

Interviewee: Mickey Matsubayashi

Interviewer: Lisa Uyeda

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THE JAPANESE CANADIAN LEGACY PROJECT

[Start part 1]

Lisa Uyeda: Okay. So, this is an interview with Mickey on June 23, 2010.

Mickey Matsubayashi: [laughs] Yeah.

LU: Um, Mickey, where were you born and when were you born?

MM: I was born in Vancouver, at the Vancouver General Hospital, in, uh, September 2nd, 1930.

LU: And why were you born in a hospital and not at home with a midwife?

MM: Um, I really don't know [coughs]. I think I may have been a sickly baby because my childhood was just, uh, just one after another it was some sickness, until I moved out to the interior of B.C., and then my health improved 150% [chuckles].

LU: So, everybody calls you Mickey, but did you ever receive a Japanese name as well?

MM: Yeah, apparently "Mickey" is a, uh, translation of my father's name Kanichi that is a complex symbol with a [gestures with hands] horizontal bar underneath, which is "ichi" or "one", and the upper part, "kan" part, you can read that two ways- one is "Kan" the other is "mickey". "Mickey" in Japanese apparently means "the trunk of a tree" [laughs]. It matches my physique! [chuckles].

LU: [laughs] So, what generation Canadian are you?

MM: Second generation.

LU: Which is nisei.

MM: [Nods] Nisei, right.

LU: Tell me a little bit about your parents. Where were your parents born?

MM: My father was born in, uh, Hikone - Sorry, I've forgotten the name of the province that he was born in - his father lived and worked in a girls' school in Hikone, and my mother's family was from Osaka, and they met in Vancouver, and the rest is history! [chuckles]

LU: So, when did your father come to Canada? And how did he get here?

MM: He came by boat in - let me see now, 1918 - 1895 - 12 is-

LU: Oh, so your father was born in 1895?

MM: [Nods] Yeah.

LU: What about your mother, do you remember when she was born?

MM: 1902.

LU: Oh, wow.

MM: Yeah. So, he [father] came to Canada in, uh, when he was about, 15, I think it was. And my mother, she was younger than that, because she had to go to a school in Vancouver. English school. So, [coughs] she spoke English and wrote English quite well, whereas my father went to night school to learn, and to read and write English.

LU: So, why did your father decide to come to Canada?

MM: Um. I don't know the reason, I don't think he ever told me the reason, but his, uh, his older sisters were in Canada, and married to other gentlemen here in Canada, and they were urging him to come to Canada because there was lots of work available. Not so much in Japan, so, uh, my Dad took their advice and came to Canada, and the first job he got was, um, working as a bell boy in one of the chain of hotels in Calgary, I think. And then, uh, from there he got transferred to- in the same chain of hotels- in Edmonton and then further and further east, until he ended up in, uh, the hotel in Winnipeg, and that was the farthest east that he was able to come. And then he went back to Vancouver, and he met my mother, and they got married in 1923, in Vancouver. So, my mother would have been 21, and my father was, uh, ten years older, I guess. 10 or 12. So, he'd be 33.

LU: You had a really funny story about your Dad working as a bell boy?

MM: Oh, yes [smiles, chuckles]. Yeah, he was a bell boy working on the night shift, and he went down to the main floor, the main entrance, to get the day's paper- the paper was delivered to the hotel, rolled up in a roll, and he was carrying this roll into the lobby and towards the elevators when this, uh, inebriated guest of the hotel started after him about something or other, getting quite abusive, so he followed my Dad into a elevator, and, uh, it got worse, so my Dad with his kendo [Japanese martial art involving traditional fencing weapons] background took the newspapers and poked his [the drunk man's] forehead with it using a kendo move and knocked him out. [laughs] He, uh, he left that hotel quite soon after that. [laughs]

LU: [laughs] Now tell me a little bit about your mother. So, she was how old when she came here with her parents and her brother and her sister?

MM: Um, I believe she was about five or six. And, um, her sister was about two years older, and her brother another two years older than that. So, that would make them born in 1920- Sorry, 1904 and 1906 or 1907. And my mother's mother and father had a small Japanese restaurant, um, downtown in Vancouver; not in the Japanese town, but a little farther east, and, uh, all the children worked in there except my mother, who was sent to school, and she worked there after school and on weekends. That's about all I know about that store. Except that my mother and my grandmother's, uh, when they made sushi, the uh, taste of the sushi [chuckles] was one that I can't forget. There's a restaurant in downtown Toronto right on Bloor street called Ichiriki that makes sushi rice that tastes exactly like my mother and my grandmother used to make, so my wife and I go there once a week at least [chuckles].

LU: [chuckles]. Now your mother was the only one going to English school out of the family.

MM: That's right.

LU: Was she the family translator for everything?

MM: [Nods] She was, yeah. So, uh, I don't know how much translation she needed to do, but, uh, she was always available. And, um, after they got married, my father would help out too.

LU: So, when did, uh, do you remember when the restaurant closed down?

MM: [Shakes head] No, I don't, I don't. It wasn't until [coughs] quite a few years after we came out to Toronto that, uh, I found out that they had this restaurant for quite a while [nods slightly]. But I imagine that because of the evacuation that they weren't able to keep the restaurant going.

And that the evacuation came quite a while after they [his parents] were married, and I'm sure they did not have the restaurant at that time, it must have been in the thirties when they closed that restaurant. 1930's.

LU: So, your parents got married in 1923.

MM: [Nods] Right.

LU: And where did they live together?

MM: Um, my uncle, Mr. Xengya [Zenya?] Hori owned a dry goods store on Powell Street [coughs]. In downtown Vancouver, opposite Powell Grounds as it was known then, it's Oppenheimer Park now, but it's still there. Um, my Dad was very close to his sister and his brother-in-law, so it got on well - and, uh, what was the question?

LU: Where your parents lived when they first were married.

MM: [Nods] Oh, yeah. Um, my uncle owned a house a little further west than where Japantown was. And they moved into that house when they got married, and that's where we lived right through until the war started. It was, um, on Dundas Street. It was roughly halfway between downtown Japantown- [interrupted by rattling noise, construction noise]

LU: [chuckles]

MM:[continuing] between Japantown and Hastings Park. So, we used to see a lot of- [interrupted by rattling again] Holy moly.

LU: Why is it shaking?

