

# NIKKEI IMAGES



Shig & Akemi Hirai in Hawaii, 1993 NNM TD 1322

 **Nikkei**  
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& cultural centre

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## Submissions

We welcome proposals of family and community stories for publication in future issues. Articles should be between 500 - 3,500 words and finished works should be accompanied by relevant high resolution photographs with proper photo credits. Please send a brief description or summary of the theme and topic of your proposed article to [lreid@nikkeiplace.org](mailto:lreid@nikkeiplace.org). Our publishing agreement can be found online at [center.nikkeiplace.org/nikkei-images](http://center.nikkeiplace.org/nikkei-images). Stories of internment are hugely popular and we appreciate your contributions, keep them coming! We hope you enjoy this Commemorative 80th Anniversary of the internment issue.

– Linda Kawamoto Reid

## Land Acknowledgement

We, the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples; and in particular, the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Kwikwetlem First Nations on whose territory we stand.

## Terminology

**Evacuation:** Implies extraction from an area for the removed individual's personal safety. The government used the term to describe the forced uprooting and forced dispersal, as well as the internment of Japanese Canadians.

**Ghost towns/Relocation camps/ Relocation centres:** Many abandoned mining towns in BC, literal ghost towns, were turned into internment camps.

**Internment:** More accurately describes the confinement of enemy citizens in wartime against their will.

**Repatriation:** Was in response to a "loyalty to Canada" survey that allowed the removal of 4,000 Japanese Canadians to Japan.

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# A Note from the Editor

My name is Jordan Redekop-Jones and I am the editor of the *kika nisei* Issue for Nikkei Images. In this project, my goal was to make sure we told as many stories as possible within a single issue. Each piece is so unique, yet they are connected by memories and identities that web into one another to create one powerful story.

I acquired this position through my ARTS Practicum course at Kwantlen Polytechnic University and never dreamed I would be so lucky as to get such an amazing opportunity as I have here.

I am so grateful for the learning I have done at the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre and know that these stories will continue to serve the important conversation on Japanese Canadian history for many years to come.

We are beginning with the story of Miki Hirai, as he feels strongly that by telling these stories, the treatment of victims of war will not be repeated in the future. The stories we chose for this issue are direct quotes from the *Okaeri* project, so they are maintained in the conversational style of the authors, some of whose first language was Japanese. The *Okaeri*

project is a series of oral histories discussing the return from exile from the BC coast after 1949.

In my conversation with Miki Hirai, who was the creator of the *Okaeri* project, he emphasized the importance of stories and of history in general. He believes in highlighting every individual's narrative of their time spent in Canada in internment Camps, interruption of education due to forced relocation to Japan, and the eventual desire to move back to Canada years later. What Hirai encourages readers to pay attention to is that through sharing histories, we can all come together to help each other in our own self-discoveries. The fact is that many different cultural groups may experience similar hardships. Through sharing both positive and negative experiences we can come to understand each other, thus eliminating the tension and animosity often created through stark separations in cultural identities. After all, "history cannot be changed" so we must move forward collecting what we can, sharing it with whoever may listen and remembering that the bigger picture of world peace is much closer to attaining once we make peace with our own stories.

# *Okaeri* おかえり – Return from exile, all paths lead home

Thanks to the JC Survivors Health and Wellness fund of 2021, a joint video history project between the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre and the Vancouver Japanese Language School & Japanese Hall was hatched. The project focussed on the wellness of the survivors over 80 years old who could speak to the return to the coast after 1949, from exile. Some were alumni of the VJLS&H, and some were *kika nisei*, who returned from Japan after exile. In total, 21 survivors were interviewed, some in threesomes, twosomes or alone.

The stories gathered in the context of having to start over building a home so many times, were rich in detail and experience, and also heart wrenching with pain and loss. As these stories were so important to capture, at the same time the survivors felt grateful to contribute to the education of future generations, in hopes the effects of war were never experienced again in Canada. The *Okaeri* video project, will be available for viewing in the New Year, but in the meantime, we have dedicated this Nikkei Images issue to the *kika nisei*, in this 80th anniversary year of internment.

The quotes that were extracted from the interviews, will be a 'teaser' to the launch of the full interview project in 2023, and at the same time be a powerful introduction into the life and times of the returning Canadians who were exiled to Japan, and who uniquely tried to navigate existence in both countries at the same time as navigate their identity.

These full stories and all the VJLS&H alumni stories (the other half of the project) will be available on our YouTube channel in the new year. Stay tuned!

Sincerely, Linda Kawamoto Reid

Research Archivist NNMCC  
*Okaeri* project



# Miki Hirai

**M**y name is Miki Hirai and I was born in Slocan City on May 22nd, 1944. My mother was the oldest girl in the family and she was born in New Westminster. I understand my grandfather on the Fujino side came to Canada in 1894. During that time, the population of BC, Vancouver was maybe around max 50,000. They were early pioneers who first saw Vancouver as it was.”

“My mother’s job was to be home, so she never went to school here in Canada. I guess she grew up cleaning people’s laundry and cooking and whatever to help 20 people living in the boarding house. That was her life until maybe she was around 15 or so. Then she went to barbering school to learn the trade of cutting hair for men.”

“When the war started she was working at the barbershop on main street. She didn’t know anything about war or anything. The war came and she noticed a lot of change, and she told me about it because at the barber shop they kept tagging her and calling her names. She didn’t quite understand what it meant, because even the other orientals

were calling her Jap, and they were spitting on the windows as they walked by and suddenly hardly any customers came in. Nobody dared to walk in, they were scared to walk in.”

“My dad’s side of the family came from previous sugarcane work and grandfather on my father’s side came in 1906, but there were still hardly any Japanese here. He was working for a farm and by the year 1920 he raised enough money to start his own farm. In 1942 when the war started and the



government took action, they took his farm. He paid, I believe, 3,000 dollars in 1920 for his land. It had been all paid up and when they took it. Within about ten days they turned around and sold it to somebody else, the BC government. They sold it for around 2000 dollars, so two thirds of the price.”

“My father was taken to Lemon Creek or some people call it Slocan, that area, ahead of everyone else because he was born in Japan. So, he was there and he told me little things.”

## Mother’s Time in Internment Camp

“Surprisingly enough according to my mother, she said that was the best time of her life so far. I asked her why the years in an internment Camp was the best. She said it was the first time she didn’t have to work. She didn’t have to go to school either. Not only that, but in the camp they had a school, they had a church, they had a kitchen, they had a Japanese bath a community bath, and they had it all organized. There she learned how to sew for the first time. So, she enjoyed so many things, now that

she was finally learning something, she said that was actually the best time for her, even though some people didn’t think so. The living standards were of course different than in Vancouver.”

“After the war I guess our family had a choice to go to Japan or go to the east of the Rockies.”

