

**Interviewee: Ruby Morita
Fukumoto**
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THE JAPANESE CANADIAN LEGACY PROJECT

Lisa Uyeda: Okay so today is July 13th, 2011 and can you please state your full name before we get started?

Ruby Morita Fukumoto: Well, my full name under my birth certificate is only Ruby Morita but my Japanese name is Rubiko, R-u-b-i-k-o, and I thought it was always on my birth certificate and when I looked at it, it just says Ruby Fukumoto, I mean Ruby Morita, excuse me.

LU: Oh, that's interesting. And your married name is?

RMF: Fukumoto.

LU: Fukumoto. Wonderful and can you please tell us the names of your parents?

RMF: My parents is Kakuzo and Isawo Morita.

LU: And your mother's maiden name?

RMF: My mother's maiden name was Fukuda.

LU: And what do you know about your parents and their family history and where they may have come from in Japan?

RMF: They came from Fukuoka, not too far from the city but in the country. I'm not sure what the village name is but they were both from Fukuoka.

LU: And were they married in Fukuoka or-?

RMF: Yes. Like my dad came to Canada, actually to Alberta when he was only fifteen because his father was here and his brother and wife. I guess he was, I don't when he was married and his uncle, his older brother, were here. My dad wanted to come to Canada so his father came back and got him and brought him here to Calgary, Alberta. And then, his father went back to Japan cause his, my grandmother never came. So, I don't know how long my grandfather was here.

LU: Do you know roughly what time period they would have come from Japan?

RMF: Well, my dad was born in 1900 so 1915 he moved.

LU: Oh wow.

RMF: And he worked in Banff for a doctor and his family as a houseboy. And he went to school while he was working for the doctor and his wife. The doctor was very particular about how he pronounced his words so my dad spoke English quite well.

LU: Oh wow. So, did your father mention if he knew any English before he came to Canada?

RMF: He didn't know any from what I gather.

LU: And what was your father's line of work before coming to Canada? What did they do in Japan?

RMF: I think they just farmed, [unclear] farming area.

LU: And was that the same for your mother's family?

RMF: [nods] More or less.

LU: And what information do you know about your mother?

RMF: Well my mother came from quite a big family. She was one of the younger ones and I don't know too much what they did but I know she had several brothers and not too many sisters. I know she had a younger sister. And my mum was very outgoing but she was-. My dad worked for this doctor and his family in Banff. I don't know just how long he worked there and then he went down, went to Calgary and he was working there and when he was 22 years old, his parents said it's time you got married and went back to Japan. He knew my mother but didn't really associate with her but he knew of her. Course it was all arranged, you know, the marriage. My mother was only 16 when she got married, my dad was 22. So, they got married and my mother's father accompanied them to Tokyo and then my mum couldn't come with my dad because she had some kind of an eye infection. She had to go back with her dad until it was healed. Then she came over. I just don't know if she came by herself. Well, she must have. Anyways, they- she came to Canada and they went to Edmonton because my uncle, my father's brother, had a little business there, he had a pool hall and kind of a snack bar so my mum and dad went there and they worked there.

[5 minutes]

LU: What was your uncle's name?

RMF: Gee, I don't know what his name is.

LU: And would it still be the Morita last name?

RMF: Yes, Morita. My dad only had this one older brother and a sister.

LU: Oh, so a smaller family. And do you know when your mother was born? What year?

RMF: Well she was six years younger than my dad so 1906.

LU: Oh wow. That's quite a story about your family history.

RMF: And my mum was pregnant when she was 18 and it was very difficult to be pregnant and a girl was born. She only lived a few days. The following year, I was born and apparently, it was a normal kind of birth so it was okay. Then, my mum, when she was expecting my brother who was two years younger than me, she wanted to go back to Japan because she didn't know anybody there. Being only 16, it was pretty lonely for her whereas my dad was quite comfortable because he had his brother, his uncle's family so my mum took me back to Japan with her when she was few months pregnant. And we stayed there and my brother was born there. I guess we stayed there, I don't know just how long we stayed there just after he was born and then we came back to Canada.

LU: Do you remember your family back in Japan? Do you remember any images of them?

RMF: Not really, I was only a year and a half to two years old so I don't remember but I know when I was there, I would call my uncle oto-san. I remember his daughter, my cousin, would get very upset and say, "Not your father, he is in faraway Canada so don't call him oto-san". Because we had gone there when we were young,

when we went back to Japan for a visit, they felt as if they knew us. My dad was very good because he always wrote to them and sent pictures of us, kind of kept them up-to-date as to how we were. It was really nice, it just felt that they knew us. My brother went back a couple of times before the first time I went. He was right in there, he wasn't hesitant about speaking Japanese, although our Japanese wasn't very good cause at home, we spoke English cause my dad spoke English. Went to Japanese school for eleven years after school but when we were at home, we spoke English. But anyway, he wasn't hesitant about talking to them at all and he was just right there at home. So, he had gone back a couple times before I had made my first visit.

LU: And when was your first visit?

RMF: My first visit was about, was quite a while ago, about 1985, quite a long time ago.

LU: Oh wow. So, since you were a baby and you went to Japan, your next trip over to Japan was 1980s.

RMF: And I went with the Ikebana group. So, went on a tour with them for a week or ten days, we ended at Kyoto and I caught the bullet train with some friends and they were getting off sooner than myself but I got off at Hiroshima because I had friends there. So, I stayed there for a couple of nights and then, they put me on the bullet train and took me to Fukuoka and my relatives met me there. My brother was there the whole month in Fukuoka. I was there maybe two weeks. But my brother, my dad's sister, she wasn't living when I went but her husband was and they had about seven girls and two sons.