[Interruption from construction noise]

LU: Alright. Um, where were we?

MM: Um.

LU: Your parents- oh! What do you remember about growing up?

MM: Growing up in Vancouver? Um, I was a...there were no close neighbours that were my age. There was the *hakujin* [non-Japanese] family across the street that, uh,

there was a girl that was about my age but she had her own circle of friends, so, uh, I played with the neighbour's dog and other dogs [chuckles]. And after a while we got our own dogs so I would travel around, there was no restrictions as far as having dogs on leashes, so I'd just follow them through the bushes and everything. We had a great time [smiles].

LU: [chuckles] Did you have any siblings?

MM: [Nods] Yeah, mm-hmm. Two older sisters. My one sister is five years older than me, and the other one is three years older than me. And my older sister had, uh, appendicitis, and it was very severe, so she had to miss one year of school, so turns out my second sister and my first sister were in the same grade at school. They were stuck together [chuckles]. But fortunately, everything worked out alright. But, um, I was the real sickly one. I had every childhood disease you can imagine. And kidney troubles of some kind, appendicitis, tonsillitis - and I had to eat- the doctor recommended to my mother that I be fed liver for each meal and for in-between meal snacks. So, I had, uh, lived on liver for six months.

LU: How was that?

MM: It wasn't very tasty, the liver.

LU: [laughing] No.

MM: And I still like liver! [chuckles] It's amazing, you'd think I'd be sick of it, but -.

LU: [chuckles] What was life like in Vancouver at that time? What was it like to go shopping in the general store and where did you find, you know-

MM: Most of our shopping was done at, downtown, past Japantown, in Vancouver - uh, was it Eaton's? Uh, Hudson's Bay store - and another general stores, and all the shopping that we did for clothes and things like that, either in one department store or another. And we didn't buy anything too fancy, anyhow, as far as I was concerned it was just another chore to go shopping [chuckles].

LU: Did you ever get an allowance, you know, for sweet treats or anything?

MM: No, I don't remember ever getting an allowance. We had treats because my grandmother would give me treats [smiles]. My grandmother was a Zen Buddhism Buddhist and, uh, she had a little prayer nook in her bedroom, and she would say prayers in the afternoon, so some days I'd sneak into her bedroom and listen to her, and that's when I got a snack [chuckles].

LU: So, was your grandmother the only one who was religious? Or Buddhist?

MM: That's right. And the rest of the family was definitely not. At that time. Later on, after we were evacuated and left Vancouver, we joined the Anglican religion because it was quite active in Slocan. But that was the only exposure that we had. We were never a very religious family at all. But I think it was more for the social aspect that we joined the church.

LU: And what do you remember, do you remember playing any games when you were younger? Did you have any non-Japanese friends that you played with as well?

MM: [Shakes head] No, I had a friend next door who was quite a bit younger, and I used to play with him but it wasn't as much fun because he was so young [chuckles]. The other time, people I played with were all acquaintances from school, and, uh, there were two people especially, the Sakaki boys, they were cousins. And they were in the same class as me in public school, and they lived not too far from us, so we used to get together on weekends sometimes. And, uh, we used to get together to go to Japanese school every day after school, too. So, they were the boys that I hung out with most of all [coughs].

LU: So, what public school did you go to?

MM: It was, it's called, uh, Hastings Public School. And it wasn't too far away, it was up the hill, over a couple of blocks, and I used to- my dog used to walk me partway to school in the morning. We'd get to a corner and I'd say, "Corkey, you stop and stay here," and he would stop, and then he would lie down on the sidewalk [chuckles] and I would walk up the hill, look back, and I could see this black dot on the sidewalk where he was [smiles, laughs]. After school when I came home, he'd be there. I don't think he stayed there the whole day, but he knew when I was coming home, so he'd be waiting for me there [laughs].

LU: And after public school ended, how much time did you have until you had to go to Japanese school?

MM: Uh, I think it was about...an hour. About an hour to an hour and a half, I guess, because we used to walk towards the school and take a detour, and go very wide around one area, and then to the school, to avoid getting into fights with some of the neighbourhood kids who didn't like Orientals [chuckles].

LU: Oh, really?

MM: Yeah...that was the first exposure that we had to discrimination. We didn't know it as discrimination in those days, I guess. They just didn't like Japs [chuckles].

LU: Did you ever have any encounters with them?

MM: [Shakes head] No.

LU: You just avoided them?

MM: Yeah, just - they'd run after us and call us names and that was about it.

LU: So, how long was Japanese class for? Once you got there?

MM: Uh, an hour and a half. So, it'd be from four to five-thirty, so we'd be home by six o'clock, and we'd have dinner, and then homework [chuckles].

LU: And did you go to Japanese school every day, or - ?

MM: Every day, yeah. It's amazing that I didn't learn more, or I can't remember more that I learned [chuckles]. But that was quite a few years ago.

LU: And how long did you do Japanese school for?

MM: Hmm...five, five years? Five or six years, I guess. I think it closed up in 1942. So...it would be about six years, I guess.

LU: That's a long time.

MM: Yeah, it was, yeah. I got to a high enough grade that I could read the Japanese language newspapers and things like that. But, uh, I forgot it just as easily. I could speak Japanese much better than I could read it. We used to speak English at home because my father and mother both spoke English, but when my grandmother was around, we spoke Japanese, so, I did get some practice.

LU: How did your parents learn English?

MM: My mother was young enough that she had to go to English school, and my father went to night school before he started working. Or he went to night school after work, or something like that. He went with some Japanese friends of his. One turned out to be his brother-in-law, and another one was just an acquaintance.

LU: So, how old were you when the war started?

MM: I was eleven years old - yeah, 1941. December, so I'd be eleven, yes.

LU: And what do you remember about the government posting their signs?

MM: I don't remember very much at all. I know that it was something that was very serious, because, uh, my aunt and uncle, two sets of them would come to our place and some other people, and my Dad and Mom, and they would sit and discuss things with serious faces, and that was about it. I had so many other things to do that I didn't pay too much attention, but I could tell that there was something very serious being discussed.

LU: And do you remember when your parents told you that you had to pack up?

MM: No, I don't remember that. I didn't have that much, anyhow, to pack up anyhow [chuckles].

LU: [Chuckles] You didn't take any of your toys with you?