“Our family decided to go to Japan because according to my dad he said his dad told him to come back to Japan, so we followed dad to Japan.”

### PHOTOS

**Left:** Miki Hirai, baby, Slocan ca. 1944 Miki Hirai family collection

**Above:** Miki Hirai and family, in Slocan, ca. 1946 Miki Hirai family collection



In Japan

“My mother tells me it was so bad because she was Canadian born here. She never experienced life in Japan and especially after the war, it was so severe. Everybody could hardly eat. So the idea was to have a farm to grow your own rice and retain whatever you have and eat that in excess. So anyway, life wasn’t good.”

“I never got segregated or anything in Japan. I guess I was strong enough, I was really strong. I guess I’m pretty forward. I never stepped back, so I had so many friends in school. I went along like anyone else in Japan and I’m pretty proud that I did very well in Japan. Academically I was in the top three in all of the classes, of maybe 100 for that grade. Sports wise, I loved baseball. I was the fourth batter, the clean up batter. I did very well.”

PHOTOS

Left: Miki Hirai’s wedding photo, Vancouver ca. 1970s  
Miki Hirai family collection

Right: Miki and Miyako Hirai traveling in Australia Miki  
Hirai family collection



Back to Canada

“We all came on the boat. I’m not proud to say, first day I was okay and the last day I was okay, but in the middle I was down. That small ship, we came on in February was very rough. That’s the first time I was on a boat that size. I was kind of excited actually to be honest, but I was so sick.”

“I did piece work helping the other farmers there. So in order to help the farm you have an annual contract. I think that’s what my uncle did. So, when you do that they’ll lend you a small house to live in, no charge, I think it’s free but they have no electricity, the bathroom - it’s an out house. Of course then you don’t have any hot water. For water you have to go to the main house or a friend’s house. I used to take a gallon size of old vinegar bottle and go to their house and fill it up with water. They had a kitchen with a stove I think either wood or coal. So we lived there but that’s life I never experienced even in Japan.”



Frank Hamanishi

My name is Frank Hamanishi. I was born in Steveston BC on April 13th, 1940. That’s where I originally started. My parents were Seiji and Tamiya Hamanishi. My grandfather came here in the 1800’s. My dad was born here in 1908. He was a gillnet fisherman and was one of the earlier ones. A lot of people came from Wakayama, where I went after the war.”

“First of all, we lived in the cannery house. We were evacuated in 1942 to Bay Farm BC, the internment camp. I think we lived in a house. In those days I guess I was just so small; all we did was play outside or whatever. I can’t remember what my father did in the Bay farm.”

“In 1945, we moved to Alberta, on a Sugar Beet farm in Shaughnessy.”

PHOTO

Right: Hamanishi family in Steveston in front of the cannery house ca. 1952 Hamanishi family collection





“In 1946, my parents had a farm and a rice field in Wakayama, he didn’t want to be on the beet farm so he thought that it might be better to move to Japan. In 1946 we took the last boat to Japan, that was the last boat I guess that left to go to Japan at that time, and then we went to Mio Mura and lived there until 1951.”

To Japan

“So we were quite lucky in the sense that we lived in Japan, but I think when we heard about people suffering from not having enough to eat and everything else, we felt we were quite lucky that we had a rice farm. We were able to grow rice,

and then also the mill was right by the water so the fishermen got to fish, and then we had a little plot of land so we could raise some chickens. We would have eggs and then we’d have little bits of land plots, so we grew our own vegetables.”

“Being next to the water meant that for me after going to school that’s all I did. Go to school, come home, go to the beach.”

“I guess I didn’t suffer as much as the elder people, I guess they had to go through everything but for me still being 11 or so, it was just like a holiday. You just go to school, and then come home, go to the beach and go swimming so it wasn’t too bad in that sense. I think now looking back I guess when I

started hearing about these things and what people went through and everything else, I don’t think I suffered. I think it’s the elder people that did.”

“I guess with the war he had a choice of staying in Canada or going back and I guess for him he thought having land in Japan would be better. I think he liked it better in Canada, being a fisherman.”

Back to Canada

“I guess being young, you just follow what your parents are going to be doing so it wasn’t my idea to come back to Canada or anything like that. There was no incentive for me to come to Canada or back again I guess. Well at least I was young enough to

go to school here because a lot of my friends that came back from Japan, weren’t able to go to school, so I think they were more trying to get back into English again, so it was a little bit harder for them I think.”

“My Dad was a fisherman but he was quite athletic. He taught Judo and was a black belt and I think in Steveston he was one of the early ones that were teaching Judo in Steveston. I think his name is still up on that wall in Steveston. So, he taught us about Judo as well before we moved to Vancouver.”



PHOTOS

**Left:** Hamanishi children at Bay Farm, Frank was three years old, ca. 1942 Courtesy of the Hamanishi family collection  
**Above:** Hamanishi fishing boat in Steveston, BC ca. 1951 Courtesy of the Hamanishi family collection



PHOTOS

**Top Left:** Hamanishi children in Mio, Wakayama, Japan, ca. 1950 Courtesy of the Hamanishi family collection  
**Bottom Left:** Frank Hamanishi in the family store on Commercial Drive Vancouver, ca. 1956 Hamanishi family collection  
**Above:** Hamanishi family in Mio, Wakayama, Japan, ca. 1950 Courtesy of the Hamanishi family collection



# Shigeyoshi Ebata & Kazue Kozaka

**Shigeyoshi Ebata:** “I was born in Vancouver in 1931.”

**Kazue Kozaka:** “I was born on Oct 11, 1928, I went to Japan when I was 6 years old.”

**Shigeyoshi:** “My parents and my grandmother, decided to take all the kids to Japan (in 1934) to get a basic education, and they planned to send us back to Canada after we get a basic education in Japan. One by one we were supposed to come back after primary education, but my older brother wanted to go on to Secondary school, in Japanese *Chugakko* for boys’ middle school, and *Jogakko* for girls’ school.”

“But we (kids) were stuck in Japan (with our grandmother).”

“Our mother and father were separated during the war in Canada, our father was classified as one of the ‘hard core’ and he spent four years in Angler POW Camp, and when that closed in 1946, he could not return to BC, so he had a choice to go to the interior of BC or to Japan. My mother went to Lemon

Creek and had same choice, so she went to Japan on the first ship and my father went to Japan on the third ship. After they came to Japan, we lost the connection to Canada.”

“When our father went to Angler, some of the men said they saw the red circle on the back of the jacket, and thought, ‘oh it’s the hina maru’ (image of the red sun on the Japanese flag) and they were so happy, but they learned later that it was a target for when you escaped, the guards could shoot at the red circle.”

“The reason we could not come back to Canada was financial, and we had no relatives left here.”

