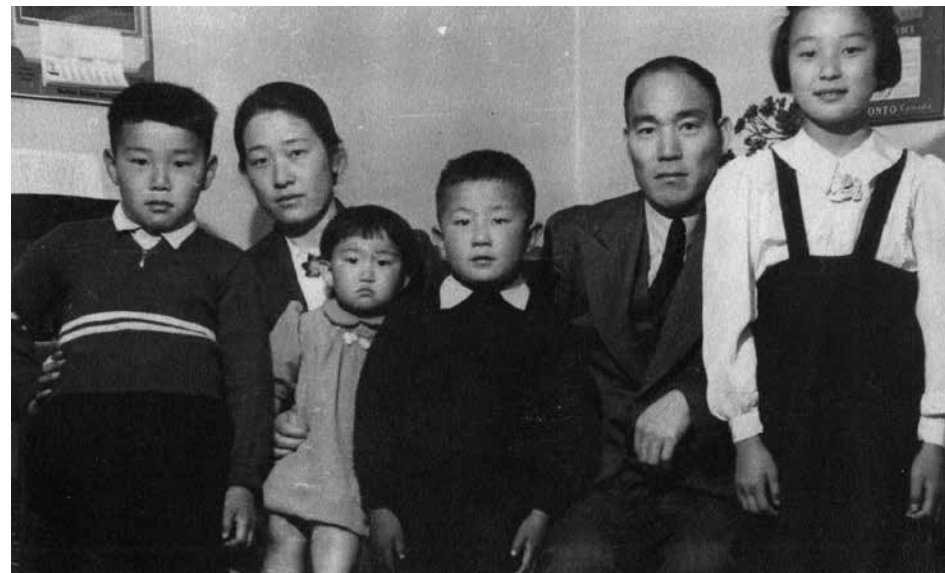
“My family was feeling really good living near Powell Street in those days,” says Grace. “My father went to work at his job in the fisherman’s co-op every morning in a three-piece suit. They had come to Canada with a dream but their whole life turned into a mess!”

After discussions with fisher relatives in Steveston, the family opted to go to a ‘self-supporting’ camp at Minto. The uncles had a bit of money, but Grace’s family had little in the way of savings.

Once at Minto, her father worked in a sawmill to make ends meet. Grace recalls how happy her father was to see his children when he returned home.

Initially, the family hoped to return to the coast and, as Allied forces began to take the offensive in the Pacific war, that seemed like a possibility. But then the government sold all their possessions – there was nothing to return to.

Even as the tides of war turned, BC members of the legislature agitated for a final solution to what they perceived as the “Japanese problem”.



Nishikihama family, leaving Minto for Manitoba in 1944. Grace Eiko Thomson Family photo.

BC deputy premier and attorney general R.L. Maitland, president of the Canadian Bar Association and a key figure in the early campaign to uproot, remained resolute. Stopping Japanese Canadians from returning to the province was essential, he told the Native Sons of British Columbia in late 1944.



Japanese Canadian children at Sunday school, Powell Street United Church, Vancouver. Grace is fourth from left, second row. NNM 2010.80.2.98

In the United States, however, the Supreme Court had forced the Roosevelt government to end its policy of incarceration and many Japanese Americans began to return to their homes on the coast in early 1945.

But not in Canada.

Panicked by US developments and under continuous pressure from BC, the Mackenzie King government made a fateful decision: Anyone over the age of 16 in the camps and elsewhere was forced to sign a declaration indicating whether they wanted to be ‘repatriated’ to Japan or move east of the Rockies.

This was a choice that was not a choice – an ultimatum, in fact, to stay out of BC: either go to Japan, a place most had never seen, or move east of the Rockies. Those that chose Japan would be stripped of citizenship.

There was to be no return to BC.

The premier, John Hart, thought that was just fine, and argued for forced deportation of Japanese Canadians at the dominion-provincial conference on reconstruction in August 1945.

Even with the war ending, the provincial and federal governments had declared Grace’s family and 22,000

other Japanese Canadians *persona non grata* in BC, revealing a bitter truth – the uprooting, dispossession, and exile that had begun in 1942 was more about virulent racism than anything else.

The possibility of forced deportations prompted an upwelling of protest from Japanese Canadians and their friends. The Co-operative Committee on Japanese Canadians launched a lawsuit against the War Measures Act and federal measures stripping the rights of those who opted to go to Japan.

Arguing the case for expulsion at the Supreme Court in early 1946 was none other than R.T. Maitland, B.C. deputy premier and attorney-general, determined to force Japanese Canadians into exile. Maitland and his federal associates largely won the legal battle but lost in the court of public opinion – many had become concerned about citizenship rights, even in BC.

Grace’s parents initially chose to go to Japan but, like others pressured to make that decision, they soon recanted and indicated they preferred to move east. In 1945 they moved to a farm near Middlechurch, Manitoba.

