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THE JAPANESE CANADIAN LEGACY PROJECT

Peter Wakayama: We are doing Lily Nagahara's interview. This is June the 5th, 2010.

Lily, what was your maiden name and when and where were you born?

Lily Nagahara: My maiden name is Omoto and I was born in Vancouver, Kitsilano.

PW: And I understand you were born at home.

LN: Yes, I was born at home.

PW: And your parents, can you tell where they came from?

LN: My dad came from Shiga-ken, Imamura, and my mom came from Shigaken, Hikone.

PW: And do you know what your mum and dad did in Japan, your dad especially?

LN: Yes. My mom didn't work. She was pretty pampered, I think. You know, growing up. She didn't work. Now, my father- No, my mother's family they were in the silk business where they were, they used to have silkworms to make the silk thread. I know my mum's father had a great big place where he had this big silk farm and he had a lot of people harvesting it. I don't exactly know what dad did but his land was a huge farm. I wouldn't be surprised if he was involved in agriculture.

PW: Do you know why they came to Canada?

LN: I think, they probably came to, they never told me but they probably came because they wanted to experience the New World. You know, because they were certainly settled in Japan, they had a nice place and everything. But I guess they wanted a new country, a new adventure.

PW: How old were they when they came and when did they come?

LN: Well, I would think they were about, my mum was in early 20s, dad would have been about 35 since there was 15 years difference between the two of them.

PW: When did they come to Canada?

LN: I don't know the exact date but it was before the big flu epidemic, so it would have been well before '42, in the 1920s.

PW: And when they came to Canada, where did they end up originally?

LN: Vancouver.

PW: Vancouver. And what did he do?

LN: He was a landscaper, designer, and gardener.

PW: And then they raised a family in Vancouver and lived in Kitsilano. Can you tell us about your family?

[5 minutes]

LN: Well, I have, I'm one of six siblings. I guess we lived in Kitsilano all the time. I don't know any other home except the one I was born in. I know that it was a huge home and part of it was used as a kindergarten because on the floor, you could still see that round circle mark and things like that but it was huge house with about ten rooms. You know, three stories type of thing and that's the only home I ever knew and that was in Kitsilano. We were all in that home until we were moved in the second World War.

PW: What about the number of boys and girls and your brothers and sisters? Can you describe them.

LN: I have three brothers and two sisters. They are all gone now, I'm the only one left. There were three boys and three girls.

PW: I understand that your oldest brother passed away when he was only one week old.

LN: That's right.

PW: But you have an interesting story about the second brother.

LN: Yes. The second brother, mum and dad took him to Japan to show him to the grandparents, my father's parents and they didn't have anybody to carry on the family name so they decided they wanted to keep this son of my mum's. And so, they really forcibly took him and kept him and raised him. Mind you, they raised him in a lovely environment and everything else but he was the only son and I guess he was pretty lonely.

PW: I understand he corresponded with your mother.

LN: Yes, he wrote to mum several times I understand, telling her how he wished he could be with his siblings. But I guess he accepted life the way it was cause that's the way it was in Japan. Someone to carry on your family name was so important.

PW: And then what happened to him in Japan?

LN: Well, during the Second World War, he was in the war and he eventually became the rank of captain I understand and then, he was killed in the Second World War before he even had a chance to get married and carry on the family name.

PW: And then, your brothers and sisters?

LN: My oldest sister, she, she actually I think just finished high school when the war broke out and she was in the commercial course and so, she was a hospital secretary in Slocan. In Slocan City as they call it. And my brother of course was still young, he was teenager. My sister and I were still young so we went to school.

PW: In Vancouver, tell us about your education and the schools you went to.

LN: I went to elementary school only up to grade three before the war broke out, Henry Hudson Public School. I went to Japanese school everyday after the regular classes at Henry Hudson and on Saturday mornings and that was it.

PW: Did you enjoy going to Japanese school?

LN: I did because everybody else did and it just seemed like it was part of the routine.

PW: Now, you lived in the Kitsilano area. Can you describe that area and say how many Japanese families were in that area?

LN: There were quite a few Japanese families. We were on second avenue and there were quite a few Japanese families on second avenue and third avenue within I

would say probably a five block area, five blocks to the east and west and north. You know, that was it. Just a pocket of Japanese families.

[10 minutes]

PW: I understand you went to the Henry Hudson Public School. Was it a mixture of Japanese and hakujin together?

LN: Yes, it was a mixture.

PW: Of your class, how many would have been what you would say Japanese Canadians? Remember that?