MM: No, I didn't. I remember I used to have, uh, a toy bear. A brown bear, that I used to carry around. And then - this was, uh, the summer before the war started, and somebody called us to go with them for a car ride or something, and somebody said "Hey, Mickey, you've forgot your bear!" and I turned around and, sure enough, I didn't have my bear, and I said [gestures with hand] "Aw, never mind." [chuckles]

LU: So, did your parents have a car as well?

MM: Yes, my Dad had a car because he sold insurance and he had to drive all around the interior of the coast of B.C, selling insurance. The \$2,000 life insurance policy that was designed to help pay for the funeral expenses. But he sure got to know the families of the people he sold insurance to, because, when we met them down at Powell Grounds or Oppenheimer Park, whatever it was called, he would be able to name the children, each one by name, and it impressed the owners, I'm sure [chuckles].

LU: Do you remember swimming or going hiking when you were younger, as well?

MM: [Nods] Yes, we used to go swimming, not every day, three or four times a summer we'd go to Spanish Banks or one of the other beaches in Toronto, and we went, uh hiking, and went up the mountain that was, uh, outside Vancouver. I've

forgotten the name of the, uh, mountain, but we went up there for a hike and a picnic. It was quite an experience. I think it was the longest walk I've ever been on [chuckles].

LU: And what about during the winter? Was it cold enough to play hockey, or tobogganing?

MM: No, the only time we ever had a chance to go skating was, uh, in 1935, I think, when we had a cold snap that winter and one of the lakes or ponds or something froze up, and so everybody went skating there. That was fun [smiles].

LU: So, getting back to the beginning of the war-

MM: [Coughs] Sorry.

LU: Have some tea.

MM: [Drinks some tea].

LU: So, what happened to your family at the beginning of the war? Were they split up?

MM: Yes. Uh, we were told pretty late in the preparations and, if I remember correctly, that we were expecting all of us in the family would be going to the same place. But then, as it turns out, near the end of the preparations, our parents told us that my father would be going to one place with my uncle and other friends, and we would go with their wives and children, excuse me, to another place. I remember it came as a bit of a shock to me because I couldn't see us carrying on without my Dad around.

LU: Mmm-hmm. So, where did your Dad go? Do you remember the name of where he went?

MM: [Scratching head] Hmm, no, I don't remember.

LU: Was it one of the detention camps, or-?

MM: [Shaking head] No, no, it was a road construction camp. So, they lived in one place and they were trucked to the site of the construction that was going on and then- back again in the evening or, uh, the afternoon [interview cuts out].

[End of part 1]

[Start part 2]

[part 2 cuts in almost as if the interview is already in progress]

MM: It was pretty hard work for him, because he hadn't done that kind of manual labor for years and years, but, um, as it turns out, the son of a friend of ours passed away, he drowned in Slocan Lake, and so, for some reason or another, my [clears throat] father, my uncle, and the father of the boy that died were taken out of that road camp and brought to Slocan, where they stayed for the rest of the war. So, we weren't without a father for too long. A year and a half, or thereabouts.

LU: Do you remember having any correspondence with your Dad when he was away?

MM: No, I don't as a matter of fact. I'm sure my mother wrote to him. But, uh, I don't remember ever hearing, she never read any mail or correspondence to us.

LU: So, what about you and your older sisters and your mother, where did you guys first go?

MM: Um...when we got to Guelph- sorry [shakes head]-when we got to Slocan, it was a bus ride from New Denver with a train stop [coughs]. Excuse me. A bus ride to Slocan, and then the bus stopped at a place called Oddfogle's Hall, which was a kind of auditorium in the city of Slocan, and there were...they basically, built uh, all double-decker beds, with, uh, sheets hanging down the side for privacy, and that's where that whole trainload of people had to stay for a while. Until other accommodations were prepared for them. So, after about a week or two weeks, we moved to a tent that was put up in the parking lot of a natural ice skating rink, hockey rink - about halfway to Bay Farm, between Slocan and Bay Farm. And we stayed there for two or three months, until the houses were built in Bay Farm. And, uh, we moved to Bay Farm finally, we were one of the first houses that was built in Bay Farm. So... we were never lacking for any spare lumber if we wanted to build shelving or anything in the house [chuckles]. Just had to go out in the evening and pick out some lumber.

LU: And what was it like, living in Slocan when you were living in the double bunk beds? Where did everybody eat, and go to the bathroom, and bathe? Do you remember much about that?

MM: Yeah, we - it was - they had washrooms in that hall, but there was no bath or anything. The bath we went to, the hockey rink where they had shower rooms, so we went there for showers, there were no baths, and when we got to Bay Farm, some of the houses were built, but the washrooms, the bath houses were not built. We had an outhouse in our backyard, so that's what we had to cope with. It was...our backyard happened to be a river bed, and digging down was quite a chore because of all the rocks, and they told us that our best bet would be to dig a four-foot by four-foot pit outside the kitchen of our house, and let the kitchen sink water run into [the pit] and seep away. So, it was up to me to dig that thing, and I kept digging, I'd dig down as far as I could until I hit a big boulder, and then I'd avoid that and dig around it. And then there'd be a boulder on the other side. And, uh, the hole [pit] kind of tapered from four-by-four down to about one-by-one [chuckles]. But it was lined with stones so it wasn't going to collapse or anything. But it worked alright, we never flooded it with water from our sink.

LU: And, going back to when you were living in the tent, how big was the tent?

MM: [Coughs] The tent was - there were five of us in the tent, and there was one two-decker bed. Uh, it was a double bed on the lower level and a single bed on the

upper level. So, I was in the upper level, my father and mother were in the lower level, and, uh, there was another double bed for my two sisters. So, it was a fair-sized tent. But, when it rained, we didn't know that you shouldn't touch the canvas of the tent [chuckles]. So, every time we leaned against it, the water would just run in and get us all wet, so we were huddled in the middle of the tent most of the time when it rained [chuckles].

LU: And what season was it when you were living in the tent?

MM: Late summer.

LU: So, it didn't get too cold.

MM: No, and that part was good.

LU: And was it like camping, when you were in the tent? Were you having your own barbecue out in the front, a fire pit, or - ?

MM: [Shaking head] No, nothing. We hadn't took [sic] all our meals from the hockey rink, it was set up for, uh, being the meals, and I think some of the men had living accommodations in the rink. And so, uh, we took all our meals in the rink. It was pretty good meals, actually.