“Our grandmother had a house in Hikone, so we went there. When (our parents) sent us to Japan, they told us we were going on a picnic, but after so many days at sea on the way to Japan, we knew they had tricked us. Grandma made 6 bento every morning, there were 4 kids, two teachers and grandma in our home. My oldest sister had to quit school and go to work. Kazue wanted to be a doctor



and studied hard in school, but grandmother said no. She was old fashioned and strict and thought women were to get married.”

“A few months before I graduated from school, I applied at Nissan but they said that due to the economic situation in 1950, there was no new hiring. But a year later, I applied at another place, and when they asked me what I was doing for the last year, I told them I was working for an American family, as a ‘houseboy’, so that I could practice my English.”

“I got a job in the American Forces in Kyoto city and wanted to save money to come back to Canada, but the wages were so low. The minimum fare on the Hikawa Maru was 100,000 yen, over 6 months wages. So I met my wife, and told her my plan, and she said she wanted to come with me to Canada, so we saved money by putting two salaries together.”



## PHOTOS

**Above:** Tayo Ebata, with Fujinkai of the Buddhist Church, Vancouver, Sept 23, 1934 NNM 2011-58-16

**Right:** Masukichi Ebata on right, walking on Alexander Street in Shinto clothing ca. 1939 NNM 2011-58-15

Okaeri to Canada

**Shigeyoshi:** “I sponsored my parents who were retired at age 55, then my wife’s sister who was a single mother raising two kids in Japan, then my two older sisters, only my older brother stayed in Japan.”

“After I came back to Canada, I picked up a job landscape gardening, then I found a job at the CPR, at False Creek they had a place where they overhauled the coaches, it lasted 2 years. Seniority was the only job security, and as each section closed down and down, I had to find another job. I learned that the Saskatchewan Wheat pool was going to build a new facility in Vancouver Harbour, and at that time were operating a small grain elevator.”

**Kazue:** “It was really tough for my husband, you know. He was a Japanese national. {He was a typical Japanese (male)}. He was in the (Japanese) navy (before). I wanted to leave him there (in Japan), but he came with me. I only wanted to bring my daughter with me. He didn’t at all adjust to life here. Not knowing the language made it worse. He had a ‘short fuse/temper’. It was really a tough life (with him). It was common for him to hit and kick me. Yup, that’s right. It was actually an arranged marriage.”

“I told (my family) I don’t want to get married. I have a job so can live on my own. But because it’s the countryside, (my family) was annoying (traditional). My parents basically did everything on their own. As soon as he came back, they put me into an arranged marriage without me having a say. {It was sort of a ‘forced marriage’. The matchmaker came with a nice story about him. They exaggerated.}. I had no say.”



“I ran my ‘beauty/hairdressing’ shop for 18 years. Yes, I made money for the family. I have one adopted daughter. She does a lot for me now, she really cares for me. She speaks English while we go shopping together. Another person from Nikkei Home comes to help me and takes me to the doctor. She tells me it’s too dangerous to go by yourself.”

PHOTO

**Above:** Masukichi Ebata on right, sitting at Yellowhead Road Camp ca. 1942 NNM 2011-58-6

# Eto Family Chronicles

\* The following stories are all extracted from the Okaeri compiled of oral interviews except for the *Eto Family Chronicles*.

The departure date was June 16th, 1946. The Eto family, consisting of parents, Sunao and Yasue, along with their children Ayako (19), Kinuko (17) Miyako (14) Sadao(12) Akemi (7) and Naomi (19 months) boarded the General M.C. Meigs at Vancouver Harbour eager to meet up with their son and brother, Tadasu (Naosuke), whom they had not seen for the last four years. Tadasu had been imprisoned at Camp Petawawa in Angler, Ontario, since he was 19 years of age.

His only crime was that he had broken curfew with a friend, while posing as a Chinese since all people of Japanese descent were not allowed to be out after 6:00pm.

The family boarded the ship in anticipation to meet up with Tadasu who had opted to return to Japan when the Canadian government decreed that Japanese Canadians cannot return to the West Coast but gave them the choice to repatriate to Japan or live east of the Rockies. Tadasu held some resentment against a country that had betrayed him. Her eldest son’s choice gave my mother no other option but to go along with him although she was aware of the hardships they may endure. Father, on the other hand, was optimistic that because he had some savings (enough to build three houses, he used to say) and owned a few paddy fields, that we will not have to worry about food or shelter.

To Japan

The Canadian Government offered monetary reimbursement to those returning to Japan and I recall my mother telling me she refused it, not wanting anything from a country she felt betrayed her and her family. She also admitted throwing

out, in mid-Pacific, the deed for some acreage in Rosedale, thus cutting all ties with Canada.

I personally have very little recollection of the voyage as I was sea-sick the minute we boarded the ship. I did not get up until I heard someone shout “There’s Mount Fuji!” I looked up at the distant horizon but we could not see Fuji-san and someone said “Look up, w-a-a-y up” and high above the horizon, we were able to get the imposing sight and majesty of the Mount Fuji we had seen so often in pictures.

We disembarked at Yokosuka Naval Base and were promptly ushered into a hall. There we were given a hard, flavourless biscuit and Sadao and I spat it out, not realizing this was the last piece of snack we would see for some time.

The train ride to Kumamoto was an eye opener for all of us. At Hiroshima, hordes of wraith-like people tried to board the train—scarred, hairless, skeleton-like figures which was a disquieting moment for us. At other stations beggars would swarm the train looking for a handout. As the train travelled along the bleak countryside, we noticed clothes hanging on trees and realized people were living in the caves nearby. This was post-war Japan and we were seeing the grim reality and despair in the lives of the people.

The long walk from Ozu- machi to Iwasaka was about four miles and the family of nine started the trek in the hot sun, not aware of the strange looks we were getting. Instead, we children were shocked to see men clad only in loin cloths and old ladies carrying babies on their back, while wearing only a *koshimaki*, We thought we were back in primitive times of in the wild jungles of Borneo. About midway





to Iwasaka, at Nakashima, a gracious grey-haired old lady rushed up to our mother. It turned out it was her Aunt Oyene. She asked us in and offered us some watermelon which we devoured, grateful for the respite from the heat.

When we arrived at the home of father's brother, we sensed the hostility as his first words to his brother were "Why did you come back?" Instead of a warm greeting. It did not help that we children rushed on to the *tatami* with our shoes on, eager to relax.

Once we settled in the *zashiki*, the uncle brought out my father's bank passbook, tossing it on the *tatami*, and our father was shocked to learn that due to devaluation, the balance would only barely buy a sack of rice at black market prices. (We sensed that some of father's savings had been spent by his brother). We found out that a bar of soap would cost five yen and for us, who were

accustomed to comparing dollars to yen, found it hard to comprehend.