LN: Probably two in my class.

PW: What were some-?

LN: There wasn't such a great concentration of Japanese so only about two would be Japanese in my class.

PW: What were some of the activities you did, recreational activities?

LN: Besides playing with my friends, in those days we did everything outside. We didn't have any fancy toys. We played tag, went swimming. If we were lucky to get a bit of snow, we would bring out the sleigh. The snow would last about maybe half a day. We used to play jacks and drawing things on the ground and all these nature things we used to do. We didn't have any electronics or fancy toys.

PW: Were you close to the beach at Kitsilano?

LN: Oh yes. We were within walking distance and all summer, we would go to the beach, every single day and swim and spend time at the beach, playing on the swings and the see-saw.

PW: Your memories of Vancouver was fairly good, I bet.

LN: Yeah.

PW: Because you were at that age.

LN: Yeah.

PW: And you were born in 1932?

LN: Yeah.

PW: What, so when the war came, what age would you have been?

LN: About eight and a half, around there.

PW: How was your relationships with your brothers and sisters?

LN: Ah, it was good. We were very close. Of course, with the older siblings, you know, you're not as close because they have their own friends and things. At home, we always used to do things together.

PW: And what was your relationship with their parents?

LN: It was good, we used to go to picnics. You know, they used to have Japanese picnics and stuff. We used to go picnics, visit relatives on the ferry to Nanaimo and Duncan and places like that. Of course, they used to come to the beaches as well but they were working for most of the time so I spent, I guess, more time with my siblings, you know.

PW: Did you have a lot of relatives in that area?

LN: Not too many. Mum and dad had very few relatives. The only relatives they had were, I guess, the family in Nanaimo and this is why we went there and they used to come to visit us.

PW: I understand you were closest to your next sister, your older sister-

LN: Eva.

PW: -who was two years older than you but you are the only remaining-

LN: [nods] I am the only remaining.

PW: -of the family? The war came in 1942, what is your recollection of that time when the war came and Canada declared war?

LN: I guess I didn't really understand the politics of it. All I know is that our parents said we had to move. And course coming from a city, I wasn't used to going to a place like Slocan. Of course, we had to go to Hastings Park first. We were there for a month. I hated it there, we had no privacy and we had to sleep in these bunk beds, like you were practically rubbing elbows with everybody. The facility was pretty crude because we were in a livestock building and I didn't think it was that great in there. Being so young, you gotta go with the flow you know.

PW: You were there in Hastings Park for a month only and your family was with you at the time?

[15 minutes]

LN: [nods] Except we were in different buildings.

PW: Your-

LN: Women were in one building and men were in one building.

PW: So, there was separation even though you were all at Hastings Park?

LN: All in Hastings Park.

PW: But you were in separating buildings. What kind of food did you eat when you were at Hastings Park?

LN: It was pretty basic. I think it was cereal, milk, mashed potatoes. I really can't remember. I don't think anything really impressed me all that much.

PW: You said it was crowded. What kind of sleeping arrangements did you have?

LN: In Hastings Park?

PW: Yes.

LN: Well, we slept in bunk beds, metal bunk beds. I guess they were straw mattresses. And because there was no privacy, people just used blankets and hung them around the bed for privacy. The washroom was a crude one. It was sort of like a long trough that I guess the animals used to use. Course, when they flushed it, they just flush it at one end and clean the trough that way. The floor was concrete with long ruts where I supposed they used to hose down the animal stuff and other than that, bunk beds and this crude washroom. There was nothing else, just wall to wall beds.

PW: So, there was no privacy on the toilet. So, you just squatted on the trough?

LN: Yeah, everybody just kind of, no doors, no privacy.

PW: Amazing. So, what happened to your father's business and home when the war came?

LN: Well, the home was sold by the government and the business, he just had to stop that. But the home was sold and of course, we got no compensation for that. So, he lost everything I guess, you know.

PW: Did he have a lot of equipment in his landscaping business?

LN: He didn't have too many except the stuff that they used for landscaping, I guess. He had maybe about four people working for him in his line but then of course, because its landscaping it was seasonal. But in Vancouver, the climate is mild so the season was pretty long.

PW: Would he have trucks or cars that he could go around to the go around to the different places?

LN: No, he used to - I remember, he used to have a policeman as a friend. You know in those days they used to have motorcycles with the little sidecar and this policeman used to drive him home. I remember him sitting in the sidecar and getting off and waving goodbye. That was quite off. I guess he had these friends who used to drive them around. He had equipment sent over and then when that project was finished, he would go onto the next one. These were landscape things that took some time, like making goldfish ponds and bridges.