Grace's mother, Sawae, recorded in her diary: "Manure clinging on straw hung stuck to these walls. A bare light bulb hung from the high ceiling. I stood in the middle of this barn, which was to be home to our family of six and couldn't hold back the tears."

Like Grace's family, over ten thousand Japanese Canadians were coerced to move, a second time, to be spread out across the country. The forced dispersal gave rise to a new diaspora – Japanese Canadians whose roots are in BC but who ended up east of the Rockies.

As well, close to 4,000 Japanese Canadians were essentially deported to Japan, a country many had never seen, a travesty documented by Tatsuo Kage in *Uprooted Again*.

In 1947, BC's Hart government refused to reinstate voting rights of Japanese Canadians and First Nations, though Chinese and South Asian Canadians won back those rights.

And in 1948, the new BC premier, Byron Johnson, advised the federal government not to allow Japanese Canadians to return to the coast, otherwise the Liberals might lose a by-election. As a result, the prohibition on returning to the coast continued, to be lifted only in 1949.

Not a single family from Victoria ever returned to live there; of 3,000 Japanese Canadian Islanders only about 150 determined souls returned.

Japanese Canadians were struggling just to survive. Grace and her family left the poverty of Middlechurch for Whitemouth, and then moved to Winnipeg.

Grace finished high school in Winnipeg and then went to work, attending classes at business college in the evenings – the family could not afford to send her to university.

After working for years and inspired by her creative mother, Grace finally was able to pursue her passion for art, registering at the University of Winnipeg as a mature student. She graduated in 1977 with a fine arts degree and did graduate work in Asian art history at UBC, where she gained a deeper appreciation of her heritage.

She returned to Winnipeg to work as assistant director/curator of the University of Manitoba art gallery where she began to advise Inuit printmakers. Travelling to the



Grace Eiko Thomson, then president of the National Association of Japanese Canadians, attending a board meeting of the World Peace Forum Society, 2006. J. Price photo.

north regularly, she began to understand the impact of colonialism.

Her feminist consciousness also bloomed, leading her to do a graduate degree in the social history of art at the University of Leeds. Told that "another feminist wasn't needed," she found herself unemployed on her return.

Taking a position as director/curator of the Prince Albert gallery, Grace began extensive work with Saskatchewan's aboriginal artists. Before 'decolonization' was even a buzzword, she was doing it – co-curating an exhibit, *Separate Identities, Shared Worlds*, with the late Bob Boyer of the Indian Federated College.

Moving to Vancouver to be with her mother, Grace took a position with the Burnaby Art Gallery where she continued her cross-cultural explorations.

In 1995, Grace was asked to coordinate a gathering of Japanese Canadian artists from dispersed communities across the country. *Tsudoi/Gatherings* finally brought Grace home – she reconnected with her community and never looked back.

"I really feel that, of everything that happened, I am very sad for my father. After 1942 his life was totally destroyed. He worked in odd jobs but had serious ulcer issues. He went to cooking school in 1960 and got a job in the kitchen at Misericordia Hospital. He finally found a few happy moments in later life."

Appointed director/curator of the Japanese Canadian National Museum when it opened in Burnaby in 2000, Grace resigned that position after two years but went on to curate landmark exhibits including *Shashin: Japanese Canadian Studio Photographers to 1942* and *Levelling the Playing Field: Legacy of Vancouver's Asahi Baseball Team*.

She later served on the board of the National Association of Japanese Canadians and was president from 2005 until her retirement in 2010.

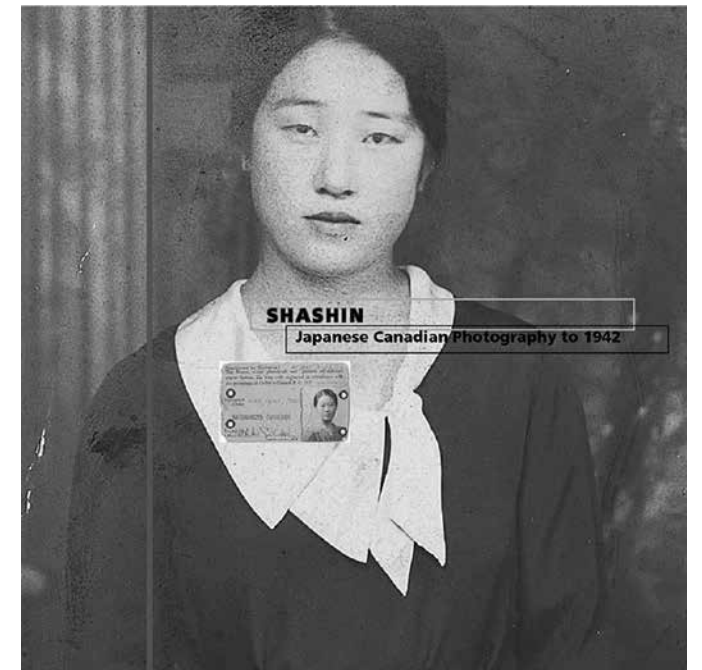
"I really feel that, of everything that happened, I am very sad for my father. After 1942 his life was totally destroyed. He worked in odd jobs but had serious ulcer issues. He went to cooking school in 1960 and got a job in the kitchen at Misericordia Hospital. He finally found a few happy moments in later life."

