

Interviewee: Sid Ikeda
Interviewer: Lorene Nagata
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SEDAI 
PROJECT

THE JAPANESE CANADIAN LEGACY PROJECT

[Start part 1]

Lorene Nagata: Can you tell me what your first name is, please?

Sid Ikeda: Sid.

LKN: And where were you born, Sid?

SI: Vancouver.

LKN: Do you remember what part of Vancouver?

SI: I lived on [Trime?] Street, that's about all I know. But it must be on the east side, but I don't know for sure.

LKN: Okay, and what year was that?

SI: 1934. October 11th.

LKN: And what generation Canadian are you?

SI: I would say I'm a – more third generation. I'm a second – third generation, but since my father died in 1943, I consider myself a second generation. A third generation excuse me. Third generation.

LKN: And where were your parents born?

SI: They're – my mother was born in the Vanc – in the Vanc – New Westminster, B.C., and my father was born in Kamamoto, Japan.

LKN: Okay, and do you know much about where your grandparents were born?

SI: They were both born in Kamamoto. In fact, they're all come from Kamamoto.

LKN: Okay, and do you know why it was that your ancestors moved to Canada?

SI: As far as I can see, my – my grandfather came because he was just an outgoing person. He wanted to see what was on the other side of the world, and I – I think that he just came out just – 'cause he was a very young man, and I think it was that desire to get out of the box. Maybe there was some hardship in Kamamoto, but he decided to come to Canada.

LKN: And when was it that your family moved to Canada?

SI: Like the – it was in 1895 that my grandfather came, and he met his wife on the same boat and they fell in love. 'Cause she was designed to be a wife of another person, waiting for her in – I believe in New Westminster. But once they fell in love, she didn't want to meet this gentleman, so it ended up that they sent her, her sister to come and marry this gentleman.

LKN: Okay. Now – do you – do you know where your ancestors first lived in Canada?

SI: In New Westminster.

LKN: And can you tell me a little bit about your immediate family?

SI: My immediate family? Well, my mother was born in 1907, in New Westminster. My father was born in Japan, Kamamoto, and came out here when he was a young man, about 21 years old. And he was sent by his sister – that, why don't you – your

sisters – “The economy’s not too good, there’s nothing here for you. Why don’t you go to, to Canada, to Vancouver, and meet your brother there, and see if you can make a life there, and if you’re not happy, then come back home.” So he came from Japan back in the 19 – early 1920s. What happened is that he met my – who was my mother, they got married, and that’s it. That’s – that’s why he remained in Canada.

LKN: And how many siblings do you have?

SI: We have a total of seven in our family, and five boys and two girls.

LKN: And do you know, in Japan, what your ancestor’s line of work was?

SI: No, I don’t.

LKN: Do you know much about your ancestors in Japan? Their life in Japan?

SI: Now, it – I’m – maybe in 1990, when I went to Japan, I did go visit my aunt. She and her family owned a, a children’s school that’s been going on for years. And when I’ve seen her, she was already 94 years old. So that’s the only business that I would know that was carried on by the – my ancestors.

LKN: Once your family moved to Canada, do you know what their line of work was?

SI: Well, my father – well, my grandfather was able to start a business, and he had rooming houses and stores, regular stores. Like he had a couple of stores until – ‘cause my aunt would tell me she worked selling clothing, and you know, and my mother would say, “Yes, we – we had quite a good business.” Because he was also connected with Japan, getting people jobs – come from Japan to get jobs in that area. So that’s about all I know.

LKN: Do you remember much about your early life? As a child?

SI: The only thing I remember is when my father had a party, at our house, and I know that as a young boy, our – all of us in our family knew that we could stay up late, and we’ll get a lot of goodies to eat. But I do remember – I used to be quite bad, I guess, ‘cause my father would, you know – I can always remember my father would spank my older brothers, but never spanked me because I was the third oldest. But I always had a habit of breaking windows, you know, because people teased me. I remember a guy named Bobby Ito – he’s one of the famous actors that played in the States, but he was also a tap dancer when he was 10 years old. But going back to the story – I broke his window, and it just so happened he teased me, and I picked up a rock and threw it. He ducked, and I broke the big picture window in their house. And that night, when my father came home from work, he gave me a spanking. [chuckles] So that I’ll never forget. And I’ll always remember when we went to my grandfather’s in New Westminster – we lived in Vancouver – and I noticed that my father loved to sing, so when I sing – and then they tell me, when I sing with my eyes closed like my father, my grandfather would give me a penny or a nickel, and I could get an ice cream cone. [chuckles] That’s all I remember.

LKN: Do you remember much about your neighbourhood?

SI: No, not too much. I did go to a Japanese language school.

LKN: Okay. Can you remember that?

SI: Yeah, I remember, because after school – I went to Hastings Park School, grade 1, and then that night we went to – in the afternoon, we went, 4 o’clock, to a Japanese language school. One thing I remember is I teased this big kid – everybody teased this big kid – so I teased him, and then he gave chase after me, and he scared the heck out of me. So I’m running, and I went to open the door and I put my head right

through the window – picture frame, and I cut my wrist, and I still got that scar right here, all these years. That’s during – that’s before the war! [chuckles]

LKN: Do you remember much about the Japanese community at that time?

SI: Oh, not at all. Not at all.

LKN: Were you involved in any other classes in the Japanese culture, like any of the martial arts?

SI: Oh, no. Not, not – not in Vancouver.

LKN: Okay. So how long were you in Vancouver for?

SI: Well, I was born in '34, so 1941 – and the war on Jan – December 7th, and the following year we were put into the Hastings Park. We were put into Hastings Park, you know.

LKN: Okay.

SI: But that was my first connection with a lot of, like – there was a lot of Japanese people.

LKN: So the community – prior to that, the community that you grew up in was not a Japanese community?

SI: Oh, there was a Japanese community, but the only time you see people would be at the – at the Japanese language school. Okay? That’s about all, because the rest of the time I would be at school, and then I’d do my own things, I guess. You know, with my own friends.

LKN: Right, okay. So do you remember the evacuation?

SI: Oh, yeah. Yes, I remember why there was curfew – there was then something that really puzzled me, because when the – when my father got taken away, we went to move in with my uncle, and we lived in a very crowded place. I don’t recall how crowded it was, but I know that it had to be crowded. But we were – we were allowed to stay a certain time and at night, my mother would say, “We got to get off the street.” So I remember – “Why do we have to go off the street, while the other kids can play?” But we had to go off the street. I was wondering why and I, you know, didn’t understand what the world was about.

LKN: When was your father taken away?

SI: Well, I think somewhere just after December 7th. You know, he’s from Japan, so he would be one of the priority persons to be taken away.

LKN: And – and where was he taken away to?

SI: To a road camp. I don’t know where, but I know that he was taken away, ‘cause I was 7 years old – 6 years old, 7 years old. Was – well, 7 years old.

LKN: And when did you next see him?

SI: I seen him in 1942. In the summer of ’42, because – I can only go by history that we went to Tashme, which is 115 miles interior from Vancouver, and we went there in – I would say summer of 1942, and he was able to come and join with us.

LKN: What do you remember about the evacuation?

SI: Well, I know one thing, it was – I didn’t understand what was going on. All I know is that we were asked to take a train, take a train and go. So as a family, we just got together and we went on the train, and we went across Fraser River. I remember the river, and how the water was flowing down, and it was terrifying for me to look at the – the water flowing by, and thinking, “Gee, oh.” And then when the train creaks, you know, and everything, and I’m thinking, “God, I hope it keeps us afloat.” You

know? So I was more terrified about that. And then we went to this country, like into the forest, which was a real change from the city into a Hastings Park and then go to a camp. And it was quite exciting to go to this place. Living outdoors, like – living in a house with outdoor facilities, like washrooms, bathhouses, which was in a community bathhouse. So – and there was no electricity, you know, so it was a real change. And then you make so many new friends, and there were so many people.

LKN: Yeah. So you went to Hastings Park first?

SI: First to Hastings Park, and then to Tashme.

LKN: So what do you remember about Hastings Park?

SI: Well, Hastings Park was – then again, it was a novelty, again. You know, you're living with a lot of people, and what I was impressed with was we lined up to have food every morning, every day. You know, so it was kind of interesting that you get fed, you know, with a tray – you go and pick up your food, and eat, and then you go play. And I remember one thing – one day, 'cause the Hastings Park had a racing track – you know, a race track. I don't know what. All I heard was a lot of noise and kids would climb up the tree, so I climbed to take a look, and all I see was a, you know, a guy riding on a horse, with a colour on him, and I didn't know that was races. And when I came – later on in life, I realized that was a race – a racehorse, and a jockey. It was, you know – but that was kind of, you know, [shrugs] something new. But those things about – little things I remember about Hastings Park. There was a big, like – like a festival. Like the – they had all kind of Ferris wheels and things, you know? We were able to go one – once, I remember that. You know, that was a novelty again. Normally, we would never go. So those things – that's about all. Making friends, I guess, and not knowing too much.

LKN: Where were you – where, where did you sleep while you were in Hastings?

SI: I don't know where I slept, but when I read back now, I realize that we were young enough to be sleeping in the horse stables. That's where we were, because I was told that's where we stayed.

LKN: How long – do you remember how long you were in Hastings?

SI: I would say a good six months.

LKN: Okay Did your mother ever tell you – talk about Hastings after you left?

SI: No, I don't think she ever did.

LKN: Your whole family was together except for your father?

SI: Except for my father, yeah.

LKN: Okay.

SI: My whole family was still – there was just at that time six, because my sister – the sixth baby, my sister – was born while we were in Hastings Park. She, she went to – when she – my mother had to give birth, they took her to the Vancouver General Hospital, and then she came back with a baby to Hastings Park. It was in 1942 she was born.

LKN: Okay, and then from there, you went to Tashme.

SI: Tashme, yeah.

LKN: Do you remember the, the move to Tashme?

SI: Well, the train trip – I was mentioning about the train trip, and seeing the large river that, you know – and then going to the forest, it was kind of – actually, kind of exciting, you know, because I'd never seen the forest so closely, and travelling on a

train – it was just – kind of exciting, in a sense. Like, you know, as a kid, you look out and say, “Oh yeah. Very nice. Where we going? I don’t know.”

LKN: So how old were you when you went to Tashme?

SI: Would be seven, still seven. It’d be 1942, and I’m, I’m born in 1940 – 1934. So ’42, October, I’m still seven. Yeah.

LKN: Do you remember arriving at the camp?