PW: I'd imagine he had shovels and pick and stuff.

LN: I think those things, he probably had them arranged to move from place to place.

PW: So, he didn't have a car or truck that took him from place to place?

LN: No, he didn't seem to need it. He had his policeman friend.

PW: What, did you father or mother say anything about the war and what happened to them during or after the incarceration of the Japanese Canadians?

LN: Well, I think dad was quite bitter about it. I can understand, everything he had worked for had been taken away from him. So, he would have good reason.

[20 minutes]

LN: And mum, she was upset of course because she was in the same boat as my dad. She wasn't in business with him but I guess she felt it.

PW: So, you, after Hastings Park and you were there a month, you went off and they shipped you to-

LN: Slocan.

PW: Slocan to Popoff?

LN: Slocan City first.

PW: Oh, Slocan city first.

LN: That's where we landed.

PW: Did you stay there?

LN: We just stayed there for, I think, a day and then they put us on open back trucks and they drop us to Popoff.

PW: And then what happened?

LN: Which is about two miles away. When we landed there, everybody got off the train and I never forget, we were taken to this rink with a dirt floor and grass growing and long tables and we were given some lunch. I can't remember what the lunch was. After that, we were put on trucks and driven to Popoff. I guess, in Popoff, then there were tents. Then, we lived in the tents.

PW: Did your whole family live in the tents?

LN: [nods].

PW: What was the sleeping arrangements in the tent? Was it a fairly large tent?

LN: Well, I don't know but it looks like the tent was around 10 by 10 or so when I think of it now and there were just sort of like bunk beds in there. It was just a tent with bunk beds. There was no heating. No water or anything of course.

PW: What time of year did you-?

LN: We were there in September.

PW: September.

LN: In the fall.

PW: Till?

LN: Until the following spring.

PW: Then you went through the fall and winter in the tent?

LN: Yep, with the snow.

PW: With the snow. What happened to, you didn't have any heating in the wintertime?

LN: No, dad went around looking for pieces of wood and he found an old can and he would burn the wood and when it turned into embers, he would put them in the can and he would bring it into the tent and this was our heat.

PW: Did you have a lot of snow and was it very cold in Popoff?

LN: I can't remember it being as cold as it is in Toronto but it cold enough. We used to have like a couple feet of snow. I know my sister was sleeping in the upper bunk. And because the tent would sort of cave in with the weight of the snow, she would wake up with the snow laying on top of her, which would wake her up because it was little hard to breathe. We had a substantial amount of snow but it wasn't like sub-zero like it is here in Toronto. Water, there were a few pumps around the grounds and you take your container to the pumps and you pump water in the bucket and you bring it back and outside, dad would have maybe a piece of wood across a couple of stands and that's where you would wash your face and brush your teeth.

PW: What was your eating arrangements since you couldn't cook in the tent, could you?

LN: Oh no. There was a great big white tent that was setup right in Popoff. When it was mealtime, people would line up in the snow and in the heat, whatever the climate was. And inside, there were long wooden benches and wooden tables and that's where you ate your meals.

PW: Was it cooked by cooks and then everybody-?

LN: [nods] Japanese cooks. I remember, I never forget the making of scrambled eggs. There were great big, galvanized tubs and I don't know how many eggs were in there but I know I saw them mixing the eggs in this great big, huge galvanized tub. And I guess that's what they cooked. You would have scrambled eggs and tea or whatever beverage. That sort of thing.

[25 minutes]

PW: So, it was basically a mess tent then?

LN: Yes. We used to call it mess hall. It was a great big white tent.

PW: And how many families will be involved during this tent period?

LN: Gosh, I don't know exactly how many people were in Popoff. There was a lot of people, hundreds, hundreds of people because there were rows and rows of houses later when they did get around later to building houses. So, it was pretty densely populated, Popoff by itself.

PW: What about toilet arrangements?

LN: We had an outhouse. Outhouses, we had little holes dug in the ground and they just put up a little outhouse.

PW: What about bathing arrangements?

LN: Bathing arrangements, we just sort of sponge-bathed in the house. Later on, they built bathhouses.

PW: The ofuros?

LN: Yes, so one side of the wall would be for men and the other side would be for women. But until then, we kind of just you know.

PW: There was about a six-month period or so that you were in this living condition?