"My mother, Sawae, was quite emotional and unhappy in the last few years of her life," recalls Grace who has recently completed her family memoir which she hopes to publish soon.

At 86, Grace Eiko Thomson (Nishikihama) remains a force to be reckoned with as she continues to write, agitate, and reflect: "BC redress is long overdue – it's 2019 for goodness sake!"

This article was first published in the Victoria Times Colonist on 8 December, 2019, and in The Bulletin, May, 2020, the final instalment in a six-part series.

John Price is professor emeritus (History) at the University of Victoria and the author of Orienting Canada: Race, Empire and the Transpacific and, more recently, A Woman in Between: Searching for Dr. Victoria Chung (with Ningping Yu). 🌸



Grace Eiko Thomson collaborated with UVIC's Phyllis Senese, Patricia Roy, Jan Gates, and Imogene Lim (VIU) and to produce the exhibit *Shashin* that included extensive photography of the Hayashi, Kitamura, and Matsubichi studio of Cumberland.

Kankei: Reconnecting to community, culture and identity

by Norm Ibuki



Kankei (Kenkyusha Dictionary): relation; relationship; connection; influence; the relation between matter and mind; be related (to); have relation (to); be connected (with); have to do (with) participate (in); take part (in); be involved (in); have influence (on); affect; form a connection (with).....

The first word that came to mind when asked to write something about Grace is the Japanese word *kankei*. Generations of Japanese Canadians (JCs) have grown up without much Japanese. What was really lost for me as the child of internment survivors was not so much property: it is the stolen culture and community that has impacted me most. Grace patiently responded to my many emails and to help guide me to a better understanding of *kankei*.

Grace points out that, *This word is one used often by the issei, as everything they have experienced in the past and continues to be influenced by is because of the kankei, that is the connection to the past, through influence of friends or relatives, through community,*

and also to avoid kankei, in order to avoid, to protect ourselves from getting involved, in situations or in others' affairs, if that makes sense. It does. Living in Japan for nine years, I was intensely aware that kankei ran to the roots of Japanese culture.

From my earliest memories of growing up in Toronto, I remember my parents seeking out the company of other JCs (friends from “the camps”), relatives, and wives of visiting Japanese workers whom mom had a knack for running into at the grocery store. For her and dad it must have been a safety-in-numbers issue at a time when there was still a lot of open anti-Japanese sentiment.

Even after a few decades of exploring the meaning of Japanese Canadian for myself, I must say that I haven't gotten very far as it seems as nebulous as it did in the 1990s.

Whatever I am now is thanks largely to my *kankei* with my parents, family, and those who I have serendipitously met like Lloyd Kumagai, Tak Matsuba, Thomas Makiyama, Chie Kamegaya, Pauli Inose, and Grace Eiko Thomson. I piggybacked on each of their coattails over certain critical times in my life to form aspects of what I am.

Grace's JC community *kankei* includes being a featured subject in the “Hayashi Studio” documentary (2018) by Hayley Gray about the remarkable photo collection of Senjiro Hayashi that is preserved at the Cumberland Museum and Archives in British Columbia (<https://www.storyhive.com/project/show/id/3715>). Grace's pioneering efforts include becoming the first woman president of the Manitoba Japanese Canadian Cultural Association and the Greater Vancouver JCCA; becoming the National Association of Japanese Canadians Secretary and President. She also curated two seminal exhibitions: *Shashin: Japanese Canadian Photography to 1942* and *Leveling the Playing Field, Legacy of Vancouver's Asahi Baseball Team*; recently

“The JC artists who attended the Homecoming conference expressed that they wished to connect with each other. Since that time, the artists have earned their status as national and international artists, not dependent on their JC connections, so any *kankei* that they had wanted in the early years diminished. . .”

completed her memoir, and is leading an important discussion about the naming of the Nikkei National Museum in Burnaby, BC.