LU: Do you remember what you ate?

MM: [Shakes head] Not really, no.

LU: Did you still have a lot of fish?

MM: No, not-excuse me- not much fish. The area was, Bay Farm especially, there were a lot of Doukhobors in the area, and they were farmers, and they had livestock that they sold to the local meat market and grocery store. So, the meat that we ate, we bought from the grocery store, so we were never short of meat, beef. I don't know if I could tell the difference between beef and pork in those days. But we were well-fed [chuckles].

LU: So, tell me a little bit about your house that you had in Bay Farm.

MM: Oh, yeah. This was a very simple house. The center part, it was 16x24 or something like that, and it was in three sections, the center section was the kitchen, the dining room, and the living room, all combined into one, and then on one side of that room was our bedroom, which had a double-decker double bed, and a single bed, which I had, was raised off the floor about four feet, so that all the luggage and everything would be stored underneath. And my two sisters slept on the upper part of the double bed and my father and mother slept on the lower part. And then on the other side of the kitchen was my aunt and uncle and my cousin, and, um, I think- I don't know what kind of an arrangement they had [chuckles]. But I guess they had a double bed and a single bed or something like that. So, it was communal. Communal cooking, communal eating, and that was about it. And then the rest of the time, we were sitting around the radio listening to it [chuckles].

LU: And did you have a stove in your kitchen inside the house?

MM: Yeah.

LU: Did you do any cooking outside?

MM: No, we had a big stove which did all the heating for the house, and for the cooking. And it was wood, a wood-burning stove. Quite a large top on it.

LU: And was all this already there when you were moving into the house? Or did you have to buy the furniture, or make the furniture?

MM: [Shakes head] No, it was all there for us. Yeah [coughs].

LU: And what were the different seasons like? What was it like living there in the summertime?

MM: The summer times, the summer time is was hot, and dry. When they had rain, it was a pretty dense shower, but not too long, the wintertime, it was cold, and dry. We did not have an awful lot of snow that I remember. Maybe it was a foot deep overnight or something like that. It didn't interfere with, uh, having to go to school or anything like that. And the trucks came around and plowed the main streets of Bay Farm. So, I mean, getting to the bath house and things like that, it wasn't a problem.

LU: And what was it like waking up? With the icicles?

MM: [Laughs] You had to get up very carefully [chuckles].

LU: So, tell the story about where the icicle[s] was - ?

MM: Well, the houses were built with a two-by-four frame, and then the outside was a shiplap horizontal boards [coughs]-excuse me- which overlapped a bit, and I think - I'm pretty sure that there was a layer of tarp paper that was put on the two-by-fours before they put the shiplap on. And, uh, that was it, if you wanted some inside covering on the two-by-fours, on the inside of the house, you had to do it yourself. Which some of the people did, and it looked more cottage-like. But whoever was the carpenter had put the shiplap on it, sometimes they missed the two-by-fours, so the nail would be sticking in all by itself and that's where the icicles formed [chuckles].

LU: [Chuckles] Yeah, right over where your bed was.

MM: [Laughing] Exactly.

LU: And, so when you're in Bay Farm, did you start going to school right away? Or did you have some time off for a while?

MM: That's right, there was no school for a year. For a whole year. And then they kept building it and building it and finally they completed the two large two-storey buildings that were [to] house the school. And the British Columbia Board of Education created, uh, what do you call it? The schedules that each grade should follow, so that they would catch up on the year that they missed. And so, our teachers were only maybe a half-dozen years older than us and had never taught before in their lives; had to have meetings and sessions, instructions from the Board of Education and things like that, to learn how to teach. And they were given instructions from the Board of Education and worked very hard to make sure that we got through the curriculum and passed the exams. So, there was a great deal of

credit that was due to the teachers that worked in the school. And, thinking back, at the time [scratches head], we looked at them as teachers, but then, later on we realized what they had given up, what hard work they had to do to become teachers, so there's a lot of admiration for them. They certainly made the schoolwork interesting and enjoyable. At least from my point of view [smiles].

LU: And what were your school days like? What time did you start in the morning?

MM: Gee, I don't remember. It must have been around 8:30 or so. It was a pretty long day, we broke for lunch, and then, uh, it was around 3:30 I guess. Not too many people had watches in those days [smiles, chuckles]. And certainly, the classrooms didn't have any clocks. Just went by the bell that they had in the school building.

LU: So, was there any Japanese school in the camps?

MM: I understand that there were, I went to one at Raymond Moriyama's mother ran [a school], but this was very, um, very late in the year that we were there, so, I only got about two months' lessons. And this was just once a week, I think it was on a Saturday, and, uh, there were, I think a total of about four students besides myself, that were there taking Japanese lessons, so I didn't really get that benefit from them.

LU: Do you remember how many people lived in Bay Farm?

MM: No, I have no idea. It was quite a large bunch, though.

LU: Mmm-hmm. And a lot of people had to share their houses with other families.

MM: [Nods] That's right. Not related, even.

LU: But you shared your house with your aunt and uncle?

MM: [Nods] That's right. And my cousin.

LU: Tell us a little bit about your uncle who wasn't put in the camps, he was out in Alberta already.

MM: I had one uncle that was the chief bell boy of this hotel chain that he worked at, and when he got through that, he opened a store in Calgary. So, Calgary being in Alberta, they weren't part of this evacuation away from the coast of BC, so, they had a pretty normal life. He had a dry goods store, I believe- no, it was a dry goods and clothing store. It was called "Silk-o-lina" Store, in Calgary, and I think they branched out to Edmonton and as far as...I think it was Regina, too, they had a branch in Regina. I don't think they came as far east as Manitoba...they did quite well, they were pretty well known, pretty popular store. My aunt and uncle had, one, two, three, four, [speaking] four boys and one girl. And I got to meet them when we were leaving Slocan [British Columbia] and heading out for Guelph [Ontario]. We stayed there for the better part of one week while the Calgary Stampede was on [chuckles]. And we attended that. And I got to know my cousins there, and I think they've all passed away, except two.

LU: And what kind of correspondence did you have with your uncle? When you were in Bay Farm and he was still at home?

MM: None at all. I think my Dad might have corresponded with him, but we had no phone that we could use, so it was all by mail. And certainly, we were thankful that he sent us this radio [smiles] that we had and listened to every day.