[10 minutes]

RMF: I think, the one son died in the war but they loved to sing and so they took us on a trip to one of the hotels and they all started, they sang all the way all the way up there. They asked her to sing but he refused so they asked me. I thought, ok, I'll sing. The only sing was [sings in Japanese], that song. I knew all of the words so I sang that. So, I guess they were a little bit surprised I could sing the whole song. But I could speak Japanese but I had to think about what I would say. So, it didn't come as easy as it was for my brother. But since I could speak a little bit, they think I could really speak and understand everything they said. I didn't always understand everything cause they had a bit of a not an accent. You know, every area has their own, what do you call it, not dialect but their own way of speaking.

LU: Interesting.

RMF: Anyway, it was a really nice trip to meet all these cousins and aunts and uncles.

LU: Who did you travel with? Your brother and?

RMF: My brother and of course, I went with this group on the tour. We went up to Sendai after and across to the island where they have the Taiko drumming then down to Kyoto.

LU: Oh, that's a long trip.

RMF: There was snow up there [laughing] which was kind of surprising.

LU: Oh wow.

RMF: It was in the spring so the cherry blossoms were beautiful.

LU: Was that your only visit to Japan?

RMF: No, went back quite a few years later in the fall. Actually, it was 1993 because my dad was 93 and my sister and I took my dad to Japan. My mother and dad had gone to Japan quite a few times because my sister worked for the Canadian Airlines so they got free transportation so they went a few times and 1993, my mum had already passed away so we took my dad to the airport in Tokyo. We had to wait quite a while for the airflight to [Fukuoka. And that's pretty tiring when you are traveling from Toronto to Japan and then have to wait in the airport. My dad was so good and when we got to Fukuoka, we stayed at one relative's place two or three nights, another relative's place. We just moved around and they took us, you know, everywhere. My dad's nieces and nephews, they were so surprised how spry my dad was. When I think of it now, he was but, you know, we sort of took it for granted at the time because my dad was always like that.

LU: When did your parents pass away?

RMF: Well, my dad passed away when he was 96. It was two weeks before his birthday and my mom was almost 84 but my dad was so good almost until a month before he passed away. He lived with, in his house with my brother. My brother next to me is not married. My dad was always pretty spry.

LU: Oh wow and do you know a little bit about your parent's educational level from Japan? Were they able to complete all their schooling or-?

RMF: Well, I think my dad passed his high school but my mom wouldn't have because she was only 16.

LU: Oh wow. Were they avid readers at all or did they bring any books with them from Japan?

RMF: I think my dad read a lot but I don't know about my mum. My mum was very active, she was always on the go.

[15 minutes]

LU: And when your parents were here in Calgary, you mentioned your mother and father were helping with your uncle's, I guess pool hall?

RMF: Pool hall and little snack bar.

LU: Did they continue that or did they work anywhere else?

RMF: No, actually my dad, we moved to Calgary. We only lived in Edmonton just maybe a couple of years and then we moved to Calgary and my dad worked at the Palace hotel as a Bellhop. And when I was five years old, we moved to Victoria because the driveways in Calgary was not good for my dad. He would get nosebleeds so that's why we moved to Victoria when I was five and then he got a job at the Empress hotel in Victoria until the war broke out, not the 1942 one but the one in Japan with the war with England. They all got laid off at the hotel, about 1939 or so.

LU: 1939. Did your mother work at all when she was out in Victoria?

RMF: Well, she used to take a little bit of sewing. She was good at looking for jobs because she always found me a job, like whether it was doing some laundry for a lady and ironing. I did housework for a family when I was in high school. And then one year, I worked for Emily Carr, the artist, that was one summer. Then the next

summer, I think I went berry picking. All my friends were berry picking so I wanted to go and do that. Then, the war broke out so we moved out of Victoria.

LU: Did your father have the chance to attain another job when he lost his-?

RMF: Well, he went into gardening. When I think of it, my goodness, he rode his bicycle to go gardening. That was a quite a job for him to do when he was not used to doing it but he did it, we survived.

LU: Do you remember your house back in Victoria, what it looked like?

RMF: No, we moved several times, I don't know whether it was because we couldn't pay the rent or what but I know we moved several times and we lived-. I still remember the house on Princess Avenue, first house. There was a girl who lived across the street, she was from an Italian family and I still see her in Toronto. It was amazing how we met. I didn't know she was out east and she knew I was somewhere in this area. She had to go to a Japanese lady to have sewing done and that was [Kadaguchi]. She was, she survived, she looks after the Ikebana group and she went to her to have something else done. [Shizuko?] was going away so she told her to go to her friend. Well, this friend knew me. They were talking and she told her that she was from Victoria. She must have asked my friend if she knew anybody from Victoria. Well, she knew me right away so she gave her my name and she said, "That's who I'm looking for". That's how I got to know she was here. It was just, such a coincidence and we see each other maybe once a year and keep in touch.

LU: So, what year did you first reconnected? Do you remember roughly what year?

RMF: Gee, it was quite a few years ago. I would say about 20 years ago, at least.

LU: So, in the 80s at some point?

RMF: Florence from Victoria, she got a job in Ottawa in the paper and that's where she met her husband. I think she went to Montreal and then came to Toronto.

LU: Wow, what a small world.

RMF: It was just so amazing how these things happen.

LU: And what other houses do you remember?

RMF: Then, we moved to Cormorant Street and my very best friend lived behind us and then down the street was Oriental Home, where a lot of the Japanese, Chinese people who didn't have parents or their parents couldn't look after them and they stayed there. There were quite a few like that.

[20 minutes]

LU: Oh wow.

RMF: And then, the last home we moved to, it was more, closer to Beacon Hill and Empress Hotel and it was our last home.

LU: And did you want to read your story? And then, maybe I'll have a few more questions for you afterwards.

RMF: Well, okay. A lot of this is what I've already said.

LU: It's okay.

