



D E N S H Ō

The Japanese American Legacy Project

INTERVIEW INFORMATION

Name of interviewee: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Location of Interview: _____

Primary Interviewer: _____

Secondary Interviewer (if any): _____

Videographer: _____



D E N S H Ō

The Japanese American Legacy Project

NARRATOR INFORMATION

First Name: _____

Middle Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Nickname (if any): _____

Maiden Name (if any): _____

Interview Display Name (How you would like your name to appear with your interview):

Street Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Telephone: (_____) _____ **E-mail:** _____

Date of Birth: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Country of Birth: _____

Name at Birth: _____

Gender: M F

Generational Identifier (ex. Issei, Nisei, Kibei, etc.): _____

Ethnicity: _____

Nationality: _____

Religion (at time of interview): _____

Densho Digital Archive
Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre Collection
Title: Kim Wakabayashi Interview
Narrator: Kim Wakabayashi
Interviewer:
Location:
Date: 1/8/05
Densho ID: denshovh-wkim-01

[Photograph descriptions]

I: This is Tokujiro Wakabayashi in Binmanji with his two sisters.

[Interruption]

I: This is Tokujiro's friends in Binmanji, and this is Tokujiro standing on the right-hand side.

[Interruption]

I: This is Kimi Wakabayashi on her wedding day in May 1931.

[Interruption]

I: This is Kimi Wakabayashi with **Mrs. Kitagawa** soon after the arrival, her arrival in Regina in 1931.

[Interruption]

I: This is Tokujiro Wakabayashi in his youth.

[Interruption]

I: This is Tokujiro Wakabayashi in Calgary in 1925.

[Interruption]

I: And what did your parents do in Binmanji?

KW: Oh, that time, my [inaudible] is a farmer, you know, but she started that rice... what you call? Business. They send her to Osaka, Kyoto, and all over, send her to rice, that kind of business.

I: And I understand the rice around Binmanji is very good rice.

KW: Rice?

I: Yes, it was very good rice.

KW: Oh, yeah, yeah. Nice farming.

I: Rice farming?

KW: Yeah, that's right.

I: And, and what did you, what school did you go to? How far in school?

KW: Well, you know, *shogakko* is grade one to six. Very close, one half-a-block away my house, so very close. Up to grade six, and go grade six, eight, nine is **Tana**. **Tana** is maybe twenty, twenty-minutes' walk? Yeah. You mean **Tana**?

I: And did you, did you go to grade *shogakko dake*?

KW: No. *Shogakko* sixth...

I: Sixth.

KW: And grade twelve, I mean, seven, eight, is **Tana**, then graduate and sewing class, three-year.

I: And what, and what did you do after you went to the sewing class, after high school?

KW: Well, that's a sewing class. I wanted to try to go Osaka or Kyoto, and *Hokoni ikitai to mateta no. Suno ni-o kekkon no hanashinatte ikinakatta*. [Laughs]

I: Oh, I see. What she said was that she wanted to go to Osaka, but marriage came up and so she couldn't, couldn't go there. Could you tell, tell me about what happened about your marriage?

KW: Marriage?

I: Yes.

KW: Oh, at that time I'm young and I don't know anything about *kekkon*, you know. Just obey to my mother and daddy. [Laughs]

I: And what happened?

KW: What? Oh, I'm, I'm lucky, he's real nice, you know.

I: Could you tell me about the experience about how the marriage was arranged?

KW: Marriage?

I: Yeah, how was it arranged?

KW: At that time I'm young, I don't think anything, just mother say, and just to obey, that's all. [Laughs]

I: Did you know that Tokujiro, your husband, was going to Canada and that he came from Canada to find a bride?

KW: Yeah.

I: And did you know anything about Canada?

KW: Oh, no, nothing. Nothing. [Laughs] But just my daddy and his daddy just arrange, you know, and married, that's all. And I didn't think anything about that time.

I: So you didn't know Tokujiro, but he was from the same village?

KW: Yeah, same village.

I: Did you know him at all before?

KW: Oh, no.

I: You didn't, you didn't know him at all?

KW: No. Yeah. [Laughs]

I: Then you were married in 1931.

KW: 1931.