SI: I remember going to where we lived, in a box house – like, you know, a mesh box house. I remember that, ‘cause you couldn’t help but notice where the rows of houses were, and we got put into 2nd Avenue. This particular place – because they – for a family of seven, they needed to have one house for you. So they were still building houses, so we – when they finished the house in the back of it, to 9th Avenue – because there was only 10 rows, 10 – 10th Avenue. When you got to 9th Avenue, they had one of the house [boats ?] so we moved from 2nd Avenue to 9th Avenue.

LKN: Can you tell me a little bit more about what – what you remember about the camp?

SI: Well, one thing that were – were – people of my age, like – for people of my age, it was a real novelty. You know, like it was a real exciting, you know, to – to mix with so many Japanese kids, you know? Make friends, and we had a lot of exciting things to do, because we’d go in the forest and we could hunt, we could make rafts, we could make a lot of good things. But we always had a – we all had chores to do before we did that, because during that time, we started to say that, you know, they would give you so much – a plot for growing vegetables, and then we would get jobs to like, water the gardens and things like that. There was always things to do, ‘cause they had to – wood – chop wood to – for your winter. It’s a [payu ?]. It stunk, but you got to chop it all down. So as a young boy, you going to – how to use an axe. You know, so you get – you’re kids so you learn from other kids how to make good of things. Like a making slingshot, bow and arrow, whistles out of trees – you know, or even taking leaves and blowing whistles. [holds hands together] You know, like – there’s so many things you learn from one another. But one thing is it’s exciting, because you’re able to be like an Indian boy and go into the forest, look for deers, hunt for deers – you know, kind of wild life. It was kind of exciting for young people, I guess. And no one ever stayed in the house because the house was lit with a lamp, a Coleman lamp. It was so dark. So you know, every day you’re – when you get up in the morning, you eat your breakfast and away you go. So when school – you know, you go to school, but after school, you – you’d meet with your friends and you’d play.

LKN: What do you remember about the school?

SI: I don’t remember the school so much as I remember going to church. Because I was telling you that there’s something there in that house, that – really tragic that happened with my father dying, in 1943, November the 15th. He went to work one morning and came back in a wooden box. And I remember coming home from school where – asked by uncle to go to his house, and a couple of hours later – it must be – we went to the house, where my father was in a box. A rough pine box, like you know – because there’s no finished lumber there. And that – that was sad, to see my father dead. I’d never seen a dead person. Like, I’d seen someone dead, but never crossed my mind, but when I saw my father there – I just couldn’t understand him just laying there. So my brother – my younger brother and I tried to wake him

up, but we couldn't, you know? Then I remember, went to the – that night, I could hear them talking – his friends were talking – because the house was so small. This A-frame house, and the two beds are in one section of the living room. In the centre, there was the stove, and a dining room table. And they talked right there, so you can't help but hear, because it's such a small house, you know. And then I remember the next day that they had a funeral at night and then they took him out to the field, where they cremated him, and I remember seeing him being burned. And also, the next morning I went with my brothers and my uncles in to pick my father's bones.

LKN: To –

SI: To pick up my father's bones, you know. So they put it in a box, and that stayed with us for years, with my mother. And one thing too, they made a – you know, since we're Buddhists, they made a shrine out of rough lumber, and shellacked it. And my brother – to this day, after – since 1943, he has it in his house to this – to this day.

LKN: Do you remember – what do you remember about the church, in the camp?

SI: Well, the – I didn't know too much about the church. I used to just go [shrugs] because everything was in Japanese in a Buddhist church. But when my father died, and my mother would say, "I have to go to church every Sunday." And I went with a friend, because there was also at the – this particular barn where they had – because that was the meeting place – both have the United Church and the Buddhist Church. So my friend and I – he would go to the United Church, and I would go to Buddhist Church. And the only thing I remember one time was that he came out with an orange. I got nothing. So I said, "Oh, I think next Sunday, I'm going to come to your church!" [chuckles] But of course, I never did, you know, 'cause – you know.

LKN: Do you remember other things about the camp? Like where you – where you washed, where you ate? What you ate?

SI: Oh, okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, not so much of what I ate, but we did take a – my mother – everything had to be done outside – washed, you know, because the water was outside. So I, I don't know how my mother did the wash for seven kids, and you know, with my father died, of course, there were seven kids, and was just – how she ever did – washing our clothes, and looking after us. But we had a [community] bath that we could go any time. And there was always – there was – since there were 3,000 people in there, they had three big bath houses, in the – logically placed. And they have – in each one, they had a – it's an A-frame, and they had a wall to separate the men and women. They used a common centre tub, you know, for a hot tub. And they kept that thing nice and hot, so you had to wash outside, and then you rinse yourself inside. And they keep about six inches at the bottom of the tub, you know, of the hot water. And as young kids, we used to dive underneath and look, and all we see is women's feet. And I says – you know, so I said, "What a waste of time! You know, who wants to dive under here and get a headache looking at women's feet?" Because the water was so hot, you know. So I gave that up – we gave that up right away. But that's how they'd bath, and the oil would come to the top and I always remember, the men would always scoop the oil off the top, to keep the water fresh, and put fresh water in. So that was – I thought that was efficiently run.

LKN: So all the, the things like the school and the bath house and stuff – who was running – who was in charge of running those –

SI: They had the, the – the community would run it, and they would assign people. SO there's – they had it all well-organized. The school was also – was well-organized, 'cause they had to have schooling. So they had, you know – grade 12 students would be teaching kinder – like grade 1. So they used what resources they had, and they had to – probably some people in the educational field would educate – educate the teachers. So they had classes.

LKN: Do you – do you remember what the general feel within the camp was?

SI: Well, for myself or for young people, we thought it was a great life for us. It was, you know – but for our parents, it would be very difficult, because not knowing – especially for my mother, for example. When my father died, leaving her pregnant with her seventh baby – that must have been a heck of a situation to be in there. A stressful situation. And she always said that, thanks to Buddha, her Buddhist teaching – her religion – it helped her overcome her difficult times.

LKN: What did you do for entertainment?

SI: Oh, the people – we'd make our own entertainment, you know, because – but the people that – the community would have movies, concerts. There was also martial arts and craft activities for other people. For example, martial arts – you couldn't go in until you were 8 years old or older, you know, because there'd be too many kids. So I never got in 'til I was into my – 1943 – or 8 years old. Be '43, '44. In fact, I think I was 9 years old, because I got in – I got in, what? 1944, '45, just before I left, when the war was over. But you make your own entertainment, and what would happen with kids is that if you see a samurai show, you know, the next morning, we will all come out in the morning and the first thing we'd do was make samurai swords and we'd start fighting, you know? We went to see Bobby Ito do tap dancing, and we thought, "Ooh, god, is he ever good! 10 years old, tap dancing." Next morning, we're out there cleaning the yard, and we're all tap dancing. You know, you know? But there were also, you know, you learn to – and then you'd do things like – so if you wanted to make a raft, you know, 'cause there's a river, so we'd go chop a tree and there's lots of trees, so we saw the trees down. In fact, when we were making a raft, my friend Seb's axe chopped my finger, because after we chopped the tree down, he had the axe, and I was cleaning the chip, and he went to slam the axe down and he chopped my finger. So that's why, you know, I remember him forever, and I always said, "Remember you? When you did this to me?" [chuckles] Only 8 years old, 9 years old.

LKN: Did you stay in contact with any friends outside of the camp?

SI: Yeah, yeah. I did, yeah. After we got here. But then – no, no one there, because we went from there to another camp.

LKN: So –

SI: 1945, when the war was over, the Canadian government says, "Okay, if you want to go back to Japan, you're most welcome. We'll send you back to Japan. If you want to stay in Canada, you cannot go to the west coast. So you've got to go east, over the Rockies." So we decided to stay. And we gave our house up, 'cause we're close to Vancouver, 150 miles from Vancouver. So we moved to another relocation camp, more interior of B.C. So we went to a place called New Denver, which was 200 miles away from the west coast. So we went there, and we got a house of our own, and the people that moved to New Denver or whatever, from the other camps that are going

to Japan, came to live in the house that we had, then they went back to Japan. So Tashme was the [indistinct] for people going back to Japan.

LKN: So can you tell me some of the best memories of being at Tashme?

SI: The best memories – well, there’s nothing to [death?] than listing the best side. Best side that – made good friends, and – it was a happy time, for me, you know? It was a good time, because there was no responsibility, for one thing. You know, you’re only 8, 9 years old. And so – good memories that – being – making rafts, being like an Indian boy. Joining a lot of activities, you know, making – like I said. I don’t know if I ever – joining martial arts. I always wanted to be a judo, because of – and do a lot of mountain climbing, hunting. There was just showing us, there was a scene today I saw about skates. They were showing – in B.C., in of – in Tashme, one guy had a pair of skates, you know, a young kid. And we’d all get to try to skate, no matter how big or small. Those skates were double my feet, but I start skid on my ankles, just so I could say I skated! [chuckles] You know? Oh, and so many things you do – now – skiing. You know we only get one ski, so we only get one try at downhill skis. A lot of good memories, and there’s some bad memories, because I was out there killing snakes one time – and I regret to this day – we used to go out in the mountains to see if we could look for snakes. And then we’re find them and that was one thing I regret doing, is going to a nest where the snakes were. Snakes, as you know, in the mountains, we were doing – and young kids like us, you know, we said, “Let’s go get snakes.” So we’d go and do things like that. When I think about those kind of things, I hate myself. Good memories and bad memories. My – losing my father, of course, was sad.

LKN: What did your mother do in the camp?

SI: Oh, she looked after the family. That was all she could – busy. Busy cooking, washing – a lot of work, that’s motherhood. Everything was outdoors.

LKN: So did she have an income?

SI: I don’t know how they – the government gave her a income, they looked after the people. They had no income, that much – I don’t know how they did the monetary – how they – with the – buy the groceries. I remember going to a grocery hut. One sad – one sad thing was the boy got lost – fell in the river. The first boy to die there, fell in the river, and I think he was the first – but then he drowned, and we all went to look for him, and they found him. And that one of the saddest parts, losing a – friend of mine’s lost their brother or family. That was very sad. Even at our age, it was – to hear of someone dying bothered – or at least it bothered me.

LKN: Were there stores on the camp?

SI: Yeah, there was one meat store, I remember, meat store. In fact, that’s where the river falls very fast during the winter thaw – the spring thaw, I mean. And I think the boy fell in around there. And – but there was a meat store there, and I don’t know where the grocery store was.