RMF: December 7th, 1941, Pearl Harbour was attacked. I was 16 years old in grade 11, attending Victoria High School and living with my family in Victoria, BC. I don't really remember what my feelings were at that time, it's all of 69 years ago, perhaps a feeling of disbelief. Later in April 1942, we, all of whom were of Japanese descent,

were told that we had to leave our homes with only one week's notice to get ready. We could only take what we could carry and that was on April 22nd, 1942, that fateful day. It must have been very hard for all the parents especially the people who had their own businesses, homes, etc. Being Japanese, nobody really had feelings of protesting and took it in their stride. I think most of us felt it would only be a temporary thing and that we would be able to return sometime later. As for myself, being in my teens, it didn't worry me too much and that song whatever will be will be would best describe my feelings. However, I was very sad I was leaving school, my friends especially. I did keep in touch with one friend but lost touch after a while. One consolation was that I had a very close Japanese friend my age. We were moved to Hastings Park, Vancouver. My father was only with us for a short time and was then sent to a road camp along with other men. It was a very sad time but once again, I was optimistic that we would all be together again. We had to stay for the section where the animals had been kept. Not exactly what we were prepared for. My mum and the two younger ones were in one section with other families and girls my age were in a group of four or five in each stall. We put up sheets for a bit of privacy. The boys from a certain age and up were in another area. When we were settled, we began attending classes to do our correspondence course with the help of volunteer university graduates or students. In our leisure time, we would play any kind of sport that was available, basketball for one and also [gleecup?] was formed, which kept us busy and was fun as well. We had our meals at a mess hall which was okay except for one incident when most of us had an attack of food poisoning and it was chaotic to find an available toilet. I remember there was running water under these toilets so we didn't have to flush them. We were allowed to leave the park which was all fenced in but we had to apply for a pass first. I remember my girlfriend and I were invited to go out with a couple of nice young men. We had a very busy fun-filled day. We went to the Midway and had an exciting ride on the Giant Dipper, our first, not just once but two or three times. I think we screamed our heads off. Then, we went bowling and then we went onto a lovely dinner and after that, a live musical performance, which featured [Sunny Dunam?] and his orchestra. I will always remember seeing my first live band show. Our family along with the Watanabe family, they were close friends left the park for Slocan in July 1942. We were one of the early Victoria families to leave and I'm not sure if it was because Mr. Watanabe being a first World War veteran. We had to stay in the ice rink for a while until houses in Bay Farm were ready.

[25 minutes]

RMF: It was not the most comfortable but we managed. What bothered me more was that there was a group of young fellows staying at the other end and being 17, I was somewhat embarrassed at times. When the houses were ready, we were able to move into a house for ourselves. There were six of us in the family so we were entitled to our own house. Unfortunately, if you were only five in the family, you had to share a house. I don't know how some of these families seemed, were able to do that. Our family got along well, she made friends easily and was able to cope with this new living situation. It was amazing how all the mothers were able to adjust to

this new experience and was able to look after feeding us and whatever had to be done. I remember my dad had been very gentle-handed and he loved to sing. I was and still am the eldest of four children and I tried to help as best as I could. This was a very new experience for us as living in Victoria, there were not so many Japanese families as other places. We were able to make many new friends especially because we were young and looking to have a fun time. We went on hikes, picnics, dances, concerts, which I took part in, and movies on the occasion, swimming in Slocan Lake even though the water was very cold. This was a beautiful area with its lakes and mountains. I was fortunate and able to get a job in the commission office in the payroll department. When in high school, I had taken a commercial course even though I knew I wouldn't be able to get a job in an office because of the discrimination to Asians in British Columbia. This course allowed me to get this job. I was, it was here that I met many of my close friends of today. The community bathhouse took a while to get accustomed to but you had no choice so you did. After all, we all looked the same more or less, don't we? By the way, male and female bathhouses were separate. I do remember that my friend and I used to go when we thought there weren't too many people there. There were two schools for the high school students. One by the Anglican Church and the other run by the Catholic church. My brother, Herb, went to the Catholic School for the first year. They did their lessons in, by correspondence. After that, he was taught by the sisters. A school was setup for grades one to eight in Bay Farm so my brother Morris, six and a half went to grade one and apparently, he was a bit of a yan-cha boy. My younger sister was only three so later she attended kindergarten. In 1945, we had to sign up to either move east or go to Japan. Our family decided to go out east. We were one of the first families to leave Bay Farm and my mum and dad signed up to go to Chatham. I don't know how they did you know cause they didn't consult us or anything. We were assigned to work for Mr. Reed. My mum and dad just signed up to go to Japan- We were assigned to work for Mr. Reed. At this time, we were not allowed to go into Toronto. We left in May of 1945 with mixed feelings but we thought this was the best thing to do. We left Nakusp and onto Revelstoke where we caught the train and we were eastern bound. Next stop was Calgary. Oh, wait a minute, I left a page sorry. We left by bus via New Denver and onto Nakusp where we stopped for a while. My mum saw this young man who stopped to be at, who happened to be at the bus stop so she gave him one of the bags of oranges given to us from friends in Bay Farm as a going away gift. My family would be interested in this. Seven years later, I married him and we had three sons and ten grandchildren. I didn't really know him too well at that time, you know, we just [shrugs] were just there. We left Nakusp and onto Revelstoke where we caught the train and we were eastward bound. Next stop was Calgary and we met, we were met by my dad's cousin, the Inamasu family. We got off here and we stayed a week with our relatives or so my brother says. I knew we had stayed there a while but I didn't know it was that long. We had a good visit. Then, it was back on the train and the next stop was Regina where the other cousin lived. We again got off the train and stayed for a few days there. We had a nice visit with them as well.