Asked about the state of the national JC community today, Grace says that she has used her art *kankei* to build bridges: *...with funds received from NAJC, at the 1992 NAJC Homecoming Conference in Vancouver, we held two artists' conferences, one in Toronto in 1994, and the other a year later in Vancouver. The JC artists who attended the Homecoming conference expressed that they wished to connect with each other. Since that time, the artists have earned their status as national and international artists, not dependent on their JC connections, so any kankei that they had wanted in the early years diminished...Toronto has, I believe, developed its own community activities and organizations without the national need to connect. Vancouver, I believe, developed a bit differently. Being on the west coast, we are perhaps more connected to Japan so community activities such as Shinnenkai/New Year's party gathering and Kerokai/Seniors' activities are attended largely by Japanese language-speaking JCs. On the other hand, GVJCCA and Powell Street Festival activities have connections to the communities at large (i.e., Indigenous, Downtown Eastside), and are produced annually largely by the younger generations of mixed heritage. What I am seeing is the younger generations are no longer Japanese Canadians as we were, but Canadians of various ethnicities and gender, reaching out socially and in support, across cultural communities.*

Recently, there has been an interesting discussion that Grace brought to my attention about the usage of Japanese Canadian versus *nikkei*. It seemed odd. As I had never heard of an ethnic group rebranding itself, I had assumed that the term Japanese Canadian was interchangeable with *nikkei*. However, as Grace explains: *I have spoken out about these terms especially as regards to the museum change of name from Japanese Canadian National Museum*

to Nikkei National Museum. I think people use the term nikkei without thinking. Nikkei is not incorrect in some usage since it means anyone of Japanese ancestry. But what is forgotten is that nikkei is anyone of Japanese ancestry, living abroad, not someone who has citizenship, as we do, and are rightfully called Japanese Canadians.

However, you can use the word nikkei when you say for instance, 'there is a nikkei conference in LA.' Which means that anyone of Japanese ancestry is invited to the conference. By using nikkei you don't have to say, Japanese Americans, Japanese Canadians, Japanese Brazilians, etc., and you are giving notice of the conference to anyone with Japanese ancestry. As for the name 'Nikkei National Museum', what I take offence to is that this museum originally opened as the 'Japanese Canadian National Museum', similar to the Japanese American National Museum, and is a museum formed out of Japanese Canadian Redress compensation assistance. It is a place for preservation of our history through archival collections, used toward Japanese Canadian history preservation, and a place for collaborative research, leading to exhibitions, and much more.

It is a museum about Japanese Canadian history preservation... that is, the journey of Japanese immigrants to becoming citizens, becoming Canadians, not an easy journey, as we know, and this should be recognized in the name of the museum where such documentation is held. We are Canadians, not (just) nikkei.

Words matter. I take great exception to the dropping of "Canadian" from my identity by some faceless bureaucrats as it severs my sansei kankei ties with my issei grandparents and nisei parents, their histories, obscuring their sacrifices, hard-fought and ongoing battles to be recognized and accepted as Canadians first and foremost.

Author's note: Thanks Grace for your courage, voice, leadership and, most of all, friendship. 🌸

My Friendship with Grace Eiko Thomson

by Judy Hanazawa



I developed a friendship with Grace upon meeting her initially in the 1990s. She had come from Winnipeg in 1995 and assumed a position as Director/Curator at the Burnaby Art Gallery.

Grace established friendships quickly, especially among Japanese Canadian artists

upon her arrival in the Vancouver area. She offered her home on many occasions so friends could get together. She was always available for discussions and to support others, not only about their arts projects, but also about general concerns and challenges. Grace has been a friend who gave 100% support when support was needed. She has also been thoughtful, diplomatic but honest when she felt it was necessary for a friend to consider another view or course of action in a situation. At times, in our friendship, we have had differing views on a matter. There would be heated discussion but also a point when there was a respectful conclusion reached to allow a matter to rest, understanding it was alright to have different points of view.

She is also honest about her own life. Upon attending university as a mature student she discovered she needed to continue pursuing her individual life course and establish her own career. She has expressed gratitude that her children and grandchildren are doing well. She is especially proud of her sons who have been successful in their chosen careers. As a grandmother, she has been a solid support to her grandchildren. When her grandson from Japan recently stayed to attend cooking school in Vancouver, she was available to cook, shop, clean, and take care of things each day during his stay, as well as to assist him in doing reports in English. She laughed recalling her

duty to accept and test his baking attempts as part of his studies.

Grace has an interesting way of blending, organizing and making decisions in her life according to her individual view, priorities, her heart as well as practicalities. She definitely sees and identifies herself referring to her professional role as an artist (sculpture) and art curator, as a teacher, and as a social activist. She has a particular focus upon those in the arts, and expresses a special empathy with the unique perspective which artists have and how it is manifested in their work. She sees musicians in the same way. Sometimes people make mistakes and when her friends do, she continues to give her honest advice and support. She is especially reactive when she feels there is unfair judgment against a person. When the Asahi exhibit was subtitled, referring to 'levelling the playing field', the title was especially meaningful to Grace, as she believes it is always important to level the playing field in a society where colonialism and racism has been part of established history. She also identifies the social rigidity in traditional Japanese society and traditional gender roles from the same perspective – that it's important to see the person, not the role and not judge or assume. Grace has always had friends among young people and it is probably because they innately recognize she wants to see and know and appreciate people for who they are, as themselves rather than being defined by others.