LU: And what did you listen to on the radio?

MM: Oh, my sisters listened to the hit parade every Saturday, and recorded all the songs in the order that they made the hit parade and all the lyrics and everything, they recorded. And my Dad and I used to sit around and listen to the hockey game [chuckles]. My Dad and my uncle- my two uncles- and a couple of other gentlemen used to take turns hosting a poker game, and so sometimes I had to sneak the radio away from them [chuckles] so I could listen to it in the bedroom [laughs].

LU: And how did you get the news? About what was going on?

MM: We would get the news around dinner time, and, uh, aside from that, my uncle would travel up to an abandoned, a defunct mine that was about maybe two miles away, and he would go up there, and whoever was the caretaker that was left had a radio, a short-wave radio, that my uncle would sit and listen to the radio and make notes, about war news and anything else, and then bring it back to Bay Farm, climb up to the top of this [coughs] alarm station that was behind the bath house, and, uh, they had a gong sort of thing that was, uh, he would hit with a hammer and that would be the signal for everybody who wanted to hear the news to gather around, and then he would announce the news, first in English and then in Japanese, and that's about the extent of how we got the news. Slocan did not have a newspaper, and we never had any coming in the mail, either.

LU: I'm just going to stop and change the tape on the recorder.

LU: So, what was it like interacting with the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police], did you have much interaction with them?

MM: No, apparently they were in Slocan City and the offices there, but they did not patrol around to Pop Off and Bay Farm, that I knew of, and I never saw them, so, I remember hearing about one young fellow [coughs]-excuse me- that climbed over the mountains and left Slocan, never to be seen again [chuckles]. But that was the only time I heard of the Mounties ever-excuse me-being required to take any action. So, uh, it was certainly different than what we expected, I think.

LU: So, they didn't have any watchtowers or fences up?

MM: None at all.

LU: So, you're free to go hiking, and swimming, and go across to different camps?

MM: [Nods] That's right. It was amazing. I think if...we used to take the bus to New Denver, which was north of Slocan, along the Slocan Lake, I guess it was about ten or fifteen miles? Or maybe not that long. But, even going there, I don't think we ever had to get a travel permit from the Mounties, because to go to New Denver was where the hospital was and where the doctor was, so, if we had any ailments or something like that we had to go to New Denver and, whoever it was, the patient

usually went with somebody from the family to, uh, look after them and that was it. But I, uh, maybe I was too young to realize what was going on, but I never had any exposure to the Mounties or heard of any action that they had to take on or be had against us.

LU: So, how old were you, again, when you were in Bay Farm?

MM: I was there from 11 [years old] to 13 [years old].

LU: So, did you start high school? When you were in the camp?

MM: Yeah, I didn't in Slocan, or in Bay Farm, when I got out, because of the accelerated program that the BC Department of Education promoted for us, I was able to get out of public school and when I went to Guelph, I could start in high school. They didn't have junior high in those days. So, I went right into high school.

LU: And what else do you remember about Bay Farm? Do you remember any special events, or what did everybody do for holidays, or birthdays, or the stuff that we do now?

MM: Nothing very much. We had - the school organized a sports day, and everybody went into training for that, running around and uh, throwing the javelin and things like that, that was pretty exciting. So, we had that. And in the summertime, during vacation, there was ball teams, baseball teams. I don't remember any softball teams, but then, there could've been softball going on when I was eating at home or something like that there. We didn't have enough hockey rinks or a nearby area where we could get water easily, so that we could have a hockey rink, so there was no hockey played. Just about every house in Bay Farm had a small skating rink in the backyard, so [chuckles] you could visit any kind of neighbours you wanted wearing skates and just skate from one rink to another, all the way over there and back [chuckles].

LU: And where did the skates come from?

MM: Oh, we had-we ordered from Eaton's and Simpson's, the mail order. And the catalogues, the Eaton's and Simpson's catalogues were always in short supply because they made the best shin guards for hockey [chuckles].

LU: And what did your parents do, when they were in the camps?

MM: My father started off as a kind of - I don't know, there was a mill, that made boards for construction, and he looked after the inventory there. And then when the school was built, and the construction of other things slowed down, he got a job as janitor in the schools. So, he took that on. And my mother stayed at home and looked after, helped my grandmother look after the garden, and she did the washing and all that.

LU: Was your grandmother in the same house? With you?

MM: No. No, she...one, two-- she lived with my aunt and uncle about three doors over.

[interview cuts out]

[End of part 2]

[Start part 3]

[Part 3 cuts in almost as if the interview is already in progress]

MM: But she spent a lot of time at both houses. So, she – if I can remember correctly- I think she had a bit of a garden in both [chuckles] behind both houses, where we lived and where my aunt and uncle were. When my grandfather [smiles], who was a very, very skilled carpenter and cabinet maker, he used to chop firewood, and stack it up to dry so that it wouldn't be dripping whatever it is, and the one thing that he forgot was that, being so neat, he wanted the stack of wood to be very secure, so he would use his axe and shave the four sides of each stick [chuckles] so that there would be no rocking of the wood pile. The only problem was that the pile was so tight, the pile didn't get any air through it, so the wood pile in the wintertime it was just a solid block of ice [laughing]. And I remember in Vancouver, when he was mowing the lawn at my uncle's house, my grandfather would mow the lawn and then he would get on his hands and knees with a pair of pinchers and he'd be pulling weeds with these pinchers all over [chuckles]. And the lawn ended up being pretty bare [laughs]. But he was amazing, he had an armoire, we had an armoire in our house that he had built, and he used no nails, just bamboo nails, I guess you could call them. And he'd drill a hole and he'd push this bamboo thing in, and glue.

LU: Oh, wow.

MM: Yeah. And everything fit so perfectly.

LU: Mmm-hmm. And, what kind of food did you eat when you were in the camps? Obviously you weren't getting any of the Japanese goods imported in, so, what did everybody do for shoyu [soy sauce] or miso or rice?

MM: Um, I think we were quite fortunate in that the gentleman that owned the general store where we did our shopping, um, got supplies of shoyu and things like that, mostly Chinese shoyu and other goods like that, he ordered and he'd get it in, tell everybody, and then everybody would go shopping there. But, we were never short for food, and then the Doukhobors were also there, and they had pork, beef - pork and beef that I know of, that they sold for us, to us.