LKN: Now, do you remember about leaving the camp?

SI: Oh, yes.

LKN: What do you remember?

SI: Well, leaving the camp – well, now again, now we’re going to be moving, so exciting again. Not knowing where you’re going to go. But just – but it was sad to say goodbye to your friends. I guess leaving was – it was curiosity. You don’t know

what's going on, at your age. I – just the idea of travelling was a change, 'cause we were there for three years, from '42 to '43 – almost three years. Then to get on a train again – get on a bus, get on a train, and we go to another internment camp. So another, you know, new place. Make new friends. So it was kind of exciting, not knowing. So there were some good memories there, too.

LKN: How long were you in the new camp, New Denver?

SI: New camp? Well actually, we went to Rosemary, because the house in New Denver was four miles away, on the same Slocan River, and it was just a matter of four miles to travel over to New Denver. I recall going there to see a movie in New Denver, but you got to walk through the highway, dirt – dirt highway, and right up four miles, you know. Going there wasn't bad, but coming home that was night was the most scariest trip I had, because it was already dark and I think the movie was a kind of a scary movie. So during the – so when you're walking along the highway, you hear so many noises in the forest, and my oldest brother, Art, was taking us – there was only, what, five of us – four of us, and we're walking. And that was the longest, scariest walk I ever had. You know, I was so happy to get home.

LKN: So how long have you – were you in New Denver?

SI: We were there 'til 1947. '45 to '47.

LKN: And then where did you –

SI: We came to Toronto.

LKN: While you were in New V – New Denver, what were your accommodations like?

SI: It was nice. It was a – New Denver was in a resort area, and we lived on a place called Marine Drive. Marine Drive. And that Marine Drive came down and went right around the edge of the river – the lake, and we could – we lived right near the lake. So it was a nice place to be. Nice place to live, actually, but then again, it's outdoor facilities again. So the same thing, you know, going to school. It's good to keep going to school. Now I'm a bit older, so I kind of enjoyed going to school, so I meet new friends, new girlfriends, you know, seeing some girls. Kind of start taking a liking to some girls, even at that age. Especially the doctor's daughter. [chuckles] She was the only one that dressed so nice. [chuckles]

LKN: Anything else you remember about New Denver?

SI: Oh, yeah. You know, we grew vegetable patches, like everybody else. I remember two good things. One was going to Kaslo, to pick – pick cherries. Now by then it was 1946 – '47, so you can see I'm 12 years old, 11 years old. Far as – so –

[End of part 1]

[Start part 2]

SI: The – I remember this – that if you take good vegetables, and give it to the conductor, he would take you from New Denver to Kaslo. And then we would go see my aunt, and then we would go to pick blueberry – blue – pick cherries. And I remember – and I'd never picked cherries before – here I am, up there in the trees, and I'm eating more cherries than I'm picking. Next thing you know, I got sick. [chuckles] But my mother – my brother was one of the best cherry pickers. So I remember getting sick, you know, but what I couldn't get over was – Kaslo, they had

the most beautiful beach, sandy beach. And I couldn't believe how beautiful the whole area looked, you know, with the mountains a bit behind, you know, looking across the lake – just the most beautiful setting.

But also in, in – in New Denver, I used to help – I used to work for – my father worked at a hardware department, and he would ask me to work for him on Sunday mornings. 'Cause you know, it was illegal to fish, so he had all the fishing equipment. So we would go across the lake – it's a mile across the lake, Slocan Lake, and then whenever the game warden come, we can always hide everything. Well one day, he – we went across and he, he says, "Oh, by the way – before we go across, I want to put this – it's called a lure." You know, now I don't know anything about lures, and the spinners, you know, and he pushed along – and I'm looking at him and in my own mind, I'm saying, "God, what a – what a guy, putting a thing like that on there! And what stupid fish would bite that thing! You know, what stupid fish." You know, in my mind. "There's no way that a fish will bite that thing." So halfway through rowing across the lake, I get tired, and he says – he says, "Kiyoshi, Kiyoshi!" He says, "Take it easy. Hold the line." So I hold the line, and he's rowing, and I said, "[Oi-san, oi-san ?] I think there's something on the line!" He says, "Oh, let me see. Oh, there's a fish!" So he brings it in, and I'm saying, "I don't believe this. I don't believe this." And there was this – biggest fish I seen on the end of the line.

And a lot of times, we went across with his father, and it was to pick up matsutake, you know, the famous matsutake that costs so much that grows under pine trees. And all he said to me was, "Now my father likes to get some mushrooms, you know." And they're matsutake but he calls them mushrooms. "And it grows under a pine tree, so if you see any pine tree, look under. If you find one, let me know." Well, the first pine tree I find, in this kind of hilly mountain, you know, because there's kind of cliffs, high cliffs, you know – so I walked up there. The first pine tree I see, I lift up, and there's this beautiful, like – you know, like colourful mushroom. So I'm saying, "I found one." You know, yelling down there, so this old man comes, and I'm going to pick it out, and he grabbed me and put me to the side, and then he – and I thought – and then he goes and picks this out, and I'm saying, "What – what a guy! Shoving me away over a –" To me, a mushroom, you know, 'cause I didn't think of the value. And I thought, "What an awful guy he is. Imagine pushing me away like that."

LKN: Yeah.

SI: [chuckles] But later on, of course, I realized what he knew.

LKN: Anything else you remember about that time?

SI: Oh, New Denver was – New Denver was just a fascinating place.

LKN: Why's that?

SI: Well, it was just a – you know, a place – you're a bit older, there's so many things that you can do. Fish – like, you're not supposed to fish but I remember making spinners and everything out of canned – like, they had canned milk, and what they show you how to do is – so I just got the snippers, cut [hands rolling in circles] and make spinners, like a [rolls hands together and brings across] – you, you make these spinners that would turn, to sparkle to get the trout to bite, and at the end, since you don't have any hooks, you – you put a gut and then you got a hook – I should say you got a hook, but not on the spinner. When you got – when you put a worm on the end, and when you go to throw, the fish will bite the sparkler, but they end up biting the

worm, and that's how you catch the trout. And I made one. And I went early in the morning, and the first cast I made out, about 25 feet out by the wharf – because where we were, you walked 10 feet, the, the – the water's edge just goes straight down, just like a mountain – like, straight down. So you've got to be careful when you swim there, because if you don't know how to swim, you'll drown. You know, so I cast it out there, and here comes this big fish, biting my spool, and I mean big. I was shocked. So I rushed to my boy friend's place, knocked on the door, got him out of bed. He gave me a hook, I got – dug worm, ran back there, cast for the next hour. Nothing. [chuckles] So I was so hurt! [chuckles]

But you know, I [used ?] that fish, and we used to go to this creek called Carpenter Creek, and my brother, he bought a stolen fish – like, gear, like fishing gear, because there was people living on the other side of the river that was campers. They come on holidays, and I guess some Japanese kids must have stolen it, and sold it to my brother. So he didn't steal it but he got caught with it anyways, but we were spooling across and every time we'd go across this river, and the [Pass Point?] River would take all your spools and take it out, and the fish would bite. So jeez, if I don't catch a fish on my line – and my brother, since he has a better equipment, cast the big fish. So what happens is that, gee, the game warden comes and calls us in, and he gives my brother, you know – my brother had to be taken in, 'cause that's – and for me, they took my fishing – and I looked at it and said – and they took my, my masterpiece away! So I was so disappointed, you know, because that was my masterpiece. So that was disappointing, but it was kind of fun.

LKN: Yeah. So then, from New Denver, where did you move?

SI: We came to Toronto.

LKN: And how did you get to Toronto?

SI: On a train. Yeah, a train.

LKN: Do you remember that train ride?

SI: Yeah, oh yeah. And so it was fascinating. I must tell you a nice story. You see, Fred Sunahara, his, his wife was Grace and their name was Shintanis – and the Shintanis, and the Ikedas like us, we caught the same train. So we went to this Vernon, or somewhere where the train comes by, and Basil Shintani, and Sak Shintani, they – they're a little bit older than me. They all had ten-gallon cowboy hats on, you know, and – so anyways, we went on the train. And that night, we went through the Rockies in the night, and those coal-fired boilers, you know, when you look outside, you've got to watch out for the ash. And they got the sulfur ash, you know, the –once it gets in your eyes, it makes you cry. You can hardly keep your eyes open, so you've got to be careful. But anyways, the next morning, I'm in the – I come out of my place – you know, because we'd sleep in the boxcars, just sleeping [shakes body up and down as if on a train] on the rough chairs. So I went out between the cab – the, the dining room unit and ours, you know, and I'm standing there, looking inside and looking outside to the scenery, and Sak – Sak Shintani comes, you know, with his ten-gallon hat on, all dressed up like a cowboy. And he says, "Hey, Sid. How would you like me to buy you breakfast?" And he says, "Come on, we'll go in there." So we got in – go in the dining room car. Now imagine, 5 years away in the forest, and here you're on the train, coming to Toronto, and he takes you into a dining room car, and

he buys me milk and muffins. Okay? Well, what a treat. And I'm saying, you know, I says – I was so grateful to Sak. I tell this story every time, whenever I can. I says, "That was the best muffin I ever had." You know, because it was the first time I ever got treated, and here – and the milk! It was the most delicious breakfast I've ever had. I never forget – forgot him, and I tell his grandkids, or his son. You know, if I saw his grandkids, I'd tell it to the grandkids, but that's a good story to tell. So that's something I remember. But coming all the way over – it was a long train ride. Yeah, we stopped out – somewhere around Medicine Hat, where they changed the trains, and we went to see a movie in Winni – Medicine Hat, I think. I think it was Medicine Hat. I thought it was Winnipeg but I think it was Medicine Hat. And then we caught the train to come to Toronto. So we arrived here in May of 1947, in Toronto.

LKN: And what did you do when you arrived?

SI: Well, I was excited, because, you know, here we are in a city. All of a sudden, I see all these houses and buildings, and you know, I just – of course, very excited about not knowing where I'm going to be living and everything. And I was only sad that the – so many people stayed on the train. They never got off, because they went to Hamilton, 'cause – the Shintanis, they couldn't, couldn't get in to Toronto – and they were limited to people. And we were so happy – we're lucky, because our uncle and aunt sponsored us, 'cause – who, you know, who would be responsible for looking after a mother with seven children? You know, there's no way they would allow them to come anywhere. But my uncle stuck his neck out and said, "I will look after them." So we're very grateful to my uncle, and to my aunt, because she was able to make some money to rent a space for us, down in Cabbagetown.