[30 minutes]

RMF: Back on the train once again and onto Toronto. We stopped here and stayed at the hostel for a day or two and we were directed to go to Chatham and meet Mr. Reed. We stayed in Chatham for a few days and all the family except me went to Dashwood to a farm owned by a Mennonite. They worked for this family and were treated well. But not being used to farming, it was not easy. I don't remember how I got a job as a housemaid for this middle-aged couple, a doctor and his wife and her mother. Apparently, they had a Japanese girl working for them but she was leaving so I was to take her place. For the first time, I found myself feeling lonely at times as it was actually the first time I was separated from my family. They treated me well and there was also another lady helping me to look after the elderly mother so I had a bit of company. I was down at their summer home on Lake Erie when the war ended in 1945. I really don't remember how I felt. I didn't mind working for doctor and Mrs. White but it was not a job I wanted to do for very long. I left after a year and in the meantime, my family came down to live on a farm just outside of Chatham. I went to live with them and I found a job at a dry-cleaning store at an office in the city. My mom and dad and brother found jobs in the city so it worked out well for me to go to my job as by this time, my dad had bought a car. I only worked there for a year at this dry-cleaning store as my friend wrote to me to say she was moving to Toronto and wanted me to join her. I decided that's what I would do and told my parents about my decision. I was 22 by this time so they went along with me. It was the summer of 1947. Luckily, I was able to find an office job right away, it was located at King and Spadina in Toronto. The owner was very good to me and I kept in touch with [Harvey Pearson] and his wife until they passed away. This is only part of my story but it illustrates that because of my age, I didn't really worry about things around me or what the future held. I just knew that it was going to be okay and it was.

LU: Oh wow.

RMF: I was lucky cause a lot of the people, young people that came to Toronto they got jobs working for Jewish people. Jewish people always didn't mind having them to work for them.

LU: Do you remember which friend it was that called you to Toronto?

RMF: Oh yes, Kuni, my girlfriend. We were very good friends. I didn't meet her until I went to Slocan.

LU: Oh really?

RMF: Cause she was from Vancouver.

LU: Kuni, what's her last name?

RMF: Kuni, her maiden name was Noguchi, her married name is Fukusaka. We are very close friends.

LU: And your family went with you when you went to Toronto?

RMF: No.

LU: No, they stayed?

RMF: No, they didn't. They came later but not too long later, maybe a couple of years.

LU: Were they able to find a job as well in Toronto?

RMF: [nods] Yeah, they- My dad worked at a knitting, where they made sweaters and my mum found a job in the fashion area, doing sewing. My mother didn't have, she didn't speak English that well but she was very outgoing so, she was able to find work.

LU: When you communicated with your parents, you mentioned before that it was always in English.

RMF: Well, my mother could speak a bit of English and she understood English but she would speak to us, you know, in Japanese too.

LU: So, would you respond to her in English?

RMF: [nods].

LU: Oh wow.

RMF: I guess sometimes, I would speak a bit of Japanese cause I did go to Japanese school every day for eleven years.

LU: Oh wow. And what was it like going to Japanese school? That was in Victoria, wasn't it?

RMF: [nods] It was okay.

LU: And how many students were in the classes with you?

RMF: There weren't too many my age because most of the ones that were my age were in a grade lower for some reason. I don't know why, there weren't too many my age in the class that I was. I just remember, in the last couple of years, there was only this girl and myself and we were doing, we finished grade 8. Did high school and stuff.

[35 minutes]

RMF: I did have quite a bit of learning in Japanese but because I didn't speak it at home, I wasn't very good at speaking. But in Slokan, we picked up quite a bit since it was all Japanese. I even went to a friend of the family's, she was very good at Japanese to get, refresh my Japanese. It wasn't too bad in Slokan but now, I don't use it. It's terrible so I'm ashamed of myself.

LU: Who is the friend of the family that would teach you Japanese?

RMF: Mrs. [Kowasoe].

LU: Did she teach other students or just yourself?

RMF: I don't think she taught other students. She was very smart. Even in Victoria, we, you know, it was such a memorable time for us in 8th grade, kindergarten up to grade 11. I had friends that rode their bikes here and there. We even went to learn the cha-no, the Japanese tea ceremony because this lady was very educated like she married to a Scottish person.

LU: And who is this lady?

RMF: Mrs. Scott and she had one daughter and her daughter lived to be about 18 I think before she passed away. I don't know what was wrong with her, must have been sick or something, a very beautiful girl and that was her only daughter. She taught us the tea ceremony and she taught us haiku. A group of us went to her place. I don't know how often but we would go there.

LU: Was Mrs. Scott Japanese?

RMF: She was Japanese, yeah.

LU: Do you know what her Japanese name would have been?

RMF: No. She's passed on now. She was elderly then.

LU: Did you ever learning anything else such as odori dancing?

RMF: Oh yeah, we did odori. We did a little bit of tapdancing. This one girl, she was very good at odori and tapdancing. We didn't do too much tapdancing, was mostly odori. Whenever there was anything special, we would perform on the showboat which was across, on the water, across from the Empress hotel. We would have shows there, we would perform there.

LU: Were there a lot of Japanese families on the island as well or within-?

RMF: Victoria? There were quite a few but we all didn't live altogether. Like some of us, the second house we lived in, the first house we lived in, there were about three families on the same street. The next house we moved to, there was one of my best friend, she just passed away this year, and another family was behind. There were three of us. We weren't all bunched in together but we did have a few families that were very close.

LU: Who was your best girlfriend?

RMF: My best girlfriend was Amy Sogawa and she just passed away beginning of March. And she, they discovered she had cancer just in February and then she died in March.

LU: Oh wow. Does she live out here, out east?

RMF: She lived in Scarborough and then she just moved to-. Oh, what's the name of that, the first one outside of Toronto. Starts with a P. Pickering.

LU: Pickering, oh ok.

RMF: They moved to Pickering because her son and family lives there and her husband and herself, it was hard to kind of manage their house because it was a split level. Her husband was going to be 89. So, the son thought they should be closer to them. They were in a really nice cottage. Very nice cottage but I don't know whether she knew she wasn't feeling well or didn't say that she wasn't but she died and didn't last very long after discovering she had all this cancer through her.