Grace has done in-depth work on reviewing her life and the history of our community. She doesn't mince words when she recalls the hardship and the lost life opportunity which her parents experienced. She vocalizes her view based on her clear sense of justice and need for righting historic wrongs regarding First Nations Peoples first, and others, like our community. Last year when she and I were campaigning along Main

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My Friend Grace

by David Jensen



My name is David Jensen and I have had the honour and privilege of working with Grace Eiko Thomson on a couple of occasions. I have been the principle of D. Jensen & Associates Ltd, an exhibit design firm, for over forty years. My company is engaged in assisting museums and cultural centres create

exhibits on a wide range of human and natural history themes. It is through this work that I met Grace.

My first opportunity was to collaborate with Grace on an exhibit discussing the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War and the subsequent redress. For this exhibit, we developed structures reminiscent of the housing found in internment camps, showing the cramped and cold living conditions displaced Japanese Canadians were forced to endure for several years. We also constructed a life-size photo mural of a store front, damaged in the Vancouver race riots of 1907.

The second exhibit we worked on together was focused on the story of the Asahi Baseball Team that played in Vancouver between 1925 and 1940. In this exhibit, we used original illustrations enlarged to recreate the Asahi's home grounds at Oppenheimer Park. Using forced perspective, we placed the team on the field as if they were playing a baseball game. Surrounding the field were houses and buildings typical of that location, many of which still exist today. A visitor's first impression was of a friendly game of baseball, however as visitors moved around the field and looked into the windows of the surrounding buildings, they began to discover racial slurs. This juxtaposition set an appropriate scene to tell the story of the teams' great success in the emotionally charged environment of fear and racism, lying just below the surface.

While working on these two exhibits, I came to know Grace as a skilled, knowledgeable professional as well as a compassionate advocate for the rights of all people, but especially Japanese Canadians. She brings passion and discipline to her work. She has a commitment to speak her mind without compromise and her dedication to honesty and authenticity is remarkable. She understands the thoughtful development of content materials is critical; whether it's an exhibit, a presentation, or a workshop.

Grace and her family experienced the severe emotional impacts of racism and social injustice during the Second World War. As an academic she also has the knowledge to provide insights that make this experience relevant and meaningful for everyone. This focus on providing insightful content, and her ability to share these insights with other team members, is exceptional. For those of you who have never participated in developing a museum exhibit, you should understand that the finished exhibit is often a direct reflection of the exhibit development process. From my experience, it is rare to have such a spirit of collaboration between an exhibit curator and an exhibit designer. I credit Grace with this achievement. She has an uncanny ability to foster empathy, support, and commitment from the people around her. The energy and excitement we shared while creating the exhibits to communicate these stories became a key component in our presentations, and was a big part of the reason why our exhibits were so well received. Aside from her tireless determination to speak and expose past wrongs, she also has a delightful sense of humour. She always has a twinkle in her eye, ready with a playful gesture or a funny quip. Her ability to get things done and to bond with collaborators makes her a force to be reckoned with. Grace Thomson is a remarkable person who has dedicated her life to making the world a better place by offering insights that challenge negative attitudes and by providing a positive vision for all; I consider her a national treasure. ✨

A Life Dedicated to Justice, Healing, and Memory: Grace Eiko Thomson

by Derek Lam



As a student and educator of history I have always been drawn to issues like injustice, redress, and memory. During my younger years, I gave a great deal of thought to the individuals who might be considered the pillars of this type of work in Canada and British Columbia, the giants on whose

shoulders educators and historians dream of standing. I know now that these “pillars” and “giants” are rarely the loud, the boisterous, or the expected – those who come from places in society that have the resources and the privilege to advocate for justice on behalf of the marginalized. The individuals who inspire us are more often people like Grace Eiko Thomson – people who, in spite of experiencing hardship and injustice as part of their own past, can still embody the strength, compassion, perseverance, and an unwavering sense of right and wrong necessary to open the hearts of communities around them.

Grace’s influence can only begin to be understood by reflecting on a life’s work towards justice, healing, and memory. Throughout her life, Grace’s approach to her work has been one based on patience, thoughtfulness, and steadiness. It is with humility and honour that I was able to accept *Nikkei Images’* offer to write about her life’s achievements.

Personal History

Grace, one of five children, was born Eiko Nishikihama in Steveston Fisherman’s hospital in 1933. Her parents, naturalized Canadian citizens from Japan, raised her and her siblings at 510 Alexander Street until 1942 when, by order of the Canadian government’s War Measures Act, they were moved to the self-supporting internment site of Minto Mines, BC.

Art was ever-present in Eiko’s life in Minto, albeit informally. Her mother was her earliest and most

constant inspiration, always engaging in art by example. Eiko watched her read, practice calligraphy, plant and arrange flowers, and even write poems on bark taken from the trees in the surrounding forest. Her mother also designed and sewed all of the clothing Eiko wore as a child.