So when we get to Toronto, we went to live at a nice street called St. Paul Street, and it was right down at the – if you know where Sackville and Queen? Sumach and Queen? Well, between Sumach and Sackville, there was – from Sackville down to the next street going east is St. Paul Street, and the next street was Bright Street and then Sumach. But St. Paul Street today is where Richmond Street comes over, and our house is the last house that's still there. But that house we lived in was worse than the camp, the camp – the house that we were in – because it was so small. Although we had electricity and we had cold water, we had to take a tub bath. So imagine eight people taking a tub bath. You know, what that's like – it's awful. And the weekend, we would pay money to take a bath, at a you know, outlet – bath house, I should say.

LKN: What else do you remember about that time? If you want.

SI: Well, one thing is that – I remember is my mother saying that we all got to work. We owe to our uncle. We don't want to – you know, we got to pay back. We've got to work and make a living here, you know, so we're, we're obligated. In other words, we don't want to shame my uncle for getting us and we don't make a living. So my mother always said to work hard, you know, to get a job but work hard, and keep a good name. You know, so that was the way it was – so – oh, but my brother, he found a job, because he was about two months earlier. He came to Toronto and got a job with a Jewish firm, working in a cleaning business, you know, the whole thing, cleaning. And my brother Kenny, he – he came with us in May, and he found a job car washing. Whatever job you could do. I washed dishes for a nickel, quarter, whatever.

My younger brother – we all – the four of us, we all worked part-time, except my brother had a full-time job.

And then I found a job selling papers at a corner. And actually, it was my younger brother found a job with this fellow, a Jewish fellow, Pinky, and then I went and applied a job, and I got one of his best corners. That's called Scott and Wellington, and there, when the – in 1947, the papers were selling for three cents. The Star and Telegram. The Star, even then, was – if you sell – if you sold 100 papers, the Telegram would be only about 50 to – 40 to 50 papers, so there was about half. So on that corner, Scott and Wellington – it was the first corner where the Yonge streetcar would come down and go across Front Street. You know, where Hummingbird, or O'Kee – or now, Sony Centre – they come up York Street to Wellington. In those days, that was the first stop for the Yonge Street bus. So most people rushed to get into the train cars – running to the bus, trolley bus, and they'd go to Yonge Street – along Wellesley to Yonge and then go up Yonge Street. So I had the best corner.

So I used to make good tips, 'cause I was always dressed – I don't dress well, because, you know, we're poor, but then they'd see us hustling, you know? We worked hard. But then we'd get to know the customers, so the people started – and then the economy was picking up, for sure, because people would give me nickels, and I'd keep the tip. So for a three-cent paper, I'd make two cents tip. So I was making – 40 people gave me two cents, out of the 250 papers, so – so I was making \$1.80, 'cause people gave me 80. So \$1.80 in those days was good money. And then – paper went up to a nickel, I lost all my tip. So I had to go back to Pinky – being a Jewish guy, you'd think he would give me a, a raise. No. You had to go and ask for it. I'm not condemning him or anything, but that's why I went to see Pinky. And Pinky's like, "What do you want, sonny?" He always talked from side of his mouth with the cigar. I says, "Hey, Pinky, you know – you know, you know, I'm not making much money now, you know." I says, "Ever since the paper went up to a nickel, you know, I need a raise, because I'm selling – you know, you've got more money, we lose our tip. I lose my tip, and then I sold 50 more papers than you had, when I started." So he says, "I hear you, sonny. Here's 50 cents more." So I made \$1.50, and someone will give you about 25, 30 cents tip, so I make about \$1.80.

LKN: That's good, that's good. So do y – what else do you remember about your time in Toronto at that time?

SI: Well, I had to make new friends. The, the hard thing was to make friends, because there's discrimination, even in 1947. So for my brothers and all of us, we had to find ways to make friends, get jobs, really – so you – you know, you take abuse or whatever, you know. But people are curious. You know, you make friends, and you build trust. You know, like, they get to know you. So I made a good friend on my street. Guy named Jimmy Wheeler, and he liked me, so he would take me out to meet with so many things, and he was always a – one that's – like, he always figured he was a girl's man, back in those days.

He was a good guy to know, because he was able to open doors for me. 'Cause I went to a community centre one night, 'cause he says, "Come on Sid, we'll go tonight. We'll go pick up some girls." You know, because they had Friday night dancing. So this would be 1948, so – I don't want to go, you know, and that's –I, I want to keep friends. And I remember at [Dixon Hall], this lady called Mrs. Fleury, Mrs. Fleury. Never met her in my life, but when Jimmy – James brought me there, and she says, "Who's your friend?" I can hear her now. She was a – "Well, that's Sid." "Sidney!" "Sidney." She says, "Sidney! Come over here. Come on in, and I'm going to introduce you to everyone on the whole dance floor." And she says – and when the dance was over, she said, "Now Sidney, I want you to come tomorrow morning. If you've got nothing to do, I want you to come tomorrow morning to join in our community activities." So the next morning I did go, and you know, thank goodness to her, because that opened a door for me. It gave me another way to look at myself and enjoy, and I learned to become a singer. Because I – gave me another way to look at myself, to join, and I learned to become a singer, because we have to always sing. So I always give her all the credit. For my community service that I do, I give her all the credit for getting me started, because I never thought about it until later on in life, when they interviewed me on TV. They said, "How did you get involved in the community? What made you be – get involved in the community?" The first person that came to mind was Mrs. Fleury, at [Dixon] Hall, and I promoted her for opening doors to me. So that's one thing that –

LKN: You said there was some discrimination in Toronto at that time.

SI: Oh yeah, yeah. Well see, because of – even then, you know, the – we all had to make money then, and you live on the street where there's a lot of war veterans, too. It's okay. We're not drinking, and you know, things are okay because in your own area, people are all friendly, you know? They made [indistinct], they made friends on the street, but poor people, they're wanting their own [brings hands together] together. So if you live on their street, they're not going to be fighting against you, you know. You know, so discrimination would be maybe the bread man, who was coming down, and you know, and I'd give the bread man help, because they used to be horse and buggy. Horse and you know, horses [the driving man]. They used to come down the street, and so I used to help him. He'll give me a quarter for helping him. So Saturday morning, since they're not selling papers there in the morning, I'll go and help him. And when we'd go to a certain neighbours, and they see me delivering pa – bread, they'd see I'm Jap, you know. They'd say, "You're a Jap." And they really sort of started, you know, yelling, and called me all kinds of names, and the bus driver – the bread man would come and fight for me. But there was that kind of hostility. In your own neighbourhood, it wasn't bad. You would have your own friends, you know, but once you get out of your district 'cause you're – an area – [draws a square with his fingers] every area in Cabbagetown, there's a certain district that you belong to. So if I went north of Dundas Street, I'm in a different district. If I go west of Sherbourne, I'm in a different district. If I go across River Street, I'm in a different district. So the only area would be where – let's say from Sherbourne over to River Street, and north to Dundas. That would be my district, 'cause I know when I go into the next district, there was a little bit of [shakes palm side to side] uneasiness.

LKN: Did you go to school during this time?

SI: Yes, I went to Park – Park School for grade, grade 8, and then – there it was good, to go to school there, too. It was good during – but then when I went to grade 9, I was selling papers. I wanted to find another job, you know, I need a summer job, so my mother got me a job at St. Michael's Hospital washing dishes, because she worked part-time there. So – and then – and that was a real good thing, because – remember I said that we only had a tub bath? So we only took a bath once a week. Most days I'd shower, because 5 cents, I could save. Buy myself a bottle of pop. So we'd take a shower instead of a bath. Bath was 10 cents, somewhere around there, and then when I got the job washing dishes at the hospital, I could shower every night. So I became Mr. Clean after that, you know, so I was very grateful, working at the hospital.

So I went to St. Michael's during the summer – during the winter months. I'd leave at 4 o'clock. I'd get there at 4:30, get ready. By 5 o'clock, we'd wash dishes until 7. Two hours, we would wash dishes. And then my brother came and got a job, so my brother and I would – then there's my cousin Dick. He just passed away yesterday. He just passed away yesterday. You know, he's 73 years of age. Just passed away yesterday. Got the news – but he would come in and work washing dishes with us. The three of us would wash dishes. Two people clean and I'd run the machine. So it was a good deal – good for us to bring part-time money, and helped our family.

But then in summer time, then I had the – I went down to the farm, down in Chatham, to do tobacco farming, to make money. You know, 'cause I'd get 50 cents an hour. And that was hard work. We spent two months working there. I was only 14; my brother was only 13. And then in – in the Chatham, like Cedar Springs where we had a – well, it was – my uncle and aunt worked for Elliot Farms, and they got a job there. But they run the farm for the – Mr. Elliot, and what happens there is that they needed helpers to come to work the ground – the grounds, and it so happens to be that when I was down there – there's this Suzuki family there, and there's Tak Suzuki. It's quite a story, because the Suzuki family – Fred Sasaki married one of the daughters. And the youngest daughter, Tak, she worked with me, and I worked with her and my uncle, and we were farming the whole two months.

Now I had this beautiful girl all to myself during the working hours, and on weekends – weekends, the Chatham boys would come – Japanese boys would come and take her out, and I was so jealous! [Chuckles] You know, of course, she was pretty older than me. It was puppy love, you know, and what, what really got me – the next year, after I'm thinking about her so much, and you know, I think I'll go back again the following year to work on the farm. I didn't want the job – I could wash dishes but I could make more money working on the farm. My biggest disappointment was her family moved, and I got to live in the house that they lived in all by myself! [Laughs] So two months, I lived by myself. So that was disappointing. So that's a great story I tell Tak, because today she's in a wheelchair, and her – she's – her son is Bill [Hassa?]. Bill, the fellow from TD Waterhouse. So, what a story.

LKN: Did you continue on and go to school?

SI: Yeah. I continued on, and I, I got through Central Tech High School. See, there was no way that I was going to go to university, because – because we, we had family to look after. And my brother, my oldest brother said, “Okay, this is our plan. So this is – “ We’re still young, you know. My brother that says, “This is what we got to do: we got to look after our mother, and we got to educate the younger ones. You know, we’re going to work, and we got to pay off – we got to buy a house, got to pay the mortgage off.” So, you know, make sure we turn everything you know, like we – so we made a commitment, the four brothers. You know, so – being the third oldest – no, I’m [not?] – just because I’m [not?] third oldest, that was not the reason. It’s just that it was a commitment that we made. So I keep my commitments, you know?