I: And then you, did you, right after the marriage, did you come to Japan -- to Canada?

KW: Canada, yeah. I think just a month, isn't it? Yeah, after month in Binmanji, then come to Canada. Yeah, that's right. Vancouver. We went to stop, I think, in Canada. Oh, at that time, already told me Regina, open store. But on our way Calgary and Edmonton stop, then come to Regina. Then Regina we stayed one year, I think, then moved to Saskatchewan.

I: And what did they tell you about your husband before you got married?

KW: Before, well, they say, "Nice man." [Laughs] He not drink, drink, you know. So I don't know. I can't think that time, just, just obey my daddy and mama, that's all. [Laughs]

I: When you came to Canada, somebody else came with you.

KW: Oh yeah, that's **Mrs. Yamamoto, Sune-san**, *isshoni kita no na*.

I: And then, where did, now, you landed in Vancouver?

KW: Yeah, and I stayed that time maybe week in Vancouver, I think. Then came to Saskatchewan.

I: So therefore your sister-in-law, **Mrs. Yamamoto, Sune-san**, was left with her husband in Vancouver?

KW: Yeah.

I: And then you and...

KW: The same time.

I: Same time. And then both you and your husband went to Saskatchewan.

KW: Saskatchewan, yeah.

I: So when you came to Saskatchewan, how did you feel?

KW: Well, I forget but very lonesome that time, isn't it? Yeah. I don't know how cook and I don't know anything. Can't talk English, and kind of lonesome, kind of, sometimes.

I: How many families were there?

KW: Regina? Maybe **Kitano**, **Nomura**, maybe five or six families.

I: And how did they help you?

KW: Oh, they take me shopping, yeah, shopping most of the time. Oh, **Mrs. Kitano** same apartment stay, she, and then that's why she taking me shopping and cooking. So I'm lucky that time.

I: So you stayed with the **Kitagawa** family the first time?

KW: Yeah, same apartment, yeah.

I: And basically you spoke Japanese all the time?

KW: Oh, yes, yeah.

I: So then after you were in Regina, then you didn't work at the store, did you, at the **Silkalina**?

KW: Oh, no, no.

I: You just stayed home?

KW: Yeah, that's right. *Sugu ni ore ni ji shita desho. Dakara.* [Laughs]

I: She got pregnant. [Laughs] And so she became a mother. And then you went to, to Saskatoon?

KW: Saskatoon.

I: And then, and that was in 1933?

KW: 1933, I suppose.

I: And how many families were in Saskatoon at that time?

KW: Saskatoon... let me see, now. Yeah, **Nomura**, **Hoshi**, and some **Takemura**, I think. **Takemura**. Maybe four, four family at that time, I think. Oh, some people at **King George Hotel** bellboy, **Mr. and Mrs. Kitano**, and **Imamura**. Yeah, I think three people working **King George Hotel** at that time.

I: And at this time, your husband, **Tokujiro**, was he able to speak English quite well, then?

KW: Oh, he's pretty good.

I: And why was that?

KW: Huh?

I: And why was, how did he learn English?

KW: I think he came to Canada and I think he went to night school or something. Yeah. **New Westminster** or something.

I: And he worked at some hotels?

KW: That is **Caroline**. Moved to **Caroline** and then he worked bellboy, I think. Vancouver just working sawmill or something.

I: Oh, I see. So your husband worked in the sawmills when he first came.

KW: First came.

I: And he was only nineteen. And he worked in the sawmills, and he worked in the logging camps?

KW: Oh, no, no. I came Canada, he already Regina. Yeah, yeah.

I: So he was working in the clothing and fabric store when you were...

KW: Regina, we started --

KW: ...in Regina when you got married.

KW: Yeah. Yeah, that's right.

I: How did you relate to the *hakujin* people and did you have a lot of contact with the *hakujin* people?

KW: Oh, no, not Regina. Saskatoon *ite kara no*.

I: In Saskatoon you had more contact.

KW: Yeah, yeah, contact. Not much. Well, my children start school, and that's neighbor or people, kids' friend, and met everybody. Then I know gradually.

I: So did you take any English class at all?