Following the end of the war, the family was forced by the Canadian government to relocate further east of the Rocky Mountains in a second uprooting, leaving Minto Mines and finding a home in rural Manitoba. Eiko would take the name Grace, offered by her mother, in order to overcome discriminatory remarks in the classroom. The family moved to Winnipeg in 1949 when government restrictions on the movement of Japanese Canadians were finally removed, five years after the Second World War had ended. Grace held jobs as a stenographer and secretary while going to school in order to help her parents afford to buy a home. As a young adult, Grace took interest and participated in local Japanese cultural events and performances and, in 1959, she married Alistar MacDonald Thomson with whom she would raise two sons.

Education

With the encouragement of her husband and friends, Grace began her formal post-secondary education in the late 1960s when she registered as a mature student at the University of Winnipeg. There she studied history, sociology, and political science. In 1973, following her love of art, she enrolled in the University of Manitoba’s School of Art where she graduated with honours, earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1977. From 1980 to 1982, she attended the University of British Columbia to undertake graduate studies in Asian Art History.

Professional Career and Achievements

After her time at the University of British Columbia, Grace returned to the University of Manitoba to accept a position as Assistant Director and Curator at the

University’s School of Art Gallery, and later taught art history as a part time instructor. During her seven years curating contemporary art, she was also invited to act as art advisor to Inuit printmakers in the Northwest Territories, assisting Inuit artists in choosing images for their drawings, producing collections of prints, and advising the Canadian Eskimo Arts Council on selecting pieces.

The experience was eye-opening and had an enormous impact on Grace. She recognized in the Inuit another community that had been displaced by the Canadian government, and she witnessed colonial powers exercise complete control over Inuit art. While Inuit art was a flourishing business with high profits for those who sold it in the south, Inuit artists and their families were still living in relative poverty in the north. This triggered Grace’s focus on cross-cultural and intercultural issues in art and society.

In 1990, she took a year’s sabbatical from her position as at the University of Manitoba’s School of Art to study for a masters degree in Social History of Art under renowned feminist scholar Dr. Griselda Pollock at the University of Leeds. After receiving her master’s degree, she chose to move to Prince Albert and take the position of Executive Director and Curator of the local gallery while also teaching art history at the University of Saskatchewan. There, she continued to work with Indigenous artists to promote their art. With major local artists, she arranged for Indigenous artists to take part in the annual art festival and, along with the eminent Métis Cree artist Bob Boyer, curated a travelling exhibition of Saskatchewan Indigenous artists. After three years in Prince Albert, Grace returned to Vancouver in 1995 and continued to highlight cross-cultural themes as curator at the Burnaby Art Gallery, including a series of exhibitions titled *Tracing Cultures*. Soon after her return to Vancouver, Grace recognized a need for the public to learn about and collaborate with Asian Canadian communities. In 1996, she co-founded Asian Heritage Month, a non-profit society dedicated to recognizing Asian Canadian arts and culture in the month of May, and has recently been honoured by the Vancouver Asian Heritage Month Society and exploreASIAN for her leadership and contributions.

Grace’s efforts towards the establishment of the Nikkei National Museum began in 1998 as a volunteer consultant for what was then the Japanese Canadian National Museum. She was appointed as the founding

Executive Director and Curator in 2000, a position that paid for two days of part-time work a week but required a full-time commitment every day which Grace fulfilled on a volunteer basis. The Japanese Canadian National Museum opened on September 22, 2000, as a tenant in the new National Nikkei Heritage Centre, with an exhibition curated by Grace entitled *Re-shaping Memory, Owning History: Through the Lens of Japanese Canadian Redress*.

After two years, concerns regarding interpretations of the differing roles of board and staff members led Grace to resign from the position in 2002. In her time away from the Museum, Grace curated *Leonard Frank: The B.C. Security Position Photographs* for the Presentation House Gallery in North Vancouver.

After the Japanese Canadian National Museum and National Nikkei Heritage Boards merged in 2002, Grace was offered and accepted a contract to curate two exhibitions that she had previously proposed: *Shashin: Japanese Canadian Studio Photographers to 1942* and *Levelling the Playing Field: The Legacy of Vancouver Asahi Baseball Team*. Her work at Presentation House Gallery was repurposed at the museum in 2010 as *Two Views*, a photographic exhibition pairing Ansel Adams and Leonard Frank’s photographs of Japanese Americans and Canadians who experienced internment and relocation during and after the Second World War.