LU: What about chicken?

MM: Yeah, chicken too. Yes, absolutely.

LU: And was there any lakes or ponds nearby that you could go fishing in? Did a lot of people go fishing?

MM: No, some people used to go fishing in the Slocan River, which ran south of, from the Slocan Lake, which was in downtown Slocan city. But I don't remember seeing too many people fishing down at the lake. But then, I wasn't interested in fishing, as well, so I wouldn't have paid any attention to that [chuckles].

LU: And what did your sisters do, in the camps?

MM: Gee, I don't remember. I think they used to go and visit some friends, either in Slocan or somewhere else. My one sister, had to have her appendix removed, I think, so she had to go to New Denver by bus for the operation. My sister went with her, and the road, the highway that the bus travelled was mountain on one side and it was a cliff more than anything else. And on the other side was the lake, and where there was [sic] one or two spots on that highway to New Denver that [coughs]-excuse me- the highway pulled into the mountains a little bit and away from the lake and, for some reason or another, the bus turned over in that part where it was away from the lake so the bus turned over, but it didn't go into the lake.

LU: Oh, wow.

MM: Yeah. So, that was a bit of excitement there. It didn't affect my sister, fortunately.

LU: What happened when people passed away in the camps? Did they have little cemeteries? Or did they cremate them?

MM: Mostly they were cremated, yeah. And I don't-I image that their remains were carried by the family to wherever they'd be settling down later on. I don't remember attending, uh, the only funeral that I remember attending was for this young friend of ours that drowned in Lake Ontario- uh, Lake Slocan, sorry-but it was quite fortunate that they were able to recover his body because Slocan Lake is so deep and that, um, the local people used to say that Slocan City was built on a ledge of dirt that went into the lake, and that the lake went underneath this ledge they were on. So, if somebody drowned in the lake, many times the body would be under this ledge and they wouldn't come up until, there was a really violent storm, and, uh, the body may be washed up after that. When it did, the body was so well-preserved because the lake was cold, and there's no deterioration at all. So, that Kinoshita boy drowned in the lake, there was a storm that night, it wasn't an especially violent one, but there was a storm and, uh, they found his body in the morning. So, they were quite lucky. And, I don't know where he was buried, I don't think he was cremated, I'm pretty sure he was in a casket. I don't know if he was buried in Slocan or not.

LU: So, when the war ended, what did your family decide to do?

MM: When the war ended, we were in Guelph [Ontario]. And-

LU: Oh, so you left the camp before the war ended?

MM: [Nods] Yes, yeah.

LU: Oh, so when did you leave camp? And why did you leave the camp?

MM: There was a lot of- not a lot, I guess, but- inquiries from places in the east...they were looking for families to come and work in hospitals or other areas like that, so we had the opportunity to go to Guelph and work, and this Homewood Sanitarium [hospital], so we took that, and we left Slocan in 1944. So, that was [coughs]-excuse me- before the war ended...and, uh, my Dad worked as a janitor, my mother as a

kitchen help. My two sisters and I went to school, and we worked at the hospital after school.

LU: Do you want more tea?

MM: No, I'm fine. Thank you. And quite a few other families did the same thing, about inquiries. Like the Noguchi- no, no, the Yamashita family, from Montreal [Quebec], they had one, two, three, three boys, four, five boys. And one girl. And then the mother and father did approximately the same thing, but they ended up in Montreal, and they all worked in Montreal. They left Slocan about the same time we did - a lot of people, after that- well, mostly they were mostly single men, and women, too-left and went to Toronto [Ontario] and a lot of them stayed at the YMCA and YWCA to find a job, not too many had jobs, like, you know, we were lucky enough to get these jobs.

LU: And did you have to get special permission to leave the camps?

MM: Not that I know of.

LU: No?

MM: Yeah. I'm sure that we had to inform them that we were going, and where we were going, and things like that.

LU: Now, I know when some families left the camps- this might have been after the war, though- they had sponsors, or people who would sponsor them in Ontario. You didn't have a sponsor?

MM: Well, the Homewood may have been our sponsor. It sounds logical.

LU: And what kind of jobs did you do?

MM: At the Homewood? Mostly in the kitchen, whenever any of the kitchen help had vacation, I took his place, and I got operating the dishwasher, washing pots, peeling potatoes [chuckles]. Cleaning up, mopping the floors, that sort of thing. And, I worked there and I worked waiting tables in the dining room, getting food ready and taking it to different wards of the hospital, and then helping them serve it and bring it back. And I worked in the boiler room for a few months, and I worked as a ward aide, and anything else you can think of [chuckles]. Gardening...[smiles].

LU: So, all this time you finished high school as well?

MM: [Nods] That's right, yeah.

LU: And when did your family decide to move from Guelph?

MM: When I graduated high school, my sister and I came to Toronto. My second sister enrolled in St. Joseph's Hospital, I think, in Guelph, to become a nurse. My other sister and I came to Toronto and I enrolled at university.

LU: Which university?

MM: University of Toronto, in Mechanical Engineering. And so, I forget what happened but, ah [chuckles], I flunked my first year.

LU: And what was the year that you went into university?

MM: '49, I think it was. Yeah, '49. So, my mother and father decided that they'd leave Guelph and come to Toronto to make sure I was still in line [chuckles].

LU: And did your other sister stay in Guelph?

MM: [Nods] Yeah, she finished her nursing course and then she came to Toronto and got a job at East General Hospital, I think it was.

LU: And what did your other sister do, when she came to Toronto?

MM: Uh, she got a job with the YWCA on McGill Street, downtown. And she worked there for, oh, hmm, quite a few years.

LU: And what about your parents?

MM: My parents, my mother got a job as a seamstress. And I forgot what she was sewing, it was a, she worked for a while, living in Guelph, and working in Hamilton, and then when they decided to come to Toronto, she got a job in Toronto as a seamstress in one of those places downtown. My Dad got a job with Simmon's mattress factory, and he was a janitor there. And one summer I got a job- no, two summers I got a job-working at Simmon's. In the factory, working assembling all the springs in the shape that they have to be to be a spring-loaded mattress. And the covers for the mattress so that there's three or four different sizes, so I learned how to use a sewing machine to sew the covers [chuckles]. Had a good time, there was a third floor that had a pretty high storage area where I'd get the springs from the metal shop, and then I would put the burlap-lined cover on the springs, and then staple the end of the cover, and then label what it was, and then take it upstairs and stack it up. So, I got ahead of the department that did the packing and stitching and all that, of the mattresses, so, my stock was getting bigger and bigger [clears throat]. I told my Dad that I was going to fill that whole end of the shop with mattresses and he says, "Yeah." [chuckles] I did, I finally did.