We stayed in the *zashiki* for a few months until our uncle and his family decided to move us into the tobacco smoke house. Our mother's parents, (Mitsunaga) had a large house but they too had a family of seven living in their *zashiki* as the eldest son had moved back from the city to escape the rigors of a war-torn city. The Mitsunagas were a long-established prominent family who were squires *shoya* and our mother had been exposed to a good life, having graduated from a girl's school, but due to present circumstances they could not help their daughter.

The smoke house was about a twelve-*tatami* room and since Nosuke and Kinuko had found employment in the city, the family had dwindled to seven. In the dimly-lit and cramped quarters, Ayako had started to do sewing. Word got around that there

was a competent tailor/ dressmaker in their midst. She soon found herself tearing apart musty *manto* into western style overcoats. Ladies also brought their *kimono/yukata* to be made into dresses. Due to the shortage of rice and other staples, our mother had been facing difficulty purchasing food for the family and out of deference to the senior Eto, neighbours did not readily sell to her. Our mother then hit upon the idea of getting paid in staples and thus, the family survived through Ayako's sewing. Throughout all of this, our mother did not waver in her determination to serve her husband and the youngest, Naomi, nothing but white rice while the rest of the family ate barley, buckwheat, millet, sweet potato, etc and in retrospect, these were healthy substitutes. In spite of the rigorous conditions, the family did not catch any cold or serious illness.

In the following year, our father would redeem some of his paddy fields and produce enough rice to keep the family well-fed.

The next obstacle was finding a place to live as the smoke house was a short-term arrangement and there were very few accommodations available in the *inaka*. Our mother negotiated with the elder Eto to get a suitable lot in exchange for one of the paddy fields. This resulted in getting a bigger house being built on a high hill but it took our mother's will and determination to save enough to accomplish this. However, with her usual flourish, our mother arranged to have a ceremonial "dig" as well as a celebration when the roof was put on. This celebration entailed throwing mochi containing coins, from the roof.

My siblings and I all had to learn to adjust to living in not only a war-torn country but in rural Japan, where living conditions were still quite primitive. The fact we had been exposed to living in relocation camps during the war and having experienced things such as outdoor plumbing, communal bathing, etc, helped to condition us to

all these changes in lifestyle. As for the language barrier, it was minimal since we attended the Vancouver Japanese Language School in pre-war times and we spoke Japanese at home. Sadao had finished grade two and I had finished grade four at VJLS so when our parents enrolled us in the local school, they opted to enroll us where we had left off in 1942. However, the principal (who happened to be our father's cousin), arranged to pass us into grades four and six respectively, after six months.

The first winter at this school, I developed severe frostbite on my hands because it was the school's program to make the older children scrub the floors on our hands and knees, every morning with cold water. The frostbite was so severe my hands got blistered very badly, and when the teachers saw this, they switched to warm water. This was my contribution to improve the local school system.

Tadasu had made good use of his four years while incarcerated to further his Japanese education and studied under his former schoolteacher who was also incarcerated in the same camp as him. He was therefore knowledgeable in verbal and written Japanese to work as translator /interpreter to the military Police of a U.S. army camp stationed in Kumamoto city. I am sure Kinuko faced many barriers, as one of her first jobs, at age 17, was as an interpreter/ desk clerk at a hotel catering to Americans. Ayako, Kinuko and later myself, were all employed at this U.S. army camp in later years in various capacities as secretary/clerk/interpreters until we returned to Canada. I had always envisioned working as a secretary and because my education in English was cut short, I had the opportunity to learn

#### PHOTO

Left: Eto family in Kumamoto, Japan, ca. 1946  
Courtesy of Eto family collection



shorthand and typing while employed as a clerk at the military camp in Kumamoto City. I was able to get my hands on a Gregg shorthand book which I transcribed onto a notebook. My day of reckoning came when one day, the radio was blaring out Peggy Lee’s popular song at the time “You Belong to Me”. I was able to write it down in shorthand and surprised myself and my sisters by being able to decipher it.

Return to Canada

When life in Japan was becoming more stable, and living in the city quite comfortable, we longed to return to our native land, Canada. Sadao came back to Canada in 1953 after graduating from a boys’ private school (known for their toughness), and had also attained a black belt at a young age so was a confident young man at age 19. He later had occasion to teach judo to a group of Vancouver policemen. Kinuko, who had married a Japanese national in a western-style ceremony, returned to Canada in 1954 and was able to send for her husband in the next year. Ayako came back in 1955, then I followed in 1956. With most of the family back in Canada, the parents had no choice but to return

to Canada. The parents and two younger sisters joined us in November of 1958.

Akemi was only seven years old when she repatriated to Japan and so she was able to complete her schooling at a prestigious private mission school. Upon return to Canada, she furthered her schooling by enrolling at Duffus School of Business, thus enabling her to get a job at an insurance company. When Naomi came back to Canada, she was fourteen years of age and had very little or no knowledge of the English Language. She was able to overcome early difficulties and successfully completed courses at Blanche McDonald School of Modelling and Moler School of Hairdressing.

Tadasu, now going by the name of Naosuke or Tony, had found employment at Northwest Airlines and had been residing in Yokohama with his wife and daughter. He was comfortably settled in Japan, and having married the daughter of an esteemed hotel owner, did not entertain the thought of his wife having to leave her comfortable lifestyle. Also, his daughter was being educated in the best schools and he did not feel any desire to change the status quo of his family. He spoke very little of



his experience during his internment years, but we sensed his embitterment.

Our mothers had to be strong, all these years, in order to survive the ordeals that they would have to face. With husbands being sent to work camps and in her case, her oldest son being sent away to a prison camp, she would have to cornerstone to buffer whatever may come their way. We had heard that family friends who lived in the Fraser Valley had been sent to Hastings Park so we visited them once and were shocked to see them corralled like cattle in a building that reeked of animal manure. We could not forget that awful stench and felt very sorry for the people who were incarcerated there but also grateful for the fact we were still able to stay in our own home. Our mother had been running a successful home business making industrial gloves and employing several ladies who also worked from home, so friends encouraged her to move to a town on her own instead of waiting for the government’s bidding. However, she decided to stay in Vancouver until about September 1942, when we were told to evacuate to some unknown ghost town. Being

allowed one suitcase each, our mother sewed cash into the hems of each child’s coat as an insurance. The destination turned out to be a small town called Rosebery on the rim of Slocan Lake, which in normal times, would be a heavenly haven. Our father was already there, helping out in the makeshift kitchen, to feed the people arriving daily. When the hastily-built tarpaper shack was ready we moved in with our meagre belongings. The first winter was so severe, that icicles hanging from the eaves were heavy enough to knock one out. We would have to venture out to the outhouse in this cold and walking back from the communal bathhouse, our hair would become frozen, hanging like icicles. Of course, we did not have the appropriate clothing to weather this type of cold. Although we were not confined or fenced in, we were not allowed to venture out of our area. However, Ayako and Kinuko were allowed to work two summers at orchards in the Okanagan but other than that, the farthest a family member travelled was to the nearest hospital, some four miles away (where Naomi was born).