From 2005 to 2010, Grace served as president of the National Association of Japanese Canadians. During her leadership, Japanese Canadian war veterans of the Second World War brought their concerns about omissions and misrepresentations of their history in the Canadian War Museum’s display entitled *Forced Relocation* to her attention. In response, Grace coordinated with poet and author Dr. Roy Miki and legal historian Ann Gomer Sunahara to produce a position paper for the Government of Canada entitled *Taking Responsibility, A Submission to the Canadian Government on the Misrepresentation of Japanese Canadians and Their History*. Soon after receiving the paper, the Canadian War Museum made the needed changes to the display.

In 2007, Grace contributed to the successful opposition of the naming of a government building after Howard Green, a conservative MP who in the 1930s and 1940s campaigned to have Japanese Canadians ousted from the country. Both this opposition and her influence

on the Canadian War Museum exhibit have played an integral role in reshaping how Canadians remember the contributions of Japanese Canadians to their country, as well as the past mistreatment of these citizens by their government.

Recent Work, Recognition, and Advocacy

During the last ten years, Grace began to experience well-earned recognition for her work. In 2012, she was awarded the Japanese Canadian History Preservation and Education Award by the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre. In 2016, Grace was invited to speak at several events, including as keynote speaker at both an arts symposium held at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre in Toronto, and for programming related to the *Two Views* exhibit that had travelled to the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles earlier that year.

In recent years Grace has continued to bring the story of the Vancouver Asahi to the attention of the rest of Canada and the world. She was the official nominator of the Asahi baseball team for the plaque that was unveiled in Vancouver's Oppenheimer Park. She was also sought after as consultant for the 2014 film, *The Vancouver Asahi*, directed by Yuya Ishii, and she co-published the English version of Norio Goto's book, *Story of Vancouver Asahi: A Legend in Baseball* (2010). In 2018-2019, Grace was a key consultant for a *Historica Canada Canadian Heritage Minute* and a *Canada Post* limited edition stamp commemorating the 100th anniversary of the team's first pennant win in 1919.

Grace continues to be active in ensuring that both *nikkei* and other human rights stories are told. In 2017 she acted as nominator for a *Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada* plaque dedicated to the courage and resolve exercised by Tomey Homma in challenging the exclusion of Japanese Canadians from voting in Canadian elections. Between 1900 and 1902, Tomey Homma fought a ground-breaking legal battle for Asian Canadians to be given the right to vote, though the Privy Council of Britain would rule against Tomey's challenge in *Cunningham v. Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma*. Japanese Canadians were finally granted the right to vote in 1949, four years after his death in an internment camp. Grace is currently concentrating on the induction of Tomekichi Homma into the *National Human Rights Museum* in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Grace remains particularly active in the struggle for the rights of Asian Canadians and Indigenous peoples. In 2015 she acted as narrator in the second iteration of the Vancouver Taiko Society's *Against the Current*, a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary production which was performed at the Heart of the City Festival. Grace worked with Indigenous storyteller Rosemary Georgeson, performing poetic lines in the production, which celebrated the role of salmon in Salish, Japanese Canadian, and founding communities of the Downtown Eastside. She also took part in Chief Dr. Robert Joseph's *Reconciliation Canada* in 2017, where she participated in a three-day Circle workshop with members of many other communities to learn the significance of sharing through the Circle towards the goals of reconciliation.

Currently, Grace is a consultant for the nomination of Nitobe Gardens at UBC for a *Historical Sites and Monuments Board* plaque and recently joined the *Museum Advisory Committee* at the Nikkei National Museum to continue mentoring the team there.

These are only some of the inspirational examples of how Grace has used the hardships of her past, her education, professional achievements, and the recognition and respect that followed to advocate for those whose voices need to be heard and those whose equality and justice Grace fights for. She works now on issues of housing and homelessness in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. In September 2013, on behalf of the Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association, Grace was asked to speak to the City of Vancouver's Apology to Japanese Canadians for their role during the internment period. She spoke not only to the apology to Japanese Canadians, but demanded a further pledge that the City not allow such injustices to happen ever again. She did so as a witness to the conditions in the Downtown Eastside and the continuing threat of displacement of the neighbourhood's residents.

At present, Grace has a dream to have the Province of British Columbia and the City of Vancouver agree to lease, free of cost, part of the main floor of the historic heritage Tamura House Building. Nestled across the street from Oppenheimer Park, the building was once owned by an early Japanese immigrant and is currently occupied as an SRO (Single Residential Occupancy) building operated by the Lookout Society, housing at-risk residents in its upper floors. Grace is working

towards the possibility of using part of the main floor for a permanent exhibition to share the story of the historic Paueru-gai, or Powell Street, district which was 'downtown' for the Japanese Canadian Community until 1941, and to tell the history of displacement of the First Nations who initially lived in this area and of the Japanese Canadians who later called it home.