[40 minutes]

LU: When you were in Victoria, do you remember some of the families, their names that were in the family?

RMF: Oh yes in the area. The [Corebearer?] family, we always went to their place to play ping-pong. And then it was the Kawasoe family, my girlfriend's was Amy, oh what was her maiden name, Kuwahara, Watanabe's, there was Henmi's. There was Kurihara's. There was Nagao's and Nagai too. [Uyeda?], there are two [Uyede?] families. There was quite a few Kawasoe's of course.

LU: Was the school located on Victoria or did you have to travel?

RMF: In Victoria, the minister and his wife, they taught and were in charge of the Japanese school and they also held Sunday school church there.

LU: Do you remember the names of the schools and the churches you went to?

RMF: I don't know what the church was called to tell you the truth.

LU: What about elementary school? Was that where the school was, in the church?

RMF: No, no. The elementary school I went to- Oh, I should know it, quadraprimary was the first school, grade one to three. Northward was the public school, grade four to grade eight. And then high school was Victoria High school which was grade nine to grade 12.

LU: Oh wow.

RMF: I have a picture of each class picture.

LU: Oh wow. Were there a lot of Japanese students in the classes with you or was it mostly non-Japanese?

RMF: Maybe one or two and there was Chinese.

LU: Oh wow. Did you have a lot of interactions with the other Chinese families?

RMF: Not really, like I was friends with the girls that were going to school around my age.

LU: I've heard some stories before that other Japanese families had interacted a lot with the native groups as well. Did your family at all?

RMF: No, no.

LU: And let me see, I had a whole list of questions here. You mentioned that your father went to a road camp at the beginning of the war when you first separated. Do you know what road camp that was?

RMF: I don't remember but all the fathers and the oldest sons, they were sent with that camp and then we moved to Slocan. It was shortly after they were sent back to be with us.

LU: And did you have very much correspondence between your father and your family when he was away?

RMF: I don't think we wrote to him. Maybe some people did but we didn't.

LU: Do you know how long you were apart for?

RMF: It wasn't really that long because we were only in the park, Hastings Park. We moved in April, we were one of the early ones, we moved out of there in July. Then we were in Slocan and moved to Bay Farm. It wasn't that long till they got the houses ready and it wasn't too long after that that the fathers all came to join us.

LU: Do you remember reuniting with your father? Do you remember reuniting with your father when you first saw him after that time being apart?

RMF: No. Actually, I don't remember that at all.

LU: [laughing] No? It could have been a surprise.

[45 minutes]

LU: And you mentioned you played a few sports as well. Do you know who organized all the sports together or-?

RMF: Oh, I don't know. I think we just kind of organized it ourselves. And I found out that I wasn't in the Glee club because it was after I left that they joined this Glee club and they would go into Vancouver to sing because we had left early. I don't even know why we went to Slocan because none of the Victoria families went there; they all went to Sandon. There was only one Victoria family that came a little later, the Kawasoe's after came to Bay Farm so we didn't know anybody. As I say, my mother is very outgoing so she got to know people quite soon.

LU: What do you remember about Bay Farm? Were there certain activities that you would do to pass the time or what did you do to keep busy?

RMF: Well actually, you know, all the activity was done more in the city which wasn't too far away. Cause there was a big hall there, we could see concerts and movies there. That's where all the activities were and like, I went to actually, my husband's sister to learn dressmaking and people would go to different people's houses to learn dressmaking or whatever you know. So, there was that right in the community.

LU: Oh wow. Did you have any chores you would have to do to help around the house when you were in Bay Farm?

RMF: Well, my mother did most of the cooking and I guessed I must have helped with the washing.

LU: Did you have a garden as well in Bay Farm?

RMF: I don't think so. There wasn't that much space. See, right there and we lived right on the highway since those were the first houses that were built. There wasn't, there was no backyard.

LU: Oh.

RMF: There had the outhouses and we shared it with the house, the first house on second avenue.

LU: Oh wow, so where would you buy your groceries?

RMF: Well, there was a grocery store in Bay Farm and there were grocery stores downtown.

LU: Was it far to travel to downtown? Would you have to walk or could you go by bus or car?

RMF: I think sometimes we got a ride on the truck and sometimes we walk. We were young so-

LU: Didn't seem that far then. Oh wow. Oh you mentioned before in Hastings Park that you were able to leave the park for a little while and get passes. Was there a curfew that you had to be back at a certain time?

RMF: I don't remember that. There must have been though. We went to see the show, the live band cause it was in the evening. I guess we must have gotten back in time. You know that was kind of exciting cause it was the first time I had seen a live band. I like music so-

LU: Would you also get passes to go shopping downtown? What else would you use the passes for?

RMF: I guess you could do that but we hardly ever went out. Maybe other people did because we didn't know Vancouver. I know my brother used to say they used to sneak out to go to the amusement park which was right next.

LU: Did he ever mention how he would sneak out?

RMF: He climbed the fence and it was kind of barb wirey. I don't know how they did it.

LU: Aren't there any guards watching or-?

RMF: I guess it wasn't well guarded. [laughing]

LU: But you never went with them?

RMF: Oh no. I'm not that much of a tomboy or I wasn't that much of a tomboy. There was enough to do in their anyways. We just sort of made our own fun.

LU: What-?

RMF: You met all kinds of new people so-.

[50 minutes]

LU: Since you were coming from Victoria where there weren't that many Japanese people around, what was it all of a sudden being in Hastings Park and just being surrounded by-?

RMF: Well, it was different especially when we went to Slocan too. It was all Japanese. It was a new experience but at the same time, it was a good experience cause we got to know so many people.

LU: And you were able to pick up on the language a little bit more you mentioned. What about writing, did you ever have to write in Japanese?

RMF: No, we didn't have to write. I could write then but can't now.