I have nothing but fond memories of the years spent at the relocation centres, but I can see now that our parents and older siblings faced some harsh times. However, even those years pale in comparison with the hardship they endured in post-war Japan. I feel very indebted to them for the sacrifices they have made on our behalf.

PHOTOS

Left: Eto girls in Kumamoto, Japan, ca. 1946  
Courtesy of Eto family collection  
Above: Margaret Eto’s first job in Japan in 1956  
Courtesy of Eto family collection





# Toshiko Kajiwara

I was a Kunimoto. I was born on November 15th, 1925 in Mission City, it's a little weak farm town but it's still called Mission City."

"We lived up high on Cherry Street. On Cherry Street we had good neighbours Sakuraki, Barnette's. Mrs. Barnette used to be a kindergarten teacher, so she used to pull us to kindergarten every day. There were six in our family, Charlie and my fifth sister Jean and Helen, Tommy and my younger brother Roy, there's six of us."

**Toshiko was sent to Japan in 1939 at age 13, and when the war started so they were stuck in Japan.**

"Well, my sister was married to a Japanese officer and she was lonely so she called me from Japan to call me to join her so I joined her and her husband. Well, he went to Manchuria so naturally my sister had two little toddlers and she wanted me to be with her so that's where I was until the war ended, so I went through all of that too."

## Manchuria

"We were close to the Russian border and the Chinese were against you because they were in the war with Japan, so they didn't like us you know. So, we really had it rough, yeah, but you've gotta take it in a stride because it's not their fault and it's not your fault. I was working knowing English and Japanese and a little bit of Chinese and anything that comes up they call you because you know more languages than they do."



"We were really bombed out. You never, really don't know what you go through, you're scared and you're not scared. You know, you're really terrified because you never know when the planes are gonna come and bomb you or the train gets bombed, and we did get bombed."

"Well, there's no country in Manchuria. No Japanese background, nothing to back you up. You've just gotta believe what they say, and do it, or if you don't do it you get kicked. Well, you try to make a few friends but you kind of trust these people and they are going back to the same part of Japan, so we tag along with them and sometimes we lose them and sometimes we get more, it was awful. I'd come back from Japan from Manchuria and the family in Japan just looked at me, like "who are you?"

"It was awful, that's war. You don't know what you're doing, what you're eating, it's what you get. If you don't get anything you don't have anything, you're just a beggar. You wouldn't wish it on anybody."

**Russians would try to get into boarded up houses, while the survivors try to hide from them.**

"Well, you go into anybody's house, it's not just your own house, you just go and run from your enemy and run behind the drapes. If they catch you and shoot you, that's your fault. So, you might as well hide yourself really good. You can't say one is bad or one is good you know they're both bad but they're both trying to protect themselves. Yes so, I don't know, war is awful. War is awful. War is terrible."

## PHOTOS

**Left:** Tosh on the way to Japan, age 13 ca. 1938 NNM TD 1358

**Above:** Bill in Capilano on fishing boat ca. 1955 NNM TD 1358



Back in Japan

While heading to Japan, someone on the boat had Cholera and Toshiko said,

“It happened quite often. It’s scary, it’s really scary.”

Toshiko replied to the question if she got sick

“No, we tried to hide. We went through a lot and you just think that maybe there’s about a thousand of us. You know, they’re all going different ways, some go up north some go down south. We’re all just travelling without knowing what we’re doing.”

“I was by myself too. I went running up that little town where I lived. And I could be wearing soldier’s clothes because you’ve got no clothes, whether pants or shirts or whatever that fits you. In those day you didn’t care as long as you’ve got something on. Yeah, it was terrible.”

When they were on the outskirts of Kumamoto City

“The city got bombed more than the town, so we were quite lucky but everybody’s just shivering you know scared that the bomb’s gonna come and hit you at any time, you never know. So, the little bit of belongings you carry it around and a lot of times I’m travelling alone. A lot of people died. If you don’t run, you die. It’s really scary.”

Back to Canada

Toshiko came back to Canada in 1948 on the US General Gordon to California

“You never realize what war is, until you go through that. Well the first boat that left Japan I hopped on. I didn’t care if I had any money or not, I hopped on and they asked you and they’re all like that, nobody’s got any money or anything. We just want to go back. I thought just as long as I reached America, somebody will save me. So that’s how I left and I was able to go straight to Canada. Then Mama and the others, they were in Alberta.”



PHOTOS

Top: Tosh & Bill Western wedding clothes, Lethbridge, Alberta ca. 1955 NNM TD 1358

Bottom: Tosh in Lethbridge, ca. 1952 NNM TD 1358



Harry Mizuta

My name is Haruji Mizuta, my nickname is Harry and I was born in Revelstoke BC. The reason I was born in Revelstoke, is that my dad was working for CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway) so mom came over to Revelstoke. Then, I was born in 1933 and three years later my sister was born and it was the two of us. I stayed until 1938, when I was 5.”

“My father had an accident in Revelstoke in the snow slide in 1938. There were two survivors and my father was one of the survivors, so he was lucky. A newspaper that said he was dead, but luckily he only had broken legs but he survived. That’s why we went back to Japan. Another reason we went

to Japan was because he had broken legs and he thought he could do better in Japan, well somebody told him anyways. So that’s why we went back to Japan in 1938, the whole family went.”

“He came back again here by himself in 1941 then west right away so we were separated during the war time.”

PHOTO

Above: Harry Mizuta in front of father’s car in Revelstoke ca. 1937 Mizuta family collection



To Japan

“When I went to Japan and enrolled in grade one, there were 38 kids and half of them were Canadian born but nobody spoke English except Mama and Papa.”

“Grandpa had already passed away, so only Grandma was there. It was the four of us, I was the only male. My Grandma was already near 80 and my sister who was younger than me, and my mom.”

“During the war time, with most of the families, the men had already gone to the war or to help manufacture other stuff, so in the village it was mostly women and the kids. Towards the end of the war, we were bombed, just like in the Ukrainian news today - just innocent people being killed. In our small village that night, six people were killed, many houses burned down. The house just in front of us was burning like hell and there were no firemen around so I was just putting the water on and luckily we survived. I mean the house wasn’t burned down.”



“So, we’ve gone through this, so when I see this Ukrainian war it reminds me of that night, well not just that night, because in those days every night when 11 o’clock comes, they bombed us.”

“One time we counted 200 of them and just about every night they came through. So, at the beginning we were so scared and everybody had shelter but we were just women and kids so we couldn’t make any shelter. We went to the ditch and stayed there during those times and especially my grandma, later on said ‘Oh I’m not going in there anymore I’m going to die in the house’.”

“But I can understand what those Ukrainian people are going through right now. Still we were the lucky ones. You know, the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and someone said being there was experiencing a tragedy, but we were in the countryside, so more or less we just watched what was going on.”