So every penny I made, you know – ever since I worked, every penny, no matter if it was a penny, a dollar, one cent or \$1.83, or \$2.05 – every penny I gave to my mother, and then I gave it to my brother. And even when I got a full-time job, every penny I made, I gave my cheque to my brother – ‘cause my brother was an accountant. He became – went to night school and became an accountant. I never short changed nothing, I gave every penny to my – you know, ‘cause that’s my commitment. They gave me a \$15 allowance. Imagine that. That’s all I got, \$15. I spent \$15 in one night and I had to work a second-hand job! You know, so I got a second-hand job on a Saturday and made money so I could survive. But that’s the way it was. So we kept our commitment.

And then even when I graduated high school, I met – Central Tech, I met Marie at where I went to get a job, and we went steady from the first time we met, and she came to my graduation. But then we split up, because there’s no way I was going to get married, and no way that she knows that I’m going to get married, ‘cause we got a house to – got a family to look after. So we – but we always stayed together, over the seven years, and then my brother Kenny got married, my second oldest brother, and he got married ‘cause I introduced him to a girl. I used to put on a lot of parties. I used to put parties on, and then I needed somebody, so I asked my brother to stay over one – to make a partner for another group of Vancouver – well they went and fall in love, and they married within the year. You know, so I said, “Alright, alright. Kenny, aren’t you going to help pay off the house?” He says, “Oh well, it’s almost paid off anyways.” So I said, “Well, go ahead. It doesn’t matter.” And then my brother got a – my oldest brother met a girl, so when we paid the house off, he got married. And then I got married. But I was going around with Marie for seven years!

LKN: She was patient.

SI: [Laughs] No, I did the right thing. You know, that’s what –

LKN: So then what did – after finishing high school, what did you do for work?

SI: Oh well, yeah, I went to – see, I took up car engineering at Central Tech, so when I graduated I got a job at the Bank of Nova Scotia, 44 King Street – that’s the original Bank of Nova Scotia building – and I went to work as an engineer’s helper. So I’d work in a boiler room, doing all the odd jobs. I helped the plumbers, carpenters, electrician. I helped the trades, and then I got a [course] class certificate, so within the year I moved on to work – the chief engineer liked me so much. So he got a job at

the Crown Life building, the insurance building up at Bloor and Church, so I moved with him, and got a job there. And they're building a new building, and I stayed there until I was 21. Soon as I turned 21, I already want my third-class certificate, so I got a job at the Eaton Company. And then I got a job with Eaton [ship]¹ work, shovelling coal, and stayed with Eaton's for 40 years. 40 years. [nods] I became a national engineering environment manager at the end. Took a long time.

LKN: When you take a look back at the – your, your war experience, how do you think that affected your life?

SI: The war experience? Well you know, it made us – to become good citizens. I think that it give me a sec – for me it gave me a security, in a sense, because my mother was very insecure, worrying all the time, you know. She was always so worried about causing problems, like – growing up, for myself, 'cause – especially me, because I was the third oldest, and I was very outgoing. She would always be very careful with me to make sure I don't get into trouble. You know, she always said to – remind me that to be a good boy, and always remember to be a good, good boy. Like you know, of course, Mother always said good boy. And to keep a good name for the family and don't disgrace the Japanese name. I think that was a good lesson to learn, because I upheld that the best I could because, you know – that's one thing I think most Japanese did. I think all of us did. We all strived to do our best, to be a good citizen, a good person, which we are to begin with. You know, I think we've done a good job. That's what I think was the most challenging – always working hard. So, so that gives you incentive, you know, because Japanese people have to prove themselves. So no matter where you went, you're always second-class citizens. You feel second class because you're the only one, maybe when you go to school or whatever it is, if you get a job – you got to prove yourself. I always felt that you had to work hard to prove yourself better than the regular person and I felt that you always got to build – so with Eaton's, no difference. I worked hard, made a good name, built a reputation.

So when I became – up the ladder, became a chief engineer, I was able to show a good example. You know, I think one things is very important is to show leadership, or show whatever – show by good example. Respect, care for the next person. I do the little extra, extra. So when I became chief, I was more concerned about giving a good name for the station engineers, 'cause station engineers, they didn't have a good name, 'cause the word "stationary" says – you run a big power plant, but you're stationary. So you're standing still. Well, people like ourselves, we're motivators, you know? We don't want to be stationary, so we get out and feel we want to prove and make the name better, so soon as I became a chief engineer, I joined the Power Engineers of Ontario. Branch of Toronto, first, and I did everything to promote engineering and to get out of the box of stationary and to open up and be more important of – to the company. So just don't be a chief of the motor room, be a chief of the whole building. So, so by then the Eaton Company opened up the chief engineers to become in charge of trades, which was a big thing, because when I took over as chief engineer, my first job was to look after 19 people. I never looked after –

¹ Possibly referring to SS Eaton.

only one person and all of a sudden I'm in charge of all the trades, plus my engineering skills. So it was a demanding job but it was a interesting job, But my goal was to make the stationary engineers very important in the company so they could always talk about how good the engineers are, and how important and beneficial it is to the company that you have that chief engineer, or engineering department, or a department that could look after multi-trade, look at the building, and that's what happened for myself, because I worked to do many other things. To learn.

The art of learning is learning from other people, you see. The secret is – whenever I was writing an exam, whenever a technician come in, I go backwards – bend over backwards to learn from them. I would say, "Let's take a look at thermostat control on the wall, that's on the wall there." I says, "Hey," You know, his name is Joe Richards. I'd say, "Joe, how does that thing work? You know, what does it do? How does it make it work? Show me." And he'd show me and then I'd go over and make coffee or tea, sandwich, some things, and say, "Joe, come on over. I've got something made for you. You know, have something." And then we'd make friends, you know –

[End of part 2]

[Start part 3]

SI: And then when I'm writing exam or something, and I know an engineer can go night school and meet a guy that runs a steam turbine in a big power plant. I don't know anything about steam engines. I got to write about it. I says, "When you open up your machine, let me know." So middle of the night, he would say, "Hey, tomorrow night – midnight shift. If you've got time, come on over. Stay with me overnight." So I stayed overnight, the whole night, learning about steam – and then on the way I learn how they operate the boiler room, so I learned some more, and you know, so he teaches me. So all these little things, you know, you learn from people. But you've got to reach out, you know, because everybody got something to give you. All you need to do is ask – but also vice versa. I would help people. So, a little bit – life is about – life is giving and receiving, you know, but learning. Learning.

LKN: Sid, you're very, very involved in a number of community projects and organizations, and you have been for many, many years – decades. Can you tell me about some of the highlights?

SI: Well, to begin with, I never wanted to come to the Centre, but I know – it so happens – leadership leads you, like – I don't mean lead. Led, like when I say "leadership", I'm thinking it's called "led"-manship. Like, someone leads you in and, and – it's like your children, you know? David takes a Boy Scouts – I'm busy working my way up at Eaton's, you know, the engineering – I want to do a good job, and all of a sudden, he joins a Boy Scouts. So the Boy Scouts – then he volunteers, so they [indistinct] knocking on doors and [indistinct] make sure you stay. So then I stay and meet the person, and next thing you know, I become an Akela, a leader of a Boy Scouts – Cubs. Now, in order to do a good job, you've got to know the rules and regulations. So I read about the Boy Scouts, you know, it's quite – one of the best things is do your best, and do a good turn every day. Well, I was doing a lot of good

things like that, and I said, "Well, that's the right thing to do." So, I says, "In order for me to be a good leader, I must set a good example." So I quit swearing. [laughter] I did everything that's going to be proper, and I never played favouritism, because then – I've got another leader come in, because I didn't want to be a leader. I said to the, the person that I would become a helper but not a leader because I never worked with kids in my life. But no one showed up the next day, and the next day I was made Akela, and nobody showed up again, but one of the fathers came and then a mother. So the father of a boy came in. I says – and he was a great engineering – smart guy. I says – name was Bill [Sink?]. I said, "Bill, I tell you what. You look after my son, I'll look after your son, and we will not – you know, you do your own things." And this lady said she'll look after your son, you know, so that we don't – like – we don't have any favouritism, you know. And we built that Boy Scouts right up – Cubs right up to almost max, from 25 or 26 to 36. And I learned so much about people, like, their personalities and how you have to motivate some and give encouragement [stuttering] and then people that have lot of energy, you got to learn to control them, 'cause some people are very high – you know, like, like abnormal, and you know, sometimes – so you got to learn to cool them down, but you're going to treat them real good.

So I learned a lot over the five years, and then Marie – and then David took up martial arts at the Centre, and Marie one day says "Hey, you're going to take David down to the Centre." I said, "Oh jeez, Marie, I don't – you know, I work all week, and I don't want to go to the Centre."² But then [I go and I'm like, ?] "Well, I have to go." "We'll be seeing you around." Well, I went and talked to the – I went down to the Centre, not wanting to join the Centre at all. I didn't want to be among Japanese people like as [gestures with hands pointing at each other] because I was [gestures with hands pointing outwards] Remember, very open to be a good Canadian, mix with all non-Japanese people. You know, feel comfortable in that situation. But then when I got to the Cultural Centre, I had never even thought about Japanese people as much – like I said, my boy friends and friends, you know, family. But gee, when I come to the Centre, and three months after, I [help him out], Kadoguchi, who is the founding member, but was the executive director, and he asked me one day, "Will you come on the board?" And I didn't even know was a board was! "Oh, board of directors. Oh, that's what it is." So then I said, "Well, maybe I will." 'Cause [he says want] younger leaders – younger people to get involved.

So a friend of mine and I will join together, and jeez, and then next thing you know, I'm on the board and meet so many nice people, and – and they do all kind of volunteer work, and it just suited my personality, like – all of a sudden I [meet] these wonderful people – nicest people you ever want to meet. So giving, so kind. And you know, it was just – it was just easy for me to join them. So I was – first year I was on the board of directors. Second year I became second vice-president, and then at that time, Toyo Takata found the first landed immigrant from Japan, 'cause Toya Takata was a former president of the Centre. He came to the meeting one day. He says, "Hey,

² All reference to "Centre" refers to the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre.

you know, the first – I did a research, and the first landed immigrant was Manzo Nagano.” So at that meeting, we were just talking, you know. “Why don’t we do a national event, you know, for the – you know, centennial year.” Like, we just – it just started from there, and it came to be [nods] what it was.

LKN: Tell me about the centennial year.