LN: I think so because when the snow came, we were still in the tent and we were there when it was really hot. I never forgot when we first went to Slocan, it was very warm, it was like a field with just tents and there were huge beetles flying around. I never forget. As a child, you rarely see these huge beetles and I know I was a little afraid of that. So it was warm when we got there. Snow came and everything so we must have been there about six months and then eventually the houses got built.

PW: What happened to education, the schooling when you were, when it was still the tent city?

LN: We didn't have any schooling when we were in the tent, it was after that that they built some, you know, when they got around to building, they built some larger structures and we went to school there.

PW: So, this is, there was about six months or more where you lost schooling?

LN: You lost your year.

PW: Basically. Then after the tent period, so now it's spring, late spring/summer that they built the shacks and you moved in into one-?

LN: Yes, one house because we had six in the family.

PW: You were all just in one building?

LN: 14 by 28.

PW: Can you describe what it was like living in that, that shack?

LN: Well, it was certainly a great improvement from the tent. But it was a thin wooden wall, no insulation or anything of course. It was 14 by 28, divided into three rooms and a few windows and the heating was sort of a central stove where you burnt some wood. That was your main heating and then there was wood burning stove to cook on. We still went outside to the pump to get the water.

PW: And then there was, there would be common bathing facilities, an ofuro, and the outside outhouses, correct?

LN: Yes, outhouses.

PW: Can you recall how many people would have lived in Popoff?

LN: Gee- there must have been , maybe rows of maybe 30 houses and maybe 6 or 7 rows of those. And then they had built large facilities they used to call them bunk houses and those were people who were just single or just a couple and they used to

live in those, it was a great big building with small rooms with a communal kitchen. And so, there would have been a concentration of people living in the bunk houses. Must have been maybe about, gee-, maybe 4 or 6 bunk houses anyway aside from all the individual shacks.

PW: So, then you went, by this time, there was some schoolhouses there. Now, this was in the summer so you started in the fall for schooling.

LN: [nods]

PW: And you went into grade?

[30 minutes]

LN: I went into grade four.

PW: Four.

LN: Yeah, I know they used to call it Riverview Public School. I suppose it was because there was a river right by. I know that's what they used to call the school, Riverview.

PW: What do you remember about the school?

LN: Oh, it was great. You met friends your age. Wintertime, you would still play with your friends. We used to make rinks and somehow or other, we got ice skates. I quite don't know where they came from but I know we were skating. We used to go swimming in the river along with the water snakes and all. It just didn't seem to bother us too much because you had nowhere else to swim and the bottom of that river, it was all sort of murky and slimy and lots of dead, you know, timber and stuff. It was pretty dangerous and the current, there was a current and that was rather dangerous but we used to make allowances for the current. If we wanted to get from one side to the other and end up in a certain place, we would go upriver because the current would drive us to that spot. Even if you are young, you sort of figure all these things out.

PW: Was the water very cold?

LN: No, it was nice cause it was a small river.

PW: So, you made a lot of friends?

LN: A lot of friends in school.

PW: Remember your teachers?

LN: I remember one of the-. I remember the principal, I could picture her face, can't remember her name. She was a wonderful person. I remember even going to her place when they skipped me a couple of grades and I needed extra tutoring in math and I know she invited me to her place. She tutored me in math so I could come up to that level. Skipping two grades in math was a little, you know, hard for me. She was wonderful, she was not married and she was the principal of Riverview.

PW: And in terms of your brothers and sisters, did they go to school too?

LN: Yep, they did. I think my brother was probably in high school in Slocan City.

PW: So, they didn't have a high school in Popoff so he had to go to Slocan to go to high school?

LN: Yes, my sister being only two years older, we were in the same school, ahead of me.

PW: And so, what about cooking and getting food in the camps?

LN: We grew a lot of our own veggies. Dad did because he was pretty resourceful in the garden. So whatever he could grow, he grew potatoes and carrots and those staples. He dug a great big, we used to call it a cellar but it was really just a hole of 6 feet or so so that you could walk in under the house. He used it as a storage of the veggies since we didn't have a refrigerator or anything. We grew a lot of our vegetables. I don't know where he got them but he got a few chickens. He had about 8 or ten chickens so we had our own fresh eggs and, but he could never kill the chickens.

PW: [unclear]

LN: So, we never ate chicken. So, I don't know what happened to them. I guess they died of old age once they were passed the laying stage. I remember we had fresh eggs and I remember helping my mother bake and if we were short of eggs, we would just sit and wait until the chicken laid the eggs and then we used to run out. [laughing] and bring these warm eggs back and use them.

PW: Was there a common store that you could buy the supplies?