“In my village, I guess in 1949, the *kika nisei* who had parents in Canada were the first ones to leave Japan. In my class, I think three groups went over to mostly Steveston, but the rest of us didn’t have any money. We didn’t have any connections to come back here. Then I had a chance to come over here as a refugee. In those days, the occupation army was based in Japan and he wanted to take somebody back to Canada and so I was nominated. His name was Brigadier Bernarche, and he was a commander in Japan, but it didn’t materialize because he had to come back here quickly and so that was out. That inspired a desire to come back to Canada. Then, I guess a couple of years later my cousin came back here and asked me if I wanted to come to Canada and I said yes I want to go over there.”

PHOTO  
Left: Harry Mizuta in Mio, Wakayama, Japan ca. 1947  
Mizuta family collection

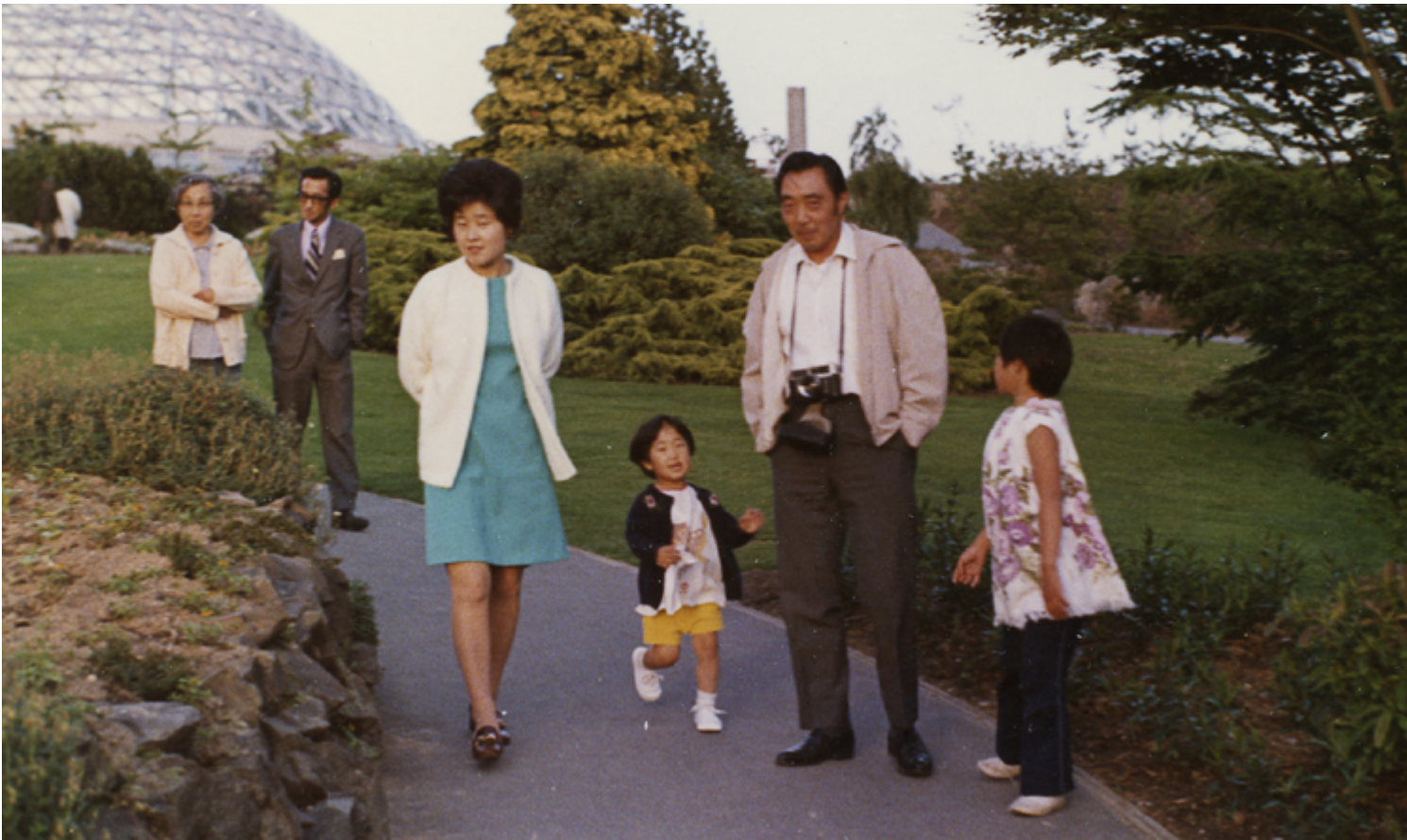
Back to Canada

“When I came over here, the relatives that lived in Steveston made the arrangement for me to go to the sawmill already but my cousin said right away ‘Haruji is going to work here and study here’. So, my relatives in Steveston were so upset because they had already made the arrangements. The reason he said “You stay here and learn English, learn the customs”. He sponsored me so I followed his advice and I went to a Jewish family as a houseboy so I was doing chores like a housemaid you know washing dishes and looking after the kids, cleaning the house and sometimes cutting the lawn. So I took a different way.”

“The family I went to were Jewish people and they are so nice to us, I didn’t know of course I thought all *hakujin* the same, you know but they were so nice to me. I prepared myself for discrimination but those Jewish people treated me like a family member. I was only there for eight months but all my life they helped me out.”



PHOTOS  
Above: Akemi and Harry on vacation, Mizuta family collection  
Below: Harry, Akemi and children at Queen Elizabeth Park, Vancouver, ca. 1973 Mizuta family collection





# Roy Uyeda

**M**y name is Roy Uyeda and I was born in Celtic Cannery. When I was born there, there was no cannery. In fact, it closed down 17 years before I was born in 1933.”

## Visiting Japan

“When I was five years and ten months old my mother and father took me and my sister who was two years older to Japan. In those days, many Japanese families would send their young kids to Japan for education, to be looked after by their Grandparents so my family was no exception. However there was another reason we went there. My mother fell down the stairs and injured her shoulder and the family thought if she used the hot springs in Japan it could help. As you may know there are so many hot springs, nice hot springs. So, we went there for two reasons and this was in 1939.”