SI: Well, how look – I’m just going to say – how lucky it was for me to become the president of the Cultural Centre in the centennial year, you know. Centennial year was a very challenging, rewarding – it was a really, one of the great projects to do. It united everyone together. So that was the goal. I wasn’t on the – I was on the committee, but I wasn’t on the national, because the Centre – you know. We had an Ontario director, an Ontario centennial chair, Mikiyo Nakamura. Toronto had two: [Kunio Soma?] and [Keigi Saisho?]. They were in the Buddhist Church and United Church, they were small leaders. So – and then we had the President [gestures at self] – I was Cultural Centre – and national, they had an [altered] NAJC [National Association of Japanese Canadians] because they all had like – JCCA [Japanese Canadian Citizens’ Association], at that time. So with that we were able to form the committee, which – I attended all the meetings because right here in Toronto, right in the Centre.

So it opened the doors for many, many people to get together and brought out people from out of the woods that never [indistinct] here. They all start coming in. So it brought together, right across the country, all the Japanese Canadians together, because it was a time to celebrate the – to let the Canadians know who we are. How proud we are to be Canadians. So I think that was a great thing that we did. And through the centennial came the, the – to look after the isseis, for all the hard work they did. So that was one of our prime objectives, was to look after the isseis and the older niseis, of course, and to fight for redress. So these are quite very important – good things that came from the centennial.

So that’s where Momiji Healthcare Society was born, officially born. You know, and then right across the country, there’s – other communities all started to look at – one of their pet projects would be – the focus would be on the, on the seniors. Priority. And then the redress was started by the younger people.

LKN: Tell me about redress.

SI: Redress? Well, the redress – I thought the, the redress was really initiated by the third generation, the younger third generation. Like people your age or younger that said – oh, it would be your age – that said, “We should – we should do something because the – see the niseis and isseis, they’re quiet.” Like, we’re so busy working, you know? Like in that case I’m more like a nisei, in a sense, because we’re, we’re working hard and keeping a good name. The fight for redress, it was really instigated – or rose – brought up from the sanseis. And thank goodness for their leadership, because when they came out – that’s why, in the centennial year, we had more Japanese Canadian marrying Japanese. Like, Japanese [waves hands to show connection] Japanese got married. So a lot of the young couples that you see, came – that you see today, like, at that age group, were all married to Japanese, because that’s what brought them out. They all came to functions together, so it brought a lot

of young people together. But – but also – oh well, one of the biggest projects we did with Ontario was put the Centennial Bell into Ontario Place. You know, Centennial Bell, Ontario Place? And that bell's been ringing since '77.

LKN: What was our role? The Japanese Canadians –

SI: [Japanese] Canadian Cultural Centre? We were there, yeah. Well, we – [I thought we had] everything happened here. We're fundraising, you know, we're very involved. But as a total community – because – like I said, Mikiyo Nakamura was on Board of Directors, he's Ontario – [Koyu?] and [Keigi?] – we're all community-minded, you know, and the Centre was a place to meet to raise funds, so we had committees and so forth. Being president in those centennial years was great for me, because we got so many – we did the, the sword exhibit. Best ever in the – they say that was the best sword exhibit anywhere, you know, in North America. And I would believe so. We put it in Ontario Science Centre. You know, what, what a good job we did. But then we all had good people, like motivation – everybody was into it, you know? So people like ourselves, we just get involved. So we raised funds, do walkathons, you know, all kinds of things. But – just so many. When we did the biggest picnic – I was co-chairman – biggest picnic ever in the city of Toronto for Japanese. 4000 people went.

LKN: What was that?

SI: Centennial picnic. Today, the Ja – what we call the picnic, you know, the Japanese Community Picnic. This year – this used to be run by JCCA, and then since the centennial, it becomes as a JC, Japanese Canadian Community Picnic. But that was one of the best picnics we ever had. 4000 people.

LKN: Can you tell me about your involvement in Momiji?

SI: Yeah. Well see, when I was president in 1977-78, with the centennial, I went to all the meetings with Momiji Healthcare Society. Well, who would not care for your seniors? I got a mother. We all got parents, you know? So we know how important it is. So I went religiously to the meetings and contributed, you know, because you listen and you know, things, and so it was right – it was good timing to form Momiji Healthcare Society, so from – from that committee – I always felt like I was a founding member like everybody else, but the signing officers were the 7 people like Fred – Fred Sunohara, Fred Sasaki, John Kawaguchi, Roger and Mary Obata, Roy Shinobu, and Kay Oki, I think his – Kazuoki Oiye. Kazuo, the lawyer. There was the 7 people, they were the signing officers. But whole committee – the church, people, the leaders of different organizations were all there and we helped form that organization. And I've been involved ever since, because I went to all the places to look for sites and everything, you know, and then went on to all the fundraising [indistinct] and you know, all the way through 'til it was built in '92. I've been on the board many times.

LKN: You touched on the issue of redress.

SI: Okay.

LKN: What was your involvement in redress?

SI: Redress – I was, I was – when we had the redress meetings – you know, I went to every meeting – not every one, though. I shouldn't say every one, but I went to meetings right at the start. I was one that was against compensation.

LKN: Why?

SI: And I'll tell you, there was a meeting that were held in 1977, '78, at the Centre, in the west room. 100 people were there. And that morning I ran and thought – 'cause you know, I run and think things out, you know. I says, "I'm all for redress but I'm against the compensation. Because," I says, "why should we have to tax us? Like, you know, Canadian citizen. Why should we tax us? I'm a Canadian, so why should I tax myself?" Like, I'm just saying. Tax my friends – why should I tax them, charge them? And then so I went to meetings. You know, there were 100 people, and it was to my surprise, they says, "Okay now, we want the redress. Should it be for individual compensation or community compensation? Like, to the pot."

And the first person that got up was my uncle, the guy that sponsored us! [Gosh] [indistinct] [My eyes] popped out of my socket. Tosh gets up, he says, "Well, what the Canadian government did to us – I want individual compensation." And it went from there all the way across, and it came to me, 'cause we're coming across. So I got up to speak, and I said that I think what they did for the – what they did, to, to send us into the internment camps, I think was the right thing to do. I said that. I says, the reason is that to, to – to save us from hard times, because if you – in the west coast, in Vancouver, when they – if they did – didn't do that, what was going to happen to the Japanese people there, with all the people? The people are mean, you know, when it comes to gatherings and it takes not much of a leader to get everybody against the Japanese people. There'd be so much sabotaging going on –killings, unnecessary killings. So I says, "I felt that that was the right thing to do, to save us from harm." And they booed me! You know, I said, "Well, let me finish." You know, so – but I says that, "But what they did, you know, to take away all your goods and leave it like that – no, I don't agree with that, but for – for doing internment camp, I thought was the right thing to do to save us from harm." So then I says, "I'm for – not for individual compensation. I'm again – I vote for no compensation, because why should we tax ourselves?" So when they had a vote, three people put their hands up for me. 97% was for individual, pretty well. But I had only three, and then my two friends phoned me and says, "Sid, we decided to go with the majority, so you're left alone. Oh, Majority rules, you know." [chuckles] But I said, "I spoke my piece." Well, I spoke my piece, from my side of thoughts, and I really thought about it for an hour running, and I was thinking about the harm. I wasn't thinking about – like, it was an injustice, though, that's for sure.

LKN: Now that you know what the settlement was, how do you feel about it?

SI: Well, I thought that what they did was good, and you know, that the \$21,000 that they gave – and they – I liked that \$12 million that they had in the – in the foundation, the NAJC Foundation. I think that proved to be the most beneficial of all. Because individual compensation, you can give – where you can spend and you know, people just spent money and you know, it's gone, but the redress foundation I thought was a great thing, because they gave opportunities to communities – used to build their NAJC offices, educational places that they were asking for, whatever the foundation allowed, and cultural centres. The most important thing, I should say – I'm sorry – I should say, was to do our priority, to build – look after our seniors. That was the first priority, then the NAJC offices. But for sure it was – the prime object was for seniors.

So I thought, I thought that proved to be very beneficial, because the money that – and I've got to give the redress foundation committee good, you know, applause, you know, for a great job they did, because the \$12 million ended up being \$20 million because of good investment. It belonged in these – how they get money, and it took so long, so the interest rate kept building and building, so more projects got done. More money became available. So places like the Cultural Centre – let's take the Momiji Healthcare Society. They asked for \$1.6 million, okay? And they received \$1.6 million to get their project off the ground, but they also asked for another almost \$800,000, I believe. They received another \$800,000. Don't quote me on that, but it's around there. But they've got probably something around \$2.4 -- \$2.2 to \$2.4 million, okay, for the project. The Centre received \$1.2 million, of which we used \$300,000 to renovate the existing building at 123 Wynford, and \$900,000 came over to this new project here, at this facility. And other cultural centres received all the way across the country. But the most important thing is that a lot of senior citizen homes were built, especially in Vancouver, and the Momiji Senior Centre is a beautiful place.

LKN: Can you tell me about the – Caledon Place?

Si: Caledon Place? Yeah, Caledon Place – that came in 1974-75, when I first joined the board, and the reason was the board of directors said that we've got to get more sanseis into the Centre. So the way that we do that is through – let's see – and this came from [George Odaki] – at that time he was on our committee, he was on executive board – said, "Why don't we put a bowling – family bowling on a Sunday?" And the only repercussion we received was from the church, saying Sunday's a religious day, but we went ahead and did it anyways. We filled the alleys full of people. So we came back to the board and says, "Recreation is the way to go, to get sanseis in, and their families. So let's look for some property."

So we formed a committee to look for properties which – I was on the committee of looking for properties, but John Kawaguchi, the president – and John Kawaguchi, okay? And Goro Kawaguchi was his – was the silent brother that – he was doing construction work, but he was the silent person that did a lot of things. Like when we go to – let's say, when we went to Lake Muskoka to look at a property up there – a lakefront, on Lake Russo – Goro went ahead and got the – one of those house trailers, and we were able to go up to, to Lake Russo and we almost bought Lake Russo property called Sugar – Sugar Hills. It was an 85-acre property, and we made a motion at the board level, and John Kawaguchi asked for 75% affirmative, you know, yes, and what happened is that we lost the vote by two people, because two people abstained from voting. He called them no, so we never purchased that property. So that's how close we were. Today that property's worth so much money. But then even at that time – heritage conservation, they were even thinking about then. You know, the distance from here to Muskoka, you know – well, whatever it is.