KW: Well, I went technical school night class, but maybe... how many times? Was too hard for me, so I quit. [Laughs] Very hard.

I: So then did you just learn English by just talking to people, just gradually over the years?

KW: Still not good, but...

I: Oh, I think it's very good. And then your husband started the Mikado Store. Could you tell me about that?

KW: That one? Let me see now. That's Regina, Mr. and Mrs.... name, what called? Store name.

I: **Silkalina**?

KW: **Silkalina**, then he quit, then he owned business in Saskatoon.

I: And that was, I understand, in 1933?

KW: '33?

I: Yes. And so what kind of business was that?

KW: Well, most that time imported to Japan, dinner set or chinaware. And tablecloth or something like that. Then after gradually carry, oh, we carried that blouse or housecoat or that kind of stuff, underwear. Yeah, then after just **George** started more, all fabric store.

I: Your husband, I understand, had a stroke, and then, but he got better. And how was, how did you, how did you deal with that?

KW: Well, that's, you know, he can't walk, so I, every day put the carriage? What call?

I: Wheelchair?

KW: Wheelchair. Put there every day, take outside.

I: When you were in Saskatoon in the early part, after you moved from Regina, did you feel a lot of prejudice against Japanese, or not? You know, were people mean to you or anything like that?

KW: Oh, no, no.

I: You didn't, you didn't have too much trouble?

KW: I not much go out, much, most, kids were small, but neighbor people really nice to me, so I didn't used to...

I: During the war, your brother-in-law and the **Yamamoto** family were in internment camp. What, what did you do for them during the war?

KW: During war?

I: Yes.

KW: Yeah, we tried to, tried to come Saskatoon. We looking down house for them, then, then what? They says they go to camp or something, so they did not come Saskatoon.

I: So did you offer to sponsor them to come to Saskatoon after the war?

KW: I think, I think we did.

I: But he didn't want to come?

KW: No. Well, they went to camp, I think.

I: I see.

KW: Yeah, I think so.

I: Can you tell me about some of parcels you sent to them during, during the war?

KW: Oh, yeah.

I: And what you sent them?

KW: Huh?

I: What you sent them?

KW: Oh, mostly clothes, and something eat, I don't know. I forgot what sent to them.

I: And did you send parcels to Japan during the war and after the war?

KW: Oh, yeah. My sister and brother, so we sent them quite a bit, yeah.

I: And what did your family, your brother do during, during the war? Was he in the war at all?

KW: Well, my place is a small farm, farm place. I don't think not much suffer, but sometime **[inaudible] ano hard dakara tabe browse tokura namuoku tatomoteru. Wasurete shimote.**

I: She said that she, she sent clothing and some foodstuff to her brother and her sister during the war because of the limited supplies over there. And then after the war, did you go and visit your relatives or your brothers in Japan?

KW: Yeah, I did. Now, how... I can't remember what year.

I: But you went several times?

KW: Yes, how many times? Three times went to Japan.

I: And I understand your sister is how old and living now in Japan?

KW: Now? Three year older than me, so ninety-five?

I: Ninety-five, you told me.

KW: Something like that, in a month? I'm what?

I: Ninety-two.

KW: Ninety-two? So three year different, so ninety-five. Yeah. [Laughs]

I: Now, how long did you work at the Mikado Store?

KW: Well, until **George** took over, you know, so I can't remember how long.

I: So you were in your seventies, plus.

KW: Hmm?

I: You were into seventies?

KW: Yeah. Huh?

I: You were well over seventy, right, when you were...

KW: Seventy?

I: Yeah, over seventy.

KW: I think so. [Laughs]

I: And you have three children?

KW: Three children, yeah.

I: And who are they and what do they do?

KW: That time is, Arthur is **university**, **Ruby** is start **nursing**, oh, **she came Toronto for nursing**. **George** is still high school, I think. I can't remember.

I: Now, your first-born, Arthur, was, worked for the provincial government?

KW: Yeah, he finished university, then they went to Regina provincial government. Unless he take off for a couple of years, **Howard University**, yeah, uh-huh. Then he went to Ottawa, I think. How many year working in Ottawa, I don't...