I had the honour and pleasure of meeting Grace in the fall of 2019 and spending some time with her and her friends and colleagues. True to the meaning of her name, she is small in stature yet she is a giant in her work towards justice, and healing, and memory. Grace offers us her hand to stand beside her and to listen, speak, and act alongside those who have fought and continue to fight for their own justice and equality. ✨

Judy Hanazawa continued

and Pender during the city's elections, Grace would scold like an 80-plus grandmother when passersby would ignore her offer of pamphlets. When they would look the other way, she would shout at them, "Don't you want to use your rights as a Canadian? It's important to get out and vote. Don't walk by. Take a pamphlet. Go and vote!" It was actually hilarious to listen to her, although in later discussion we were very serious when expressing our frustration about the apathy we encountered.

I especially admire the way Grace does put things together given her whole life experience. This includes her knowledge and understanding of the unique social cultural heritage of her particular community coming from Mio in Wakayama. But she also understands, reads and speaks 'proper' Japanese as taught by her mother. She knows her local family relations and history very well. It's interesting she demonstrates perhaps a *nisei* view when she states her knowledge of Japanese isn't particularly useful being a Canadian. When I have pointed out how valuable maintaining language is as roots for one's identity, she doesn't agree, saying she hasn't found it particularly useful looking at her own life!

Tenney Homma continued

by a deep sense of purpose, vision, and foresight to not only preserve, but to share the stories and events which have shaped our Japanese Canadian history. I can only admire and respect her strength, social conscience, and work ethic.

With high regard and utmost appreciation, we thank you, Grace.

Tenney Homma and the extended Homma Family ✨

My view is that Grace has been a gift to Japanese Canadians and others, in one to one relationships as well as at a broad community level because of:

- her knowledge and experience given her family roots
- her lived experience and challenges throughout the internment and after
- her personal development, artistic, academic, and career pursuits and accomplishments
- her understanding of individual, family, and community issues
- her compassion, honesty, and developed sense of justice – indicated in her strong ability to be direct when she has a concern
- her commitment to community and doing the right thing through activism in addition to her other valuable qualities.

Recently she was remarking on her personal satisfaction with the way her life is. She feels good, having turned 86 on October 15. I think it is a lesson to me that she is able to feel satisfied with her life at a broad level, despite the fact she regularly complains that her apartment is full of papers and other things which keep piling up on her. Life continues to be very engaging, given the many people, events, and issues which matter to her. ✨

Dear Members of the Advisor Council:

Re: Testimonial Letter for Grace Eiko Thomson to be appointed to the Order of BC

I have known Grace since 2012 when she joined Reconciliation Canada for a dialogue session with elders from different backgrounds to speak about the language of reconciliation. Grace Thomson proved to be a wonderful ally as we reached out to multi-cultural communities to understand our diverse histories and experiences and explore the language of reconciliation.

Grace experienced the uprooting from BC of her family in 1942, upon Canada's declaration of war with Japan. The expulsion from BC of her community, identified as 'Enemy Aliens', resulted in the exile of her family to Manitoba where she grew up as her family struggled to find their bearings. Reconciliation Canada became aware of Grace's work in the Japanese Canadian community and her participation in various social justice actions in partnership with other communities. We were aware, upon the City of Vancouver giving their apology to Japanese Canadians in 2013 for their history of racist policies and the 1942 uprooting, that Grace's voice was key resulting in the City declaring their commitment that no other community will experience such injustice again. Her work as an art and museum curator indicates her social consciousness and her consistent effort over decades to work cross-culturally with Indigenous and other communities in presenting creative works which share human experience.

Grace participated in various activities with Reconciliation Canada with our outreach and community engagement events. These included: our Elders' Dialogue on the Language of Reconciliation, our First National Reconciliation Gathering in Vancouver, many Dialogue Circles within the city, including Grace co-facilitating for a Reconciliation Dialogue Workshop with the Chinese/Japanese community, and of course our Walk for Reconciliation in 2013 and again during the Canada 150+ events in Vancouver, which included us blanketing her in ceremony for her continued support of reconciliation.

Grace has been an amazing ally. Reconciliation Canada engages people in open and honest conversation to understand our diverse histories and experiences. We actively engage multi-faith and multi-cultural communities to explore the meaning of reconciliation. Together, we are charting a New Way Forward. Time and time again, Grace has courageously shared her experience to help bring our communities closer.

As a beloved friend, Grace Eiko Thomson has always shared her warmth and laughter. She is always willing to share her own story and resilience. Her ability to listen with compassion when others share their stories is a core action to reconciliation. She offers support upon hearing the experience of racialized communities and has stood firm with Reconciliation Canada in our work to revitalize the relationships among Indigenous peoples and all Canadians. For those reasons and much more, Grace is recognized as an Ambassador for Reconciliation Canada.

I offer this testimony about Grace Eiko Thomson because she is so loved and respected by us at Reconciliation Canada. Grace absolutely contributes to a vision of a shared common humanity and she is truly worthy of a nomination to receive the Order of BC.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Joseph". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

**Chief Dr. Robert Joseph, OBC., OC.,
Ambassador
Reconciliation Canada**