So what happened – the following year, he decided that the new president came in, and didn't want any part of it, so he squashed the idea of looking for a recreation property. But in '77, we opened the door again when I became president, and we searched for properties. In 1981, Wintario grants came out, and the Wintario grants

had been – Sam [Nishama?] was the president, and he says that the Wintario grants would put the money up, he's all in favour. And so the board agreed, and that's when Caledon Place was purchased. So Caledon Place was a recreation property that was to draw in more sanseis into the Cultural Centre.

LKN: Okay.

SI: The community.

LKN: How about the purchase of 6 Garamond? How did that come about?

SI: Did Garamond come – well 1990, I – when I became president here, we were – we were going through an expansion at the existing property. We had to fight for the redress money, 'cause the redress wasn't so settled. So by then, when we got the redress settled, we hired Raymond Moriyama. We did our research, by the way, on architects, and out of the study report, Raymond was selected. And so we went ahead to, to allow the plans to – Raymond to, to go ahead with the presentation that he made, and meanwhile he was doing that, the – we started to lose floor space, and a lot of complications came in, and we're – we're saying that hey, we're not getting the value for our money, you know, for what we're investing. And we're losing floor space and it's going to cost us more money.

So – and then, at that time – 1995, '96 – the property in the area started to come down, and Sam Nishama, who was a former president, told me one day – he said that, "Why don't you buy the Shell building across the Don Valley Parkway, on the west side? They're selling their property." And he says – I says, "Sam, that – I don't think it's a good idea, because you know, it's going to be very difficult for us to sell – to get rid of the old property." But then, another six months later, when I was – six months later, Gary Kawaguchi on the board. Mark Yamada, who's – also was a past board of director many years ago – he says, "Why don't you buy a property?" So Gary brought it to the board level. So at the board level, we says, "Well, why don't we look at outside properties?" You know, 'cause he brought up the Shell building again. Same thing. So we formed a committee. Gary would look at the outside properties, and I would be responsible for looking at the expansion of the Cultural Centre – the alternative place to build on the Cultural Centre, because the existing place that we agreed to go with Raymond Moriyama, that was handled by Steve Oikawa and Roy – Roy Shen. So – but since I said that the property should be evaluated for itself, we should do our homework and make sure everything's right before we go outside. So then they says, if that's the case, you be the chair of that. So I took the chair – me, president, I took the chair, and we did a study on building the back of the centre, the old centre, okay? But when we all come down to it, it comes down that it would be better for us to look outside. Like, when we found Garamond, we did a study and we took the architect – like, Bruce Kuwabara – and he charted [indistinct] this is a good place to renovate. This building here. It's got 30-foot centres. It's very easy to do this, very easy. Accommodating, you know, so I can build – we can build a good cultural centre here.

So finally, it comes down to – so we had to do a study, you know, with the community – to the martial arts people, to the existing people. Then we went out to the public, like, to meet with people, and we did consultations and – and then talked,

and we finally come to a conclusion that it'd be best for us to move. So when we came to a meeting we call the AGM [Annual General Meeting], and we made a presentation and they finally approved that we should buy this place. So that's how it came. They said, "This building here came down to a reasonable amount." We bought this property for \$2.6 million, you know, and we plan to do it by phases, you know, build by phases. So it was a – one of the biggest changes that, you know, that one community can do, to go – to go out of the box and say – to expand, you know? You can almost say, expand beyond expectations. [laughter]

[tape changing noises]

LKN: Can we backtrack – go back in time a little bit, and can you tell me what you know about how the original cultural centre came about?

SI: Well, I can only give you what – 'cause I was not involved in that time, but from what I learned is that you know, there was a group of concerned people – it would be – probably started from the JCCA. They were the only existing community group, recognized group. And from there they said that we need to build a community centre. We need to get the Japanese people together, because people were meeting all over the city of Toronto – church groups, they'd meet with their church groups. You know, people would have social functions, here and there. It was scattered. Bowling leagues would start up. You know, just a big community together. So – so these people, concerned people thought it would be best to build a community centre, and that's when they formed a committee and start to look around. So this would go in the late 50s, I would imagine. And then by the 60s, they thought that it'd be better started to look for properties, you know, so – and that's what happened, is that they founded the existing cultural centre here, because at that time, this area was not populated yet. Don Valley Parkway was just coming up, and a person like Coby Kobayashi, you know, with a – you know, he's a very optimistic person. And he was in real estate business, and he says that in the future, he'd like to – [well] in the future, this is – be right in the centre of the city. It'd be a good place to buy a property, you know. So he convinced the board of directors at the time that they should buy this property. Actually, the original property was supposed to be on Don Mills and Eglinton, you know – like, over there more [gestures westwards], at Don Mills and – at Don Mills and Wynford, like in that area. But the, the value – the valuation on their property – would be better for business and they can do better, so he relocated to the Don Valley corner here, Don Valley Parkway. He said this would be a good location. Okay?

There were some people opposed to it, and they wanted to go small, and I think would be – but I think they made the right decision. The most important decision that they made was that when they went to apply for the – to build the cultural centre – and it wasn't called a cultural centre, it was called the Japanese Canadian Community Centre. When they asked for a tax exemption, the government or whoever that was there said that if you want tax exemption, why don't you call it a cultural centre? And – 'cause cultural centre could go under the educational tax, you know? So – tax by-law – so the, so the people went back to the board, and they come up with a new mission statement, and they re-envisioned the mission statements and they changed everything to focus to put more culture, like, model friendships

and culture. But if you look at the four objectives they wrote – to use the facility, [ensure convenience whenever they had time], to go into – to join our cultural programs – all these – martial arts [one?], martial arts [three?], ikenobo, sumi-e, shodo, and bunka shishu. All these things. So they – so that’s what they did. They made it so that it opened the centre to the public at large, to culture. So I think that was a great move, and – from the people previous to us.

LKN: And how did they finance it?

SI: They raised money on their own. They went from door to door, raising from the public. They went right door to door. They would come knocking on the door. In fact, Ed Sano, that – he lives near our street, lived near our house – he came knocking at our door, and we gave a small donation, ‘cause we had family, you know. In 1963, I just had bought a house, and I had a son, so there was not much we could give. But Marie gave some money. So people like that raised money. So mostly it was strictly individuals.

LKN: And they – and did they mortgage?

SI: Yeah, they mortgaged. That’s why they have 85 people – if you saw the board downstairs. 85 people mortgaged their homes so they could have loans to build. So you’ve got to give credit to the Japanese community.

LKN: Absolutely. Okay. Sid, tell me about your life now.

SI: I’ve retired. [chuckles] You know –

LKN: But you’re still heavily involved at the – in a number of –

SI: Ohhh, well, I – you know – well, I really believe in the Centre and what it’s done for the community, but also for myself. I grew, grew – I mean, I’ve made so many friends. I made – I grew as a person, you know, as a person, because you know, you meet so many wonderful people, and it’s an education. Life is an education, you know? You give and you learn, you know, or you learn from others. But I’ll say one thing is that I did promise Bob Kadoguchi, before he died. And this is – it may sound you know, kind of funny, but Bob Kadoguchi was very ill, and this was in 2000 – 1995. Okay, 1995, and it was Good Friday, and I – Good Friday morning, and I got up and I says, “Listen, Marie.” I said, “Let’s go do some good things today. Let’s go and see Henry – Henry –” What’s that name? Henry Ita. He was at the St. John, recovering from a [gestures at back of neck] some severe neck problems in a wheelchair, you know. So we went to see him, and then I said, “We’ll go and see Bob Kadoguchi at Bayview Centre.” Because he’s –

[End of part 3]

[Start part 4]

SI: Baycrest Centre, I should say, and then I said, “We’re going to go meet –” [we had to go and rest about Barry Kimes?] because phoned to say he wanted to do something for the Kobe earthquake, ‘cause that was during the Kobe earthquake fundraising. So we went to see Henry, and then in the afternoon, about 1 o’clock, went see Bob Kadoguchi, and his wife was waiting for me. Sue Kadoguchi says – Sue said, “Don’t go up there. Come and have coffee with me. Bob’s in a coma, so he won’t be able to see us.” I says – well, after drinking coffee with her for about 10, 15 minutes – “So, you know, we’ve come all the way. Let’s go see Bob.” So she says okay.

So we went up, and we talked for about a half hour, you know, just talking about things, about the Centre, and a lot of happy stuff, and then I said, "Geez, you know, I've got to go. It's 2:30. 3 o'clock I've got a meeting with Barry Kimes." So I says, "Well, I'm going to leave soon, so I'll say goodbye to you now." And then you know, wished the best for Bob, you know – wished the best for Bob, and opened the door to go out, and Bob gets up and yells my name. "Sid!" he goes. You know, I rush back to him, you know, and he looked me right in the eye – he just [gestures with hands, palms down in front of him] sleeping – got up, and he looked at me and says, "Look after the Centre." I said, "Bob, don't worry. I'll look after the Centre. I promise you that." You know, so I says, "I'm committed." That's a true story. And he died that night. He died that night. Sue called me the next morning. Saddest news I had. You know, and then I went to see Barry Kimes and he wanted to raise money for the Kobe – through Kobe – for the kids of Kobe, so he go onto the committee and helped – he helped us raise money. So a lot of good things.

LKN: Yeah, absolutely.

SI: But anyways – and, and I always say, "I'm committed."

LKN: Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?

SI: Well, you know, the community, you see, the – it's very important, you know. Like, you know – see when we bought the property in 1996, okay? December 4th, I think it was December 4th. 1996, we bought this property. We still had to fight for taxes and all these things. You don't realize the amount of work it takes to get everything approved, you know, for the community. And we had some great leaders of our community, like between Marty's and Gary's and name the people – they all just did a great job. Okay, but we still had to fight for tax – you know, we had to go to the – see, don't forget we were changing our focus to relocate. We got money that was given to us by the NDP [New Democratic Party] party – you know, the Jobs Ontario. So there's a story you should know, too, if you want to hear about.

If it weren't for Jobs Ontario and the NDP party, we would never be where we are. Because in 1990, when the NDP took over the leadership of the provincial government, you know, it was – we went to ask for funding for programs, maybe \$25,000, and we met with the committee of the – Jobs Ontario committee there, and out of the blue, we're talking about, you know, what we really – what we want to do is build a expansion, you know. They said, "Well, why don't you ask for the capital grant?" Nobody knew about the capital grant. So we set up a committee and right away, Steve and Marty, everybody got together. We presented a \$2 million presentation to the Tor – Ontar – Ontario government to, to – to Frances Lankin. She was the economic minister – minister of economic development. And so they says, okay, they'll give us a million, but they give the Koreans a million, they gave the Chinese community a million, they gave us a million. They said, "So if you want the other million, you come and prove it to us."