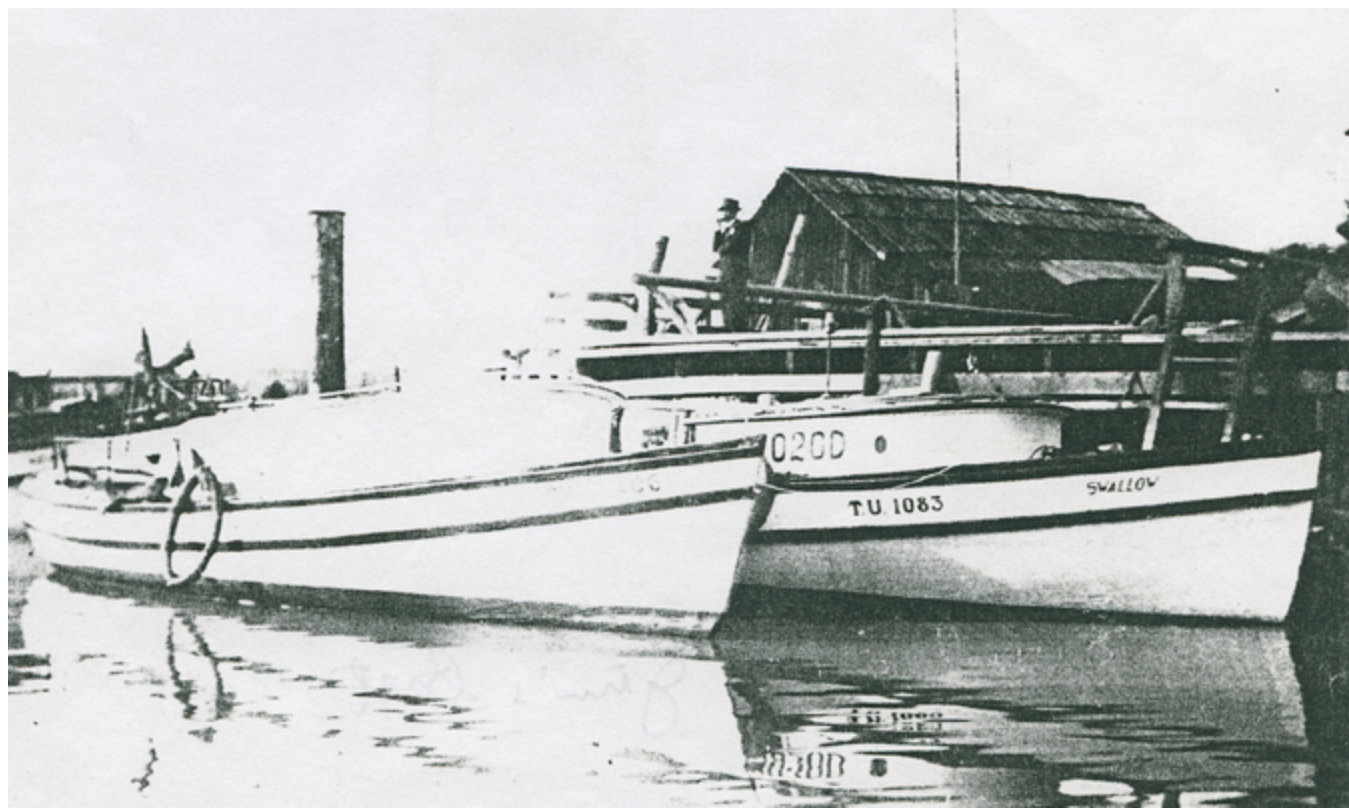


### PHOTOS

**Above:** Roy and older sister on way to Japan 1939. NNM TD 1008-2-12

**Below:** Uyeda brother's boat, Celtic Cannery, Vancouver ca. 1926 NNM TD 1008-2-5

**Right:** Roy Uyeda, Japan ca. 1951 NNM TD 1008-1-004



## Pre-Internment

“I did my best and school life was not that bad until that eventful day in December, when Pearl Harbor happened on that Sunday. On the Monday morning when I came to school, it was a few minutes before the class was starting so I passed a group of small boys talking together and as I passed there one of them said “here’s a Jap”, and ever since then every day after school there would be some kids hiding behind the bushes. They would shower me with rocks. So, every day I had to come up with a strategy to elude these kids hiding behind the bushes to shower me with rocks. It was not a pleasant thing at all.”

“One day, a government official came and told my father that we were no longer allowed to live freely like that. So, we were told to hurry up and just get a few belongings together, you know one suitcase in each hand kind of thing then we were sent to Hastings Park. We didn’t stay there too many weeks. I don’t remember how many weeks

but sometime in June or maybe early July we were shipped into the interior, and we were sent to Slocan Valley.”

## Internment

“They’re very hard winters (in Slocan Valley) and the temperature really drops and it snowed a lot there. The one ironic thing, I don’t know what the adults were going through but for us kids Slocan was a haven because the atmosphere in Vancouver was so ugly. Over there I felt so free I didn’t have to feel bad, nobody to look down on us or call us names. And the mountains were all over and we used to go up there and pick berries and look for *warabi* and then nuts. We picked nuts in the Autumn.”



Moving to Japan

“In 1945, the Canadian government gave us an ultimatum that anybody who wanted to stay in Canada had to go east of the Rockies and if that’s not satisfactory, ship out to Japan. Then we were called repatriates, which means that you go back to your former place of birth. More than 65 percent were all Canadian born kids and all of them don’t even speak Japanese. They had never been there; they didn’t even speak Japanese whereas I had two years of schooling there so for me I wasn’t going to a strange country.”

“The trains we got on stopped at every station and it was so slow it took two days in the hot summer. What disgusted me and really made me sick to my stomach and made me feel so helpless, was that every time the train came to the station there would be hoards of people with stuffed backpacks. It was very hot so all the windows were open and they would throw in their backpacks through the windows and they would literally crawl over all four of us sitting, literally crawling over our knees to get inside. They didn’t bother going in and boarding the train from the proper place, it was everybody for himself. Survival of the fittest kind of thing. The strongest got the best and they would fight for seats and that happened all the way to Kyushu. Along the way we would see these bombed out shells of factories, and the big electrical motor left in the corner. Nothing else, just these steel gilders of the factory skeleton and that kind of thing. We saw a lot of devastation; it was very unpleasant.”

Back to Canada

“So I came back to Canada, May 1958 although I was apprehensive of racial discrimination. I will call it roots, just like salmon going upriver to where it was born and my family was salmon fishing. So I decided to come back and the Hikawa Maru was the only Japanese ship that survived the war because it was

a hospital ship with a red cross insignia so the U.S Navy spared that boat and then all the boats that applied before between Vancouver and Yokohama they all got sunk, every single one of them. So I came back to Canada after 12 years and once I landed here I started looking for work.”

“I would have ended up in the Salvation Army’s basement homeless, but narrowly I missed that because in those days there’s quite a few *nisei* like myself. Most boys and girls would remember or they would find some families to take them (us) in for chores and we would get room and board free so I found that kind of place too. It was a young lawyer or family so I wasn’t out on the streets.”