[35 minutes]

LN: There was, Mrs. Popoff had a store. Now she owned the property. She used to have cattle and she used to have workers and I remember she had cattle and our house was an end house in Popoff and there was sort of a, crude sort of a fence. On the other side, we could see the cattle. They were slaughtered there and everything. So I guess they used to butcher the meat that they used to sell in their store. And that's where we got some of the groceries.

PW: Did you get any Japanese supplies in Popoff?

LN: Well, I know my mother used to make her own shoyu and miso and I don't know where she got the rice but we used to have some rice but she used to bake her own bread and all that pastry, you know tea biscuits and that stuff. That was the extent of our groceries. Mrs. Popoff's store had groceries you know good stuff.

PW: Did you drink milk when you were there?

LN: [nods]

PW: You had milk?

LN: We had milk. I guess, the milk was from her cattle and she used to sell groceries in her store.

PW: Did your father work while he was at the camp?

LN: Oh yes, his job in Popoff was chopping wood with a crew of maybe four or five other men. They used to go around like a group or a crew and their assignment, they were hired I guess by the government. Their job was to chop wood for burning, for cooking, and for heating. People who had able-bodied men in the house, they had to chop their own but their job was to chop for those who didn't have their husbands cause they were at internment camps or so, people who were ill and maybe couldn't chop. Their job was so people would have wood to burn and to cook. That was the only way to heat homes.

PW: How far did you go? Did you finish public school in Popoff?

LN: Yes, I finished school up to grade eight and I guess, I just started grade nine when the, you know we had to move again. In those days, there was no high school

in Popoff. So, we used to walk the two miles to Slocan City and went to a Catholic school. There was a Catholic school and an Anglican school. I went to a Catholic School and I took the commercial course which, I guess, was the most common one, you know. We were taught by nuns.

PW: Did you continue your Japanese classes when you were at Popoff?

LN: No, I think I went up to grade four and that was it. After that, we didn't go anymore.

PW: Then, the war ended and your parents wanted to probably move east versus going to Japan or no?

LN: Well, actually my father first had considered repatriation to Japan but he changed his mind and then came to Toronto but not as one family.

PW: Oh, I see. How did everybody come out east?

LN: Dorothy, my oldest sister, came out first to Toronto and my brother he was, he went to Chatham and he worked in a hospital there. My sister, I think, worked in an office in Toronto when she came out. My sister, she went to Ottawa and she was like a live-in babysitter for this lovely family. She really was fond of the family so she was, I think, in Ottawa for a couple of years.

[40 minutes]

PW: That's Eva?

LN: Yes, that's Eva. I was the only one that came out with my parents so the three of us came out cause I was pretty young. Only going on 14.

PW: What year did you come out east?

LN: Well, I guess, I was going onto 14 so '46, 1946.

PW: Was your dad sponsored to come out east or did he know somebody to come out to Toronto?

LN: Nope.

PW: He just came?

LN: I think so. We lived with relatives for two weeks and then we lived on our own in one room on King Street, mum and dad and I.

PW: And did he find work in Toronto?

LN: Yes, he was working in a doll factory and my mum, she was sewing clothes because she knew how to sew. Cause when she was in Japan, she was sewing and flower arranging and all those things, you know, she did in Japan. She used her sewing skills and got a job.

PW: Then your, you continued your education. You started high school in Toronto?

LN: Started back again in grade nine and went to Jarvis Collegiate to grade 13. Then graduated from there and went off to nursing.

PW: Did your brothers and sisters come and join the family in Toronto or were they still in the other places?

LN: They came eventually but I think it was a couple of years they were on their own like Frank in Chatham and Eva in Ottawa. Then, they all came to Toronto and then we all lived at King's.

PW: And so, you went to, you went into Nursing after graduating from Jarvis and where did you go to have your training?

LN: Toronto General Hospital, School of Nursing.

PW: School of Nursing and you were in residence at the hospital?

LN: [nods] At the hospital.

PW: And what was that experience like?

LN: Well, it was wonderful. Course in those days, you had to live in the residence and you were only allowed one late leave a week, which meant that you could stay out until 11:30 one day week. And once a month, you could stay out until two o' clock because there might be a special dance or family function or something. Other than that, you were in the residence. You got pretty close to the girls that you were training with. To this day, we are friends. We have reunions every five years. It's just like, after the first ten minutes, its as though we were back in the residence together. We have great fun and this is 55 years.

PW: Tell us about your roommate that you became very good friends with.