LU: [laughing] You did?

MM: [laughs]

LU: Did you find that your family had a hard time being welcomed in Toronto?

Having a hard time find jobs at all?

MM: [Shakes head] No, no, Toronto was very good to us. We really enjoyed Toronto. Anytime that we had a job anywhere, we had nothing but nice people that we worked with, or worked for, so it was a real pleasure.

LU: And did you have any contact with any other Japanese Canadians? In Toronto or -?

MM: Yeah, we had our relatives that we were always close to, and we kept in touch with them. So, we would meet them, and then there was a Kisuragi [sic?] Club, you know the club for seniors? No, adults, I guess. It's a social club that really advanced the visitors from Japan, artists, singers like Aiko Saita, things like that, they encouraged them to come to Toronto and then they entertained them. And, uh, they kept busy that way. My - yeah, my two sisters, in their spare time they'd play tennis

with me and some of the other guys, in the summertime. In the wintertime, there was badminton, so we kept busy that way.

LU: And where did you live in Toronto?

MM: When our family came, when my mother and father came to Toronto, I was in, I had - I'm getting mixed up here.

LU: So, you and your sister came to Toronto first?

MM: Yeah, and after a year, my father and mother came. So, we had - we lived in the third floor of a house that was owned by [coughs]-excuse me-a Mr. and Mrs.

Koyama. And I had a room on the first floor, my parents and my sisters lived up on the third floor, and there was several other people living in that house, too. We stayed there for, oh gee, quite a few years, three or four years.

LU: And you rented?

MM: [Nods] Yes.

LU: Did you eventually buy your own family house?

MM: Yeah, we bought a house near Keele and Eglinton. It was a detached house, um, storey-and-a-half with a full basement, and my sisters did not stay there too long, because they both got married, so I had the whole second floor to myself pretty well [chuckles].

LU: And, after you graduated university, what did you go on to be doing?

MM: I left Toronto and I got a job with Canada Air, in Montreal. I stayed with the Yamashita family, in downtown Montreal, and I had a great time with them. Then my Dad decided to buy a house, so he said, "It would be nice if you could come back to Toronto and get a job, and help us to buy the house." So, I quit my job at Canada Air and came back to Toronto, and I stayed in the house on Strathnarne Boulevard. And I got a job, didn't take me long to get this job, which was with an architectural firm, called Page and Steel, and I was with them in the engineering department, and then my chief engineer decided that he'd go out on his own and he asked me if I wanted to join his firm, I said "Absolutely!" So, yeah, I went with them and I was with that firm - it changed names a few times - and I was with them for 45 years.

LU: Oh, wow.

MM: Yeah [smiles]. He was a great man.

LU: So, when did you meet your wife and decide to move?

MM: [Smiles] Oh, my first wife, I met her on the tennis court. She was, we used to play tennis at a place just on the north side of Queen Street, near the Princess Gates. And somebody would have to go there early on Sundays with the nets because it was a public tennis court, whoever got there first had to put the net up [gestures with hands]. That court was theirs for the day. So, somebody would have to get there early and put the nets up, and it was me! [Smiles, laughs] So, and then, of course, you had to take down, after everybody finished, and this girl stayed on and said she'd help me, so that's how I met her [smiles, chuckles]. That was it.

LU: And how long were you married for?

MM: Oh, 20 years? And then, she got cancer and died.

LU: And did you have any children?

MM: [Nods] Yeah, we had one, my son, about a year after we got married. This was the one who was born the day after my father died- oh, the day before my father died. And then, we didn't have another child for a while, so we went to see Dr. Roy Shinobu, and explained the situation, he said, "Well, we don't have any basis in fact about this", but- in his experience, he said that "a couple that has proven that they can have children, but can't seem to have one, I'd advise them to adopt one, then they'd have a natural child soon after that." So, he said, "it's worked 70% of the time, it's worth it." So, we adopted a [coughs] [smiles] half-Japanese, half-Irish baby girl, and, sure enough, a year after that we had a natural daughter [smiles]. A third child. And, uh, we've been - we had a really good time. My first wife was very active in softball and badminton and tennis, anything else, so she encouraged the kids to play sports whenever she could, so - but the adopted one wasn't very athletic, so she kind of felt left out, I think, sometimes when we were all having a lot of fun playing tennis or something [chuckles]. Then, she [first wife] passed away, and a year or so after that I got together with Laiko, who I knew from when we were in Vancouver, because our families lived in the same area in Vancouver and we went to the same Japanese language school.

LU: Oh, wow.

MM: Yeah, that was fortunate for me. And she had a son and a daughter from her first marriage, so we didn't have to bother having more children [chuckles].

LU: And did you find it was hard to stay in touch with all your friends from before the war?

MM: Yes. I lost track of these two cousins that I used to go to Japanese school with everyday. I haven't - in 1992, we went to a reunion out in Calgary, I think it was. And I met one of them there, but, uh, we hadn't been in touch at all, not even Christmas cards or anything for all that time, so, it was kind of difficult.

LU: Did they know that you had relocated to Toronto?

MM: I imagine so, because, uh, in the Japanese newspapers, I had news of all of the communities, whether they were in Montreal or Toronto or anywhere, it would go right across Canada, so, I played a lot of tennis and tournaments and things, so my name was in the paper quite a bit, so I think they knew where I was. But they had their own interests and things to do.

LU: And, you had a really funny story last time, about when your first son was born-

MM: [chuckles]

LU:- and you'd go to the badminton-

MM: [smiling] Yeah.

LU: Do you want to tell us a little bit about that?

MM: [Smiling] Oh, yeah. We had- my first wife and I- joined a badminton club in Toronto, that was made up mostly of niseis, and we rented space in some high schools or church halls, things like that, we were always competing with other badminton clubs for members, so we couldn't raise the entrance fee or membership fee too much. So, we kept looking for places, and finally we found that the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre was open, and this was in 1960-'61-1, so I went to- this was after it was, the construction was finalized, I went there to see if we could rent space in there for badminton, and we got the approval to play badminton, and there was a funny story, I don't know if you should publish this, but-

LU: Oh [laughs].