LU: And just checking the time there. You mentioned you were available to go to Victoria High School. Did you have your graduation ceremony there as well or did you graduate high school?

RMF: No because I was in grade 11 when we were moved out so I didn't really finish my course because I was taking a commercial course but then it worked out well because I got a job in the office so-. I couldn't finish school anyways, I guess I could have but I just wanted to take general courses, correspondence and some teaching.

LU: Were you able to complete your last credit for high school?

RMF: No, I didn't. Never did but I was able to, you know, find work.

LU: You mentioned it was in the commission's office. What was it like working in there? What were some of the tasks?

RMF: I was in the payroll department. We had to type out the payroll, kept us busy.

LU: And what other tasks would be done in the commission's office, just typing up the paycheques or?

RMF: Paycheques and working out the hours and so forth. I guess that was about all we did. There were other people around doing other jobs.

LU: Were there a lot of people staffed in the commission's office?

RMF: Yeah, there was, there were. I think there was just two or three of us in payroll. Mr. Tokunaga, he was the head of payroll. Then my friend Kim was next-in-charge. I was the one who did a lot of the typing.

LU: Do you remember Kim's last name?

RMF: Oh yeah, Kim, Hirota was her maiden name, she lives up the street from me now, and Fukushima is her married name.

LU: Oh wow. Do you remember anyone else who worked in the commissioner's office as well?

RMF: Well, there was my friend. My close friend now, Kuni. She was Noguchi then, Fukuzaka now. There was Betty Izumi, she was in the office and there was Mary Kadowaki, she was in the front office. And there was one of my close friends, Molly Yanagizawa. She worked for the treasurer, this was in the adjoining office. There were quite a few girls working for the, what is it, not the relief but what's that word? Can't think of the word. There was Sachi, can't think of her last name now and there

was-. My sister-in-law worked in the office too, [Kay?] Suruhiro was her maiden name. There were quite a few of us.

LU: Sachi Takashi?

RMF: No, but I know of Sachi Takashi because their family lived right next door to my husband's family in Marpole in Vancouver so I know Sachi.

LU: And in Bay Farm, did everyone have a house number and is that like an address in Bay Farm or-?

RMF: I know we lived on A line.

LU: A line?

RMF: And we were the third house.

[55 minutes]

RMF: A line was right on the highway because they were the first houses that we finished.

LU: And when you were in Bay Farm, did you parents have a job at all as well?

RMF: Oh yeah, my dad worked but I don't know what he did but they had all kinds of jobs for the men, not too many for the women.

LU: I guess that would have been hard, there can't be too much to do.

RMF: [nods]

LU: When you were traveling on the train from, going out east, do you remember if there were other Japanese families or individuals on the train after you?

RMF: I don't remember. As a matter of fact, all the ones that left after us, they didn't go that way. They went from Nelson I think, they couldn't stop, went straight to wherever their destination was. I don't know, we just stopped in Calgary, Regina, and Toronto. Mr. Reed, the person that my family was to go to, he was quite upset because we were quite a bit later than we were supposed to get there because we made all these stops.

LU: Oh right. [laughing] Well, I guess that happens. Think I'm just going to pause the for just a moment here. There we go, so how did you meet your husband?

RMF: Hmm, I was standing on a corner. I was taking piano lessons and he comes by in his car and he asked me if I wanted a ride. Actually, I knew who he was because I knew his family and, but we never went around the same circles. We played tennis but we were in a different group. When we came to Toronto, we joined badminton, tennis, ski clubs so we got to know a lot of people so it was good.

LU: So that was in Toronto when you were taking piano lessons and you met him?

RMF: From then on, we sort of started going out.

LU: [laughing]

RMF: We went around for a whole, we were engaged for a whole year since we had to save for our reception, 10 dollars a week I think it was. We had our reception at Mirrorhead at Adelaide. It's no longer there between Yonge and Bay, the meal was something like a dollar and thirty-five per person. My wedding gown, I had it made by dressmakers, was blush satin, cost me 35 dollars. My bridesmaids' gowns were 25 dollars, I had one bridesmaid and one junior bridesmaid and hers, I think was about the same price. The flower girl was 25 dollars or something. Anyways, I still have the bill.

LU: You still have the bill?

RMF: A little brownish, a little torn looking.

LU: That's a treasure now. [laughing] It certainly is. What year were you married?

RMF: 1952.

LU: So not too long after the war ended and what was it like in Toronto at that time for the Japanese community? Was there any discrimination?

RMF: I think there was maybe a bit but we didn't run into it. My girlfriend and I, we stayed at St. George and Bloor and we ran into bed bugs there so we moved down the street and found a place. There was a place for rent, we didn't stay there that long, we moved down to Sussex and moved out to, what's the name of that street, just west of Spadina. It runs off of Bloor. It's a fairly well-known street.

LU: Dufferin?

RMF: No, no. Just west, excuse me, just east of Spadina, near St. George.

LU: Bay?

[60 minutes]

RMF: Not Bay, not that east. It was West of St George, like between St. George and Spadina. You would know the street. Anyway, we moved up there. From there, I went to live with my parents. They got a place on [Landsdowne?] Avenue. This Japanese man owned it but he rented like suites. So, we stayed there for a while till we bought our own house, of course, on Dundas and Leslie.

LU: Oh wow. Was it difficult to find places to live when you came out to Toronto?

RMF: I don't think so because there were Japanese realtors by then.

LU: That's lucky. I heard stories where people had to wander around the streets for a week before they could find a place to stay.

RMF: I don't think we had any trouble. My brother still lives in the house.

LU: Oh, he still lives there?

RMF: He's not married. My sister, who was 14 years younger than me, is not married. My brother next to me, two years younger, he's not married. And my brother in between, Morris is ten years younger than me, he's married to an American girl but they don't have children. So, we had to do all the producing: [laughing] three sons and ten grandchildren.