PHOTOS

Below: Roy Uyeda, Japan ca. 1951 NNM TD 1008-1-003



Sumiko Urata, nee Ono

My name is Sumiko Urata, I was born in Vancouver on February 23, 1936. Kanzaimon Ono is my father. He was born the middle child of three sons on July 10, 1890. He was given his adult name Yosojiro at age 17 and immigrated to Canada in 1907, the year of the Vancouver riots. He lost his wife and two sons to disease. His 10-year old eldest son, Yoichi, survived. Yosojiro returned to Japan in 1929 and married Suye Kawase. My brother Yoshikazu was delivered in 1932 by midwife Mrs. M. Ichiki and my sister Kikue was delivered in 1934 by midwife Mrs. I. Watanabe. I was delivered on February 23, 1936 by midwife Mrs. I. Watanabe at 1889 Triumph Street.”

“We had a big fire in 1938. My brother died from smoke suffocation. My mother heard the sound of the crackling, and she went outside and she opened the basement door and the flames came out and she couldn’t get inside the house. I think it was a two or three storey house. Some people jumped from the top floor and some people died. Altogether three boys died that day.”

“I remember dad put all our belongings into a wheelbarrow and took it to a Buddhist temple on Cambie Street. I got a ride in the wheelbarrow on the way back home. He stored our furniture and other belongings into storage. I remember crossing the river at night. There were so many people on the boat. My mother got seasick. The officer took her somewhere and I remember crying. We got off the boat at Nakusp and went onto an open truck.”



PHOTO

Above: Suye with baby Sumiko, Yoshikazu & Kikue, Vancouver ca. 1936 Urata family collection

Sandon

“Our house was on the top of the hill which was an old hospital building. It was a 3-storey building including the basement. Each room was very small size. We had bunk beds. Mom and dad on the bottom, and me and my sister Kikue on the top.”

“We went deep into the forest to pick huckleberries. We hung a little can in front and when it filled up with berries, put it into a knapsack. We would exchange berries for sugar. We had no money to buy sugar, so we had to trade.”

Lemon Creek

“Then we were moved again 2 years later. I lived in Lemon Creek from 1944 to 1946. There was no electricity here. We used oil lamps. There was no indoor plumbing. The toilets were outside. We had to get water from an outdoor water pump. There was no insulation in the bungalows, just a wood stove for heat and cooking. We slept on bunk beds.”

Exile to Japan

“After the war, around summertime 1946, my dad took us to the boat, S.S. General Meigs, it sailed from Vancouver to Japan. It was maybe about 10 days. My mother and sister didn’t eat because they were seasick the entire time. They were weak when they landed in Japan.”

“We were quarantined for two weeks in the Yokosuka Uraga barracks. We got immunization shots, but I don’t know what it was. No separation. No privacy. We had to get our food in a bucket. The rice was full of white worms because it was hot and humid in Japan. So, my sister didn’t eat. I was so hungry, I ate anything and everything.”

“Kikue would not eat any food with bugs in it. Everything had bugs in it. In those days, there was no fridge. She died of malnutrition at the age of 13 on November 3, 1947. I would pick the sweet potato leaves when it was growing. You can’t pick all the

leaves, because the plant has to grow. I would take the leaves home, and mom would cook them. My mom would walk to her birth village about an hour away to pick up some rice from her relatives, and bring it back.”

“In Japan, our house had a well, but it didn’t have a cover. There is a little metal bucket attached to a long bamboo rod. I would lower the bamboo rod and when it reached the water, you would scoop the water. And then pour the water into my own wooden bowl, and take that home. I remember the whole house filling up with black smoke whenever you cooked, because there is no chimney, just an open hole in the roof. The stove is an open fire pit. I would cough and get asthma. I felt like I was going to die because it was hard to breathe. I wasn’t used to breathing smoky air. I finally got used to it four years later.”

“Toilet was also outside. There was a rectangular opening in the middle. It smelled awful and you could see white worms in the sewage. We didn’t have newspaper, so we had to use rice straw for toilet paper. My mom showed me how to rub the straw between my hands to make it softer, so it wouldn’t poke me in the bum.”



“When the latrine was full, we would scoop up the sewage and put it into a bucket. We would take it to the vegetable garden and spread it out. That’s why you would get those worms in your stomach and intestines. At the school, everybody had to drink *makuri*, a very dark and bitter drink made from a weed. It tasted terrible. You had to pinch your nose to drink it. After the drink, the worms flushed out.”

“The rice was planted and growing. In the meantime, our school would go and pick the *inago* (grasshopper) for soup. The school would cook the grasshoppers into a soup, and this was for the school students. Also we picked little green leaves growing out of the ground.”

“To prepare a rice field or paddy was very hard work and strenuous. We have no machinery at the time. We used spade or shovel to dig out the trench, and then plough it. Then use a hoe to make the dirt

smaller and smoother. When everything is nice for planting, then we planted the rice seedlings into the muddy field. It will take all day from morning to dusk to plant the seedlings.”

“The muddy fields have leeches. I screamed when I feel them suck on my feet. It will not come off easily. I have salt in a bamboo tube hung around my neck. The leeches are put into the salt tube.

Between planting and harvesting, we have to go into the field to take out the weeds. We do it with bare hands, no tools.”

“When rice is ready to harvest, we use a rice sickle to cut it. My mother warned me do not put my hand too low or you will cut yourself. She was right. I cut my left baby finger, quite deep. She ripped her apron and tied it around my finger. There was no medicine. No doctor. It took a long time to heal because it started to puss around the cut. I kept working in the field after the cut.”

Return to Canada

“I returned to Vancouver in June 1960, and I met my husband in Steveston. We got married in 1962. I have four daughters.”

“My parents returned to Canada in April 1963 when I was two months pregnant with my second child. When they realized I was not going back to Japan, they immigrated back to Vancouver. My father passed away in 1970. My mother passed in 1993.”

PHOTOS

Left: Sumiko returned to Vancouver, ca. 1960 Urata family collection

Above: Sumiko dancing with parasol, Tatsumi Dance Recital , Vancouver ca. 2022 Urata family collection





Shig and Akemi Hirai wedding, Vancouver 1962 NNM TD 1322

## Treasures from the Collection

Shig and Akemi Hirai were the founders of well known and loved Fujiya food stores in Vancouver. They both worked very long hours to build their success. They both loved the 'community' aspect of the business and were very social, often talking to the customers on a daily basis. Shig took part in many community events such as *Sumo* at the Powell Street Festival, *Shiga kenjinkai* in Vancouver, and received a glass award from the Vancouver Japanese Business association in 2007.

As one of the early returnees to Vancouver from Japan, Shig opened one of the first Japanese restaurants in the 1960's, Maneki restaurant. Shig and Akemi were both *kika nisei*, (those who returned from Japan), Shig returned in 1954, and Akemi (Eto) Hirai arrived in 1958. They were married in 1962. They have donated many photos and stories of their history to the NNMCC, we appreciated their generosity, as supporters of the NNMCC in so many other ways. Shig is the brother of Miki Hirai and Akemi is the sister of Margaret Eto, both whose stories are included in this special *kika nisei* issue.