LN: Right, I had three roommates to begin with in my probation year. There were four of us in the room and one girl was from England and her father was with the Rowntree Chocolate Company. He was transferred to Toronto and that was how Maggie came to be in Toronto and the other roommate was from Kenora. I think her father was a physician up there in Kenora. The other girl, she was from a small place north, northern part of Ontario. So, we were all total strangers when we were all assigned to this room. After the first six months or so, we were divided two to a room so Maggie and I, we were classmates but we were roommates for three years.

[45 minutes]

PW: Just to go back, when you first came to Toronto, did you or your parents or your family experience prejudice?

LN: We did especially when you were looking for somewhere to live. A lot of people said, "oh, well it's been rented" but you know it wasn't so in that way, you experienced a lot of prejudice until they got to know the Japanese and then, we were the preferred ones they wanted to rent homes to. At the beginning, some people had doors slammed into their faces. It was pretty bad.

PW: Did your father speak English?

LN: He spoke English but not fluently. He could speak enough to get by.

PW: Did he learn when he came to Canada, when he was in Vancouver?

LN: Yeah, Vancouver because he had to deal with customers and I know he did his own accounting and everything cause I used to see him working on his books. He learned English that way.

PW: What about your mother?

LN: She didn't really learn to speak fluent English, just broken.

PW: Did you communicate with your parents in Japanese or English or a combination of both?

LN: Japanese.

PW: Japanese.

LN: Always Japanese.

PW: With your siblings?

LN: English.

PW: When they, your brothers and siblings came, your parents bought a house or something for you all live together or were they married by that time?

LN: No, we weren't. After we lived in that one room, mom and dad and I, after that, I think we moved to a three bedroom place above a store on College Street which was step-up from the one room. At that time, I think it was five of us were living together, everybody except Dorothy and then after that, mum bought-. I know, a big house on Madison Avenue. It was a three-story big rambling home. Then we moved from there to a bungalow in Scarborough. So, when we were in Madison, we were all together. In Scarborough, we were all together.

PW: What were some of the activities, well, I mean in residence you were all confined in training, but after graduation, you graduated from nursing and then you started working at TGH?

LN: I was working at TGH for two years at obstetrics and gynecology and then after that, I went into special duty care for the surgeries that were very new in those days. They needed special duty nurses, one on one cause the patients needed to be monitored 24 hours a day and so I did some private duty nursing there. That was really the extent of my nursing at Toronto General.

PW: What were some of your recreational activities?

LN: Oh, dancing. Oh, we used to have these dances and every two weeks, we used to have wonderful dances. We just looked forward to it every two weeks. Whole bunch of us, teenagers.

PW: All niseis?

LN: [nods]

PW: And where would these dances held at?

LN: Down near Grange Avenue, it was a hallway down there on, near Grange Avenue and we used to all assemble there and have this wonderful dance. Such great fun, we used to have some concerts so it was great fun when you were teenagers.

PW: And then, did you play any sports or recreational activities?

LN: Well, aside from skating in the wintertime, roller-skating at mutual arena, used to call it mutual arena, going swimming to Central Island in the summer, that kind of thing. Every summer, we used to spend a lot of time going swimming. We used to get on the ferry and go to the island and skating in the wintertime.

[50 minutes]

PW: How much contact did you have with the Japanese Canadian community because they were all scattered all over Toronto?

LN: Yeah, we were all scattered but I suppose where you met them were at these teenage dances because a lot of the people there were from Slocan so you had familiar faces and I think that was about it, our contacts with the others.

PW: There were several dance clubs like Aristocratic and some of these other dance clubs in that period. Did you belong to that or did just go to general dances?

LN: No, we just went to these general dances.

PW: Is that where you met your husband?

LN: Actually no, I met him at one of the concerts that they had cause he was looking after the sound system and I was in the concert with some of my other friends and we used to sing and do all kinds of things like that.

PW: You were in a concert and sang?

LN: Oh yes, we used to sing in groups like Slocan reunions and well actually, I used to sing solos. We used to, a bunch of us used to get together, you'd get up and you'd sing. It was fun in those days.

PW: These concerts, they were organized by, how were they organized?

LN: Well, I think they probably had a committee, said "let's have a concert" and we'll have some singers and we'll have some odori and maybe a skit or two and then people would come and the place is usually pretty full and those were wonderful concerts, wonderful memories.

PW: So, you met your husband and tell us a little about Mitt.