I: Many years. And he was, he was very distinguished in his career. And he's in, got a Order of Canada.

KW: Oh, yeah, that's right. That's very nice. Not, how many years ago?

I: Few years ago.

KW: Huh?

I: Few years ago.

KW: Oh.

I: And your daughter lives where?

KW: Daughter?

I: Yeah.

KW: Mississauga.

I: Mississauga? And what does she do?

KW: She, what? What you call? She not much doing now.

I: She does a lot of work volunteering.

KW: [Laughs] Church.

I: Church? And what does **George** do now?

KW: Well, **George** now, most of the time in what?

I: Retired?

KW: Not much doing.

I: Now, **George** took over the Mikado Store after your husband passed away?

KW: Uh-huh.

I: And he ran, and he ran the store.

KW: Yeah, then later, how many years? Went to **[inaudible]**.

I: Now, I understand you and your husband contributed -- and your family -- contributed a lot to the city. And what did they city do to recognize your contribution to the city? What did they do?

KW: Well, they just named the Wakabayashi, they christened, Wakabayashi christened, yeah, the Wakabayashi Way. Yeah, that's very nice.

I: That was, that's their recognition of the contribution that your family did to the, to the city. And what do you do right now?

KW: Right now? I'm not much doing. Just most time watch TV and sit down. And doing cross-stitch or sewing or something like that, knitting, you know. Not much doing.

I: How do you feel after over ninety years, now, you're healthy and you're, you travel a lot still, and you had your great-great grandchildren, how do you feel about having, coming to Canada?

KW: Well, I'm... what you say? [Laughs] Very lucky, I'm very lucky, I think. And long good time I had. So I don't know what to say.

I: Do you have any regrets about coming to Canada?

KW: What's that?

I: Do you have any regrets?

KW: Regrets?

I: Yeah, regrets means, do you feel any sorry that you came to Canada? You're happy to have come?

KW: Oh, right now, sure, I'm happy.

I: But at the time when you first came, how did you feel?

KW: Oh, that's hard time. You know, I wanted to go back to Japan. And nighttime I can't sleep more, you know, thinking about Japan. But right now, very lucky and I like to stay here.

I: Okay. Do you have anything to say about, about how you raised your children when you were, when they were growing up? What did you tell them about, about themselves?

KW: Oh, that's hard to say.

I: Was there any special advice you gave them when they were growing up?

KW: No.

I: No? You don't remember anything about any special advice you gave to your children?

KW: No.

I: I've read somewhere where you said that, that because they were Japanese, they had to be very good children so they're not, they don't bring any disgrace to your family. Do you remember anything like that, telling them something like that?

KW: I don't think so. I can't remember.

I: No? You can't remember.

KW: No.

I: You're memory's pretty good, and you're still very healthy.

KW: No, I don't think so. I'm awful.

[Interruption]

[Description of photographs.]

I: This is a needlepoint that Kimi Wakabayashi did for her daughter, **Ruby**.

[Interruption]

I: Another example of Kimi Wakabayashi's needlepoint.

[Interruption]

I: --garden which he still does in Saskatoon.

[Interruption]

I: At ninety-two, she still does her own gardening and mows the lawn in the summertime.

[Interruption]

I: Wakabayashi Crescent, named by the city in recognition of the contribution from the Wakabayashi family in Saskatoon, and this is with her family.

[Interruption]

I: The family.

[Interruption]

I: Arthur Wakabayashi with his Order of Canada presentation with Governor General Adrienne Clarkson in Ottawa

[Interruption]

I: Arthur named Chancellor University of Regina.

[Interruption]

I: **George**, the sixtieth anniversary of the Mikado shop.

[Interruption]

I: **George** in the farewell and thank you after sixty years of the Mikado Silk, established in 1933 by his father Tokujiro Wakabayashi.

[Interruption]

I: Fourth-generation **Damon** Wakabayashi with his grandparents **Art** and **Marge** Wakabayashi of Regina, Saskatchewan.

[Interruption]

I: Fourth-generation **Claire Kimi Chalmers**, daughter of **Janet** and **Mark Chalmers** of Vancouver, B.C., in 2004.

[Interruption]

I: Kimi is named after her great-grandmother.