LU: That's right. [laughing]

RMF: We have a great time when we get together with our families. My two sons are quite, they are fun-loving and make things really quite happy. We have a great time.

LU: And does one son live down in the States or just your grandson?

RMF: No, just my grandson because he went to school down there and that's how he met this one. He went to a Christian college near Rochester. They went around for four years.

LU: Oh wow. You mentioned that you had a few jobs here and there when you were, I guess during when you were growing up but you mentioned that you stayed with Emily Carr for a summer. What was that like, what were you doing there?

RMF: Just doing general housework. She was in bed all the time because she wasn't well. She was writing stories and she was kind of cranky at that time because she wasn't feeling well. She had all these birds and this monkey, pet monkey.

LU: Oh wow.

RMF: But she wasn't famous at that time, it was after she passed away. Quite famous. She was quite a lady, she lived among the Indians and did all her painting.

LU: Oh wow. What year would that have been when you stayed with her?

RMF: I would say, 17 when I left so about '50.

LU: What happened with the bird?

RML: I was cleaning the cage and I had the window open. It was a canary, it flew out and never came back. She was quite upset with me but she couldn't do anything about it. She had loads of other birds but I think it was her pet canary.

LU: She had a monkey too though.

RMF: [nods] She had a monkey. She loved animals, birds.

LU: That's fascinating.

RMF: She had her older sister living- this was their original home in Chatham. Her sister couldn't see too well and she would bring some meals up for her. One time, she brought her some soup and there was a fly in it. So, Emily Carr was not happy. Her sister was very, very gentle.

LU: And what we it like going berry picking the next summer?

RMF: Oh, it was fun because all my friends had been going there for a couple of years you know. My dad wouldn't let me go for some reason. I finally got to go one summer.

LU: Do you stay right there on the farm?

RMF: We stay right there and they get someone to cook your meals.

LU: Do you know where the farm was or whose farm it was?

RMF: I don't know, it was a little ways out of Toronto, I mean out of Chatham, not too far just on the outskirts.

LU: Oh wow. That would be fun. So, you did a lot of little housework tasks, did- Was there any, I guess, did you require any education before you went and did all the-?

RMF: Nope.

LU: Did you have to learn how to do anything?

[65 minutes]

RMF: They show you how to do it and I guess, what they wanted you to do. My mom found all these jobs cause I don't think I did.

LU: And did your brothers and sisters have a chance to work as well?

RMF: No, they didn't work. Well, my sister was too young. My brother next to me, he didn't need to work. Anyway.

LU: Oh wow. So, I guess, just over the years, did you find it difficult to correspond with a lot your friends from Victoria?

RMF: I only really wrote to one girl and then she did come out east and I did have her over one day but I don't know what happened because I lost touch.

LU: And do you know anything about the early days of the cultural centre and, and were you active with the cultural centre at that time?

RMF: I wasn't, I wasn't too active because it's quite far from where I live but we did join the ballroom dancing group at the old centre. That was fun.

LU: Who taught the ballroom dance?

RMF: We had several teachers. Well the teacher that we had, she was from England. Mary Thompson, she was very good. I think, if it wasn't for her, I don't think my husband would have lasted that long because he didn't really care for it as most husbands seem to be but she was so much fun and she taught and then there was another girl, can't remember her name, she taught the beginner's class. We did it for 12 years. It's a wonder my husband lasted that long and it was like real, what do you call the ballroom dancing. It's not the casual one. It's the-

LU: Waltz?

RMF: We did waltz but there's a name for this type of ballroom dancing. What they do, on You Think You can Dance, not that one, on the other one, on Dancing with the Stars, but it was a more simplified version. We did everything: tango, rumba, waltz, quickstep, we did everything but really quite simple, basic.

LU: And what do you know about your father, husband's side of the family? Was he born here in Canada?

RMF: Oh yeah. My husband was born in Canada of course but his parents came from Kagoshima, which is southern part of Kyushu. His mother was a picture bride.

LU: How exciting.

RMF: So, I guess it worked out okay. Some of them didn't but there's worked out and my husband's family was five.

LU: Was he the oldest?

RMF: He's the second oldest. The oldest passed away quite a few years ago.

LU: Did he also go to Japanese language school when he was growing up?

RMF: Yes, he did. He was quite a sportsman, was an avid golfer and in his younger days, he was an avid basketball player. Anything he did, he was serious about it. But me, I like to be good at it, but I'm not really competitive, joined everything.

LU: Did your husband ever have a chance to visit Japan?

RMF: No because he didn't really want to go back because their family didn't really keep in touch with their family in Japan, so he didn't really want to go back whereas mine, they always talked about my family in Japan. As I said, my dad always sent pictures of us so I was quite interested in going. The second time I went with in the fall, it was beautiful.

LU: Do you know what your family's line of work may have been? In Kagoshima?

RMF: I don't know. Probably farmers.

LU: Do you know roughly when his family would have come to Canada from Japan?

RMF: I don't think he was that young, young like his father when he came. He must have been in his twenties I would think.

[70 minutes].

LU: Oh wow. It's interesting, the history of everyone's families coming over from Japan and what they did. It's wonderful that you know so much.

RMF: Some of the mothers really had a rough time especially when they went up where the logging-. They have been pretty tough.

LU: Quite a difference between the two countries especially at that time as well. Did your mom ever have a chance to go back after her first visit?

RMF: Yeah, they had the chance to go back several times. She went back a few times because as I said, my sister worked at Canadian so they always had free airfare.

LU: Oh right.

RMF: So, they went back quite a few times. My mum went back without my dad a couple of times.

LU: It must be hard to leave your family and friends behind in Japan and be all the way on the other side of the world and try and start a family.

RMF: That's right, especially when you are 16, that's pretty young. My dad always wanted to come since his relatives were here.

LU: Wow, so interesting.