LN: Well, he, for most of the time, he had his own business, electric motor sales and services until he retired. He was on his own for most of the time that I knew him and after I finished working at Toronto General, then I had my children and so I went to help in the kindergarten, junior kindergarten. I used to go and volunteer and the teacher I was working with wanted me to come and work full-time so that I could be there as, you know, an assistant. I said, okay since I was at home. I ended up working in the kindergarten for about eight years.

PW: In the Japanese Canadian community, did you get involved with the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre very much?

LN: I- Not other than maybe having classes here, taking some classes here and volunteering when there were some functions. That was about the extent of it.

PW: What are your current activities that you do here?

LN: Well, aside from coming to the shodo classes here, the rest of the time, I have two granddaughters that I like to spend as much time as I can with. And I think that's about it. Of course, I am still in touch with all my nursing friends from Public Health. This is like, after I finished at the kindergarten, I worked for North York Public Health in the communicable disease control. So, we got a bunch of nurses working there for North York and we are all still very close. We meet, we have reunions with the girls I trained with. So, life is pretty busy.

[55 minutes]

PW: You also did sumi-e. What other-?

LN: Well, I did just sumi-e and bunkashishu and shodo. Those are the three classes I took.

PW: When the redress came up, did you participate and what did you think about the redress?

LN: Well, I kept close tabs on it because I wanted to know what was going on although I never traveled to Ottawa for any of that. Most of it was keeping tabs of going on and being involved on my own that way.

PW: Did you think it was a worthwhile cause?

LN: Oh yeah, I think so.

PW: What about the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, what's your opinion about the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre?

LN: Oh, I-. Everything is terrific. Especially now with the new place and everything, certainly a place we can be proud of. I think it's just a wonderful place, what they do and certainly the facility is nice too. Course it is the biggest Japanese cultural centre in the world but the way they have progressed and fixed it up and everything is a place to be really proud of.

PW: What's your opinion on the current situation of the Japanese Canadian community?

LN: Well, I think, you know, we are such a small community and there are so many intermarriages. That we are not really a community, centralized community except when we come to the cultural centre for a cause or entertainment or whatever. Aside from that, we are all sort of spread out in various places and various professions which I think is excellent. The Japanese people are involved in so many different professions and being recognized too. Architects and so forth. So, I think we made quite an impression.

PW: Do you have any bitterness of what happened with what the Canadian government did to the Japanese Canadians, what they did to your family and to yourself? Any opinions about that? Any bitterness?

LN: I don't think so. I mean, I really felt for my parents because I was too young to feel the full impact of it. Especially after you become an adult and have your own family and you think of your parents losses and everything, in that way, I felt very, you know, strongly about their losses and all their hard work sort of being taken away. I wouldn't call it bitterness because I usually don't dwell on being bitter very long. I think people did what they did and they regretted it, they apologized for it, so let's get on with it.

PW: Do you have any other comments you would like to make?

LN: No, I think most Japanese people have fared the war and the aftermath of the war very well. I'm always impressed by the number of people that I see for Issei Day for example. They are all, the ones who are well enough and active, I'm always impressed by how wonderfully they are doing and their attitudes. They are enjoying life and I think that's just great when you think of what they have all been through. Seeing them like that now, you don't see that in very many nationalities I don't think.

[60 minutes]

PW: Have you any opinions about how to get more sanseis and yonseis involved in the centre or the Japanese Canadian community?

LN: Well, it's getting more and more difficult because as I say with intermarriages and people being dispersed all over. I suppose, continuing to do what the cultural centre is doing is the best way. Having all these classes open to everyone with so many interesting classes that people can get involved in. When they get involved with the classes and become members, then, they become involved and that's the best way to keep the sanseis and yonseis coming to the center and keeping it going.

PW: How important do you think the Sedai project is?

LN: I think it's important because without it, history would be lost. Not the main things that you can read in a book but little personal things that the ordinary people all went through or how it affected or what they experienced it and none of that would be captured if you didn't have something like the Sedai group because these things are not in a book. You know, it's very personal and it's very individual.

PW: And I think what's so important is that each one has their own stories, they are all different, although they say what I don't have, and they say my life is not important but I think it's so important we capture this before losing this chapter in our society.