MM: Raymond Moriyama was the architect, and he didn't want- he was consulted about this badminton business, and he says, "Oh yeah, it'd be alright as long as they took the lines up after they finish every night." [gestures] You know, all the lines on the corners? And I said, "I think that's a little out of the question." So, I went [clears throat] down to the auditorium, and I looked at these inserts in the floor-[interview cuts out].

[End of part 3]

[Start part 4]

[Part 4 cuts in almost as if the interview is already in progress]

MM: - and I opened it up, and there's a hole, and it's lined up [chuckles], so I said, "Wow, you know you have inserts for badminton posts in your auditorium already? So, you going to let it go to waste?" [chuckles] So, we got to be able to play there, and we played there three nights a week, I think it was. And, then we had [coughs] the baby boy, and [smiles] he was a good baby, when it was bedtime, he slept, so we could take him to badminton and open a closet there and throw him in there [laughs]. And play badminton and then, when it was time to go, we'd open the door, pick him up, and in the car. So, one night we were cleaning up, and getting washed up and everything, and got out to the car and sat down, started the car, and then, we looked at each other and said, "Where is- where's Barry?!" [laughs]. So, lucky thing that I was- they trusted me enough to give me a key [chuckles], so I got in there and turned on a few lights so we could find our way in [smiles], and got him out of the closet, he was still asleep [laughs]. Got him out to the car, and I said, "Barry, you don't know this, but you almost became the youngest volunteer caretaker." [laughs] Or night watchman! [laughs].

LU: [laughs]. And did you have any participation with the redress?

MM: [Shakes head] No.

¹ The Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre was built by late 1963 and officially opened its doors in 1964.

LU: No? None whatsoever? Did you remember having any feelings about the redress?

MM: Not, not really. Um, I think that it was a real injustice, there's no question in my mind that it was illegal, but I didn't- I was too busy with other things to get involved with that. So, I didn't have anything to do with it.

LU: Mmm-hmm. And did you ever have a chance to go to Japan, and visit Japan at all?

MM: No, um, we had chances, yes, to go to Japan, but we, neither my wife or I were really interested, because all our relatives that were in Japan were-died in the war. So, there's nobody that we could see. And there are places in Canada that we wanted to see first, so, we spent a lot of time driving from here to the east and then to the west, all around. So, we got to know Canada first [chuckles].

LU: Well, you were born there!

MM: [laughing] Yeah, absolutely!

LU: And, um, so, have you always been an active participant with the JCCC [Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre]?

MM: As far as I can remember, yeah. I got involved when their first campaign to raise money for the centre, and...you know, have you met Mel Tsuji? Yeah, his father or grandfather - he and I went door-to-door raising money for it, and, uh, some of the Japanese that we went to see, they were so poor, they were having trouble making ends meet as it was, and they were so embarrassed to turn us down, but it was getting so bad that we almost [chuckles] we almost contributed something to them! But, uh, that was when I got involved in part of that program. It was quite successful. But we had to go door-to-door to raise the money. And, we had a meeting there for it, and we all signed a certificate or something like that, that said that we would pledge our support to the Centre [coughs] if they ever needed money or something like that.

LU: And how do you think that the centre- what kind of role did it play in the Japanese Canadian community? Bringing everyone together?

MM: I think as far as Toronto went, I think they did an excellent job. They got the whole community involved, there's - in Toronto, I think, you mention the Centre and that was, everybody knew you were talking about, what was coming up, things like that. And, the Centre now, being five times as large, it's still getting that way, and it's expanding. People from Hamilton, Montreal, they all know where the Centre is and what it's doing, and so on. It's really admirable. And so much of it is done by volunteers, it's just incredible, the amount of help they get from the community.

LU: Mmm-hmm. And what are your thoughts about the Sedai Project?

MM: I really don't know too much about it, except for the article that you put in the thing [newsletter].

LU: And how important is it to you that your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren will learn about their history as Japanese Canadians?

MM: I think it's good that they are educated in that direction. Like, I've tried to write to my kids, tell them things about the community, tried to bring them here whenever I could, whenever they could work it into their schedule, but it's difficult, you know? They have so many things that they are involved with-especially, uh, my grandchildren, uh, they live in Barrie or London, it's quite a distance to come here, so - and they are involved in dancing and soccer, everything like that. So, I keep telling my son that, when his kids grow up and get married, something like that, then he's going to come to the Centre and take my place [chuckles]!

LU: Yeah [laughs]! That's good. And, is there anything else that you would like to share, that you can think of?

MM: The only thing that I remember is ,uh, when we first went to Guelph, I started working in the kitchen, and the head chef there was a very nice man, and very loud-spoken and blunt, but he was still very nice. He said that when he heard that the Homewood had hired a Japanese family to come and work in the kitchen and everywhere else, and they were coming on this particular day, he said 'We all were looking out the window waiting to see you come walking down the street in your kimonos [chuckles].'

LU: [chuckles] And did you arrive in kimonos?

MM: No, no [laughs]. But he was funny that way, he was a hard worker and I learned a lot from him. The, uh-my boss, particular boss, in the kitchen was the dietician, and she was very nice. And she gave me every job in that kitchen that you can imagine. Yeah, "just go ahead and do it." She said, "it's good for you." [chuckles] "If you have any trouble, come and see me, but you can work it out." [chuckles]

LU: And, before we finish, do you want to tell the story about your Dad and Bloor Street?

MM: Oh! [laughs] My Dad used to drive the car, and we'd be in the back, and he'd say, "Oh, we're here, we're coming up to Bloor Street." And we'd say "Dad, it's not 'blow-er' Street, it's 'Bloor' street!", "No, no, it's Bloor. B-L-O-O-R." "What about this? F-L-O-O-R. How do you pronounce that?" [chuckles] "Floor". He says, "Argument over." [chuckles] And my mother was in hysterics, she was laughing. [giggles]

LU: [laughs] Is there anything else that you would like to add?

MM: I'll probably think of something later on [chuckles].

LU: Well, thank you very much!

MM: Thank you! Gee, time goes fast.

[End of interview]