RMF: Yeah, my dad worked at the Palace Hotel in Calgary. He loved music, he took violin lessons. He liked to dance and loved to sing. He knew a lot of, all the old songs in English that were popular at this time. And he actually, he made two tapes of the songs he knew in English and, but I can't find it. I don't know where it is.

LU: You'll come across it. How did your parents feel about the war? Do you remember when you first heard the news about Pearl Harbour? Do you remember where you were or where you heard it from?

RMF: Well, I don't know whether I was in school or whether-. I forget what day of the week it was.

LU: I think it was a Sunday.

RMF: Was it a Sunday? Might be at home. I don't know how I felt as I said, you know, just sort of disbelief. Didn't really, I guess it must have been pretty bad but other than that, I don't know exactly how I felt.

LU: Did your parents ever express any concern?

RMF: I guess they were pretty shocked but they didn't really say too much.

LU: Oh wow. I guess, it must have been hard knowing they had a little bit of family left over, back in Japan as well. What about after the war ended and even beyond that when redress started to take place? Were your parents around during that time?

RMF: [nods] Yep, they received it.

LU: And how did they feel about redress?

RMF: They were quite thankful that they were able to get this money cause, you know, it was quite an upheaval to be moved out. We didn't own our own house or anything so at least it was just our furniture or whatever we had to leave behind that we lost. But people that had their businesses, boats, and so forth, it must have been pretty hard for them.

LU: Do you remember some of the items that you had to leave behind, other than you know the type of furniture? Were there any special items that you wish you could have taken but you couldn't?

[75 minutes]

RMF: Gee, I don't remember if there was anything special. I know we had a piano and I had my bike [laughing] which wasn't that old but not really cause we took all our pictures and everything.

LU: Oh, did you? And you were only able to take what you could carry? How many suitcases would that be?

RMF: Whatever we could carry I guess.

LU: I guess it would just be a couple. Were you able to take a crate with you or-? Some people were able to take large boxes of items as well.

RMF: I guess we had some big boxes because we had clothes and some bedding. We didn't think we, we thought the war would end before too long and we would be back. LU: Where did you keep the items you left behind?

RMF: Just left them there.

LU: Just in the house you were renting?

RMF: We had nowhere to you know take it.

LU: Have you been back to Victoria?

RMF: [nods] Yep, I've been back twice. Went for a visit with my sister and my cousins in Calgary. We drove from Calgary right through, through the ghost town to Victoria.

LU: Oh wow.

RMF: It was surprising you know, when you were kids, it was a whole street that hill. It was really nice and steep for riding the, skating down like it was a good hill. But when we went there, it wasn't very big the hill and it wasn't very far to the school. We thought it was quite a ways cause we walked to school. It changed quite a bit.

LU: Oh wow. I'm not sure but I think I might have, oh maybe not. No, I just have Slocan, a map of Slocan.

RMF: Oh yeah. Not of Bay Farm?

LU: Unfortunately, not of Bay Farm. I don't know if you would recognize anything from the Slocan map.

RMF: I don't even remember the names of the streets.

LU: Oh.

RMF: So, the Main street is where we had our office.

LU: Oh, it says to Bay Farm and Lemon Creek was off that way. Would you have to come all the way up here to the commission's office?

RMF: Wasn't really that far you know cause I think we would walk sometimes. When we could get a ride, we would get it.

LU: It has marked here that that's the hospital.

RMF: That's the hospital. Ok, so then our office must have been around here.

LU: Oh okay. This one says BCSC garage, do you know what that was? BCSC, maybe BC Security Commission.

RMF: Yeah, must be. I don't remember a garage there.

LU: But your office was on the corner?

RMF: I know our office was on the corner, across the street was a grocery store and then there was a post office.

LU: Oh, BCSC Welfare.

RMF: Oh, welfare, that's where we were then.

LU: That's where.

RMF: I was trying to think of the welfare department. There were several girls who worked there.

LU: And then there's a stores department here.

RMF: Oh yeah.

LU: Bath, a fire hall-

RMF: That was Cluff's grocery store.

LU: Oh, Cluff's grocery store.

RMF: And then Grim had the post office?

LU: And who is T. S. Shorthouse?

RMF: T. S. Shorthouse, I don't remember that.

LU: Do you remember what was across the street this way?

[80 minutes].

RMF: Old buildings where people stayed. Like people from Prince Rupert, that area, they were the first ones to leave the park, Hastings Park and they occupied all these old houses just like in the movies, you know, when you see those old western movies.

LU: City Hall was down this way. Do you remember what was behind the, what this corner may have been?

RMF: I know there was a store, not store but a sort of little restaurant kind of corner. And the-

LU: Do you remember the name of it?

RMF: Wait a second, this is the hall. The little store was around here, across from it and there's the halfway house, that was a store.

LU: Oh. There's quite a bit on here. Wonderful. Well, were there, let me put this away here, were there any other stories you wanted to share or any other comments you wanted to make that I didn't ask the questions for? I'm sure I'll think of a thousand questions after-

RMF: After.

LU: -after you leave.

RMF: Can't think of. I can't think of. I think most of us did okay, having moved out of east cause there was more opportunities. There wasn't too much discrimination I don't think.

LU: Did you have any experiences of it even when you were out in Victoria and Vancouver?

RMF: No, not really. We knew there was discrimination but I don't know, we had friends, Caucasian friends as well as Japanese friends so it didn't really bother me too much.

LU: When the war started, were you still able to still be friends with the non-Japanese friends you went to school with?

RMF: Well, I don't know. We didn't really have that much time. Well, we still went to school close to the time we were leaving.

LU: Did they ever ask about, you know, your Japanese heritage and-?

RMF: No, they didn't really but my friend sent me the picture, the class picture, you know, after I left, which was nice.

LU: That is nice. Oh wow. Well, thank you very much for coming in.

[End of interview]