LN: I think Japanese people and the community, they have always been fighters. My mother, when she first came to Vancouver. I remember her saying going from point A to point B, she would go on the streetcar and notice so many stops. She doesn't know the name of the street, she doesn't understand English, but she knew it would be nine stops on the street or something. She would have nine little bits of paper in her hand. When the streetcar came to a stop, she would throw one on the floor and when it was gone, she would know she reached her destination. Little stories like that of how they had to cope, I mean, even in the worst of times like the flu, the great flu epidemic and she lost her son and he wasn't only a week old, her firstborn and yet, she went around, helping the neighbours because she had just had a baby and she had no baby to nurse but I guess she had a lot of milk and a lot of parents, the mothers in the neighbourhood, they were so ill that they were unable to nurse and she used to hear these babies crying, losing weight. She used to go from place to place nursing these babies and making sure that the babies, she could give them some milk. I think that's pretty amazing, having just lost her own. It's little things like that, people just kept fighting. They are fighters.

PW: Did your parents ever talk about what happened to them to you or the family? Express anything?

LN: You mean about the war or-?

PW: You know their incarceration, about the war, or losing everything? Did they ever-?

LN: I think my father used to have his strong opinions because he lost, he lost the most. But I know one thing, they didn't dwell on it. They just, certain things needed to be done, they just got on with it.

[65 minutes]

PW: Stop the-

LU: I'll keep that one going.

PW: I think we are almost finished.

LU: Okay.

PW: [unclear]

LU: Oops, got the digital one going still.

PW: You okay? I think that covers a lot of ground that we have covered often and I think that's a very interesting story you have given us. It's a legacy for your family, your children in your family, and your nieces and nephews. They will really enjoy sort of hearing your stories in one go. These stories come in bits and pieces around

the dinner table but to see it all as an overall picture and hopefully cover all the things we wanted to ask you. I certainly appreciate the time you have given us Lily. And so, thank you so much.

LN: I enjoyed it. Thank you, Peter.

PW: Lisa?

LN: You know, they were kind of young.

PW: Yeah?

LN: In our-

PW: In relative.

LN: In our society, everyone lives a lot longer.

PW: And so, did your father ever get to Japan other than the time they went back before the war? But after the war, did they go back after the war?

LN: No, my father never went back.

PW: After those three years and your mother went back?

LN: After 50 years. After she had been to Japan, she never ever went to Japan again after her son was taken but she went 50 years later.

PW: Did she ever want to go back?

LN: She didn't.

PW: She didn't want to go back?

LN: No but I think when she did eventually go back, it was rather interesting cause she told me about the time she went to visit Hikone which was her hometown and there was one person still living in Hikone who she went to kindergarten with. He was sort of and he wasn't well but he was still there. The funny thing, she went to visit him and remember this is 50 years after she left Japan. She went and saw him and he saw her and the first thing they said to each other was, "My, how you have changed". [laughing] I thought that was so cute. You know, they haven't seen each other since they were kindergarten and that was the first remark. But it was interesting that she was at least able to meet one person.

PW: Did she have relatives?

LN: She had her niece and grandniece and grandnephews still living and she was able to meet with them. And they met their aunt for the first time and so they had a wonderful visit because these were nieces and nephews of her brother.

PW: Brother, right. Was your sister Dorothy able to converse in Japanese with her?

LN: Oh yes.

PW: Because I remember she was quite fluent in Japanese.

LN: I think probably with me. Japanese was my first language until of course you went to kindergarten and then, you start speaking English. At home, mum and dad always spoke Japanese so we spoke Japanese.

PW: Although, it's funny when you take to current [unclear] and you come out with the language that you used with your parents. They say that's quite an archaic language that you are using or that it's old-fashioned to some degree.

[70 minutes].

LN: Yes.

PW: Because that's what we are used to.

LN: Yes and because when my sister went to Japan and she spoke Japanese, they said, "you speak such beautiful Japanese". I guess it's more broken down now, they use more common terms and everything so they thought her Japanese was so formal.

PW: Because it's very formal compared to the modern day language which has evolved over how many years.

LN: That's interesting. They thought she spoke very formal Japanese and that's the only Japanese she knew because you learn from your parents too.

PW: It's funny too because each camp had their own dialect and phrases from the different areas. It's an interesting language when you think about it.

LN: I regret my son didn't get more involved in learning Japanese. I tried to teach them.

PW: So difficult.

LN: But there are so many distractions when you grow up. They understand more than they can speak but it would have been nice if they could speak.

PW: Does your husband speak Japanese?

LN: Yes.

PW: So, do you converse in Japanese mostly?

LN: It's English at home. It's funny when you speak in English and throw in the odd Japanese word. It sort of makes it sometimes, depending on what you want to say, there are some things that are easier in Japanese than it is in English. So sometimes it's combined but my sons, I mean in their work too it's all English. They don't have the opportunity both of them in their line of work.

PW: I think that's fine. Thanks very much, Lisa. Thanks, Lily.

[End of interview]