So we got a committee together, you know, it's the same committee, and we got – so that's where Shokokai comes in, you see, and I'm going to bring you back to Shokokai, okay? How important they play. So we met with the Shokokai – we asked

Teshima, the president of Shokokai, to come to a meeting to help us with this cause, and we needed to get the extra million dollars. And my job as president and things I do, you know, do the chair – like, I just chaired, that's all. And we met at Frances Lankin's board room, and the – Frances Lankin stood there, [points to his left], and we got Teshima sitting right near them, and Teshima says, "No, you should sit there." And I said, "No, no. I'm sitting here." And Steve will make the presentation there [gestures at right] and we had so many people lined up, probably, and then – so then we did the presentation, and Teshima being there, [points to left] right there, Japan economic business was climbing [lifts hands up]. Everything was in a good position, and she says, "I like your presentation. I think that we'll probably approve it." We, we all – we went across to the bar in [indistinct] on Queen's Park and went into the bar at Sutton Place and we drank says, "This is good." [pumps fist] and congratulated ourselves, you know, congratulated Teshima.

Okay, but in 1990, when I became – you know, came back to the Centre – so this is very important, okay? I would never come on the board 'cause Steve – I just so happened I was finishing off Momiji fundraising and things, and Steve says, "Can you come on the board?" I says, "Aw Steve. Get somebody young." 'Cause he is, relative to me. "But if you can't get anybody – okay, then call me." Sunday night, he calls me and said, "We didn't get anybody, so can you replace them?" So I said, "Okay." I said, "I will run, if you can't get nobody." So I went the next Monday morning, to the board, and I got elected, and so I went to there, and I was voted in, and then that year – that short time, I became president.

Well, it was a good thing for me to become president, because I was so much experienced – over the 10 years I was – I wasn't away from the Centre. I was involved with Momiji, I was involved with so many other things – rotary and there's so many charity work. I belonged to my business at work – I learned how to do good business, because building my – like, building – becoming a national manager, like becoming Ontario manager and all these things. You learn how to negotiate. There's so many things you can do. Remember I said I want to be better than the average person because of our – Japanese, keep a good name. So I work hard – learn, learn, remember? 'Cause everything – remember I said – now people don't realize that when I think of things, I only think of good things, you know? I says, I wanted to do a good job to make it good for engineers. I want them to be proud of their job. I want the company to be proud of who they are, so we're going to set a good example by being more versatile, more open – you know, who could go from boardroom to running trade shop? I could run a whole construction business, by the time I learned the business, you know, because at the work, I learned how to negotiate, I learned how to order things. I know how to buy multi – products, you know. You know, you know, like – if I wanted to buy a table from you or if I wanted to buy a dozen of those things, I know how to negotiate to get better pricing, you know, because everything is this competitive, you know. It's like running a business. So I learned – and I learned from a lot of people, because I – so – so when I came to the Centre, I had a lot of good experience, and I'm so much wiser, 10 years wiser.

So when they got me there, now I'm more management, you know, so I come to the board and I says, "Okay, what are the priorities of the board?" I says, "Name me the priority. What are you, you know, as your group – what is it, the most important thing we need?" "Well, we need to fight for redress." "Well, let's get that as a first priority. Redress. Let's get this thing finished once and for all. Let's make a presentation." "Caledon," they said, "it needs a manager's house." "Okay, then that will be a goal." Gary Kamino was on the board. He said, "We need to do a symposium to do a feasibility study to – for the future. \$20,000 budget, they have." I said, "Okay, let's put that as a priority." I pushed that through, okay, because these are important things. The symposium kicked me out of being president, because symposium said, "We need younger leaders." So next year they [throws hand over shoulder] voted Steven. [laughter] I got kicked out! And I says, "Hey! Well geez, I don't want to go past. I just got here!" [laughs] So I says, "Hey, let me become first vice-president." And so they say, "You be first [vice]-president." I, I – I just got there. I'm motivating everything, and they make me past president. I said, "Aw geez. You know, keep me in there." You know, 'cause – so –

So then I said – there was five priorities, and we solve – we accomplished every one of those priorities. You see, because, you have to get your business management skills – you know, you learn, and then Steve took over. I was a good vice-president for him because I'm committed. So Steve, you tell me what you do – I do whatever you want, because I said I'll be your first vice-president. So two years I was the first vice-president, and a good one for him, because he's my relative. I want him to do a good job. And then he gets a promotion to general manager at Bell, so I became president. For the next 6 years, I was president, but in my sixth year, I says that, "Listen, we're coming to a new place. This is not for me. We need young people." Okay, so something didn't work out well and I became you know, like executive director for 6 months while we looked for James Heron.

Meanwhile I said to, to Marty and, and Steve, "One of you got to take the president, you know. Leadership –because that's not for me. Let me do the outside. Let me become an ambassador. I don't know what, you know, but let me be –" So they made me Special Ambassador to do the outreach, because there's no one out there doing anything. See, not everybody got the time, okay? But I have time, and I got – you know, certain skills that I can use. You know, 'cause I can reach out to people, you know, 'cause I'm – I'm always making friends – respecting people – and by then, I'd built a good relationship – see in 1990, I got the Shokokai to come on board, because it was Japan [Bashi?], okay? And also I found a networking organization, in 1990, this network of 18, 20 organizations, and one was to bring people together to work for a common goal, and my goal was to – if you read it there, it will say – to benefit the community at large, to help other people, and that was my focus and goal, you know. And it was sort of just saying – welcomed the ambassador, you know, goodbye to the consul general. You know, no things are – you know – but benefitting community at large is much better. Bigger scope, bringing people together – common goals, you know, you work together. So that's why I formed that one there, with that idea, you know.

And I got the Shokokai – and if it weren't for Shokokai – the leader of Shokokai at that one particular meeting in 1990, we're welcoming the ambassador, and I put on the agenda, the Teshima agenda, why don't we form – why don't we do something to help the community at large? And if it weren't for the Shokokai leader to speak up, at that meeting – he was the president – we would never have formed the network group. We would have been – we would never have got a board of directors on to the – to the Centre, because from that meeting, I was able to convince them to come to meetings, tell us what they do, what we do. Within the second meeting, they already had a person picked – or a volunteer picked for a position with the board of directors. Okay? Because – all because of Japan Bashi, and I thought it was a good timing for them to show involvement in the community. Not for money. See, a lot of people think they were [indistinct] Shokokai only for money. No, for their prestige, their knowledge, their – their – the level – you know, even to this day I still say to the board, "Get a Shokokai president to be an advisor to the Centre." You know? It won't hurt you any, and they'll take an important, responsible position to help you.

LKN: Yes.

SI: So those games who – the network's been going on, and to this day – so Marty's the president now, because I said – was president for – chairman for 15 years. So again, should get younger leaders. So a lot of things that happen. Like, even – if you want to say, talk about the Centre, [I joined Rotary Club ?] I says – and I know I'm – you know, I'm – like I said before, I don't just go and do things. I learn from other people. Charlie and Tosh before, back in the – when the Centre really needed money – they used to run bingos. Then they started running Monte Carlo nights, raising money and so when I went to Rotary Club, I said – this is 1980, '79-'80. I said to the fundraiser of our committee at the Rotary Club, "Hey, why don't we raise money? And I'll help you, you know, raise money for Easter Seals." So he says, "I like the idea." So I came to the Centre – I made a presentation report – I says, "Why don't we learn to – why don't we raise some money for Easter Seals? Help the handicapped children, and why don't we show the Cultural Centre take a leadership role to show how a cultural centre learns how to give out, instead of always going and asking, [government] for money." 'Cause you already hear, all they want – people is asking government for money. Why don't we show a way to give to the community? Give to a cause? And I talked to Rotary to say that okay, we'll do joint projects. For 15 years we ran a Monte Carlo night for Easter Seals. For me, it was easy because at Rotary, I had – 9 years I worked with handicapped kids, and since I worked with Boy Scouts, and everything, I got how to play Monte Carlo, I know how to play a guitar, I can sing, I knew all those cup songs, I could take kids, you know – so I make friends, you know? So my daughter and my young [little daughter?] – she passed away, but we used to take handicapped kids on the Saturday, especially from group homes, for the whole day. You know – do good things, you know. Yeah, yeah – like I said – learn. Everybody teaches you something.

LKN: Yes. Anything else you'd like to share with us?

SI: I can tell you a lot of things, there, you know.

LKN: Next time.

SI: No, no, but I – like I said, we have to go out [this way]. It was very important for him to, to work with the community, and all the – see, we’ve got to think of what the Japanese people can contribute to the future of the – Canada, and our history is so enriching to give, you know? Like, it’s a good story. It shows how a, a – you know – small group of people can go through racism and discrimination, go through the internment camps, come out and they, they – they intermingle, like forced to intermingle because they’re forced to come out. If you want to go where you cannot live together, you got to integrate in the city, you know? So – and then our children grows, and the intermarriages, and your children, like – your children, they’re all rich with culture. I always call it the hidden culture that they don’t know they have, but other people see. And our name is so good and clear. It’s to show Asian people or foreigners coming in today, to say that, “Hey,” You know, like the [indistinct] people, for example, they complain and this and that, you know. I says, “Learn to work hard and build a good name. You know, integrate, but – you know, to – and we’ll show you some ways to do it. If you want to build a cultural centre,” I says, “We’ll be the first to show you how.” You know, because we want them to become good citizens.

So that’s why I say that we’ve got to keep ourselves involved, because we’re so small, and if you don’t, you’re going to be snowed under because there’s so many rich cultures. Like Chinese and the South Asian people who are coming in, so many – we got to be able to stay there. And that’s why I say that you got to stay out there and join things. So be involved with the place. The place says, “We don’t need you.” Well, my god, they do! I always tell the chief of police, “You should be happy you got someone from a – the – community, that went through all the hardships and everything, just liked I said to you, and became good citizen. And it’s a plus for you to say that there is this group of people living 132 years in the country. So that’s the image you want to leave. You know, so –

LKN: Yeah. Okay. Well Sid, thank you so much for sharing your story with us. Thank you.

SI: Okay. You’re welcome.

LKN: Now Sid, if you – I mean, thank you so much for the time you spent. You’ve told me so much. What –

SI: Those stories, there – I told everybody there, there’s all kind of things I joined, but, you know – I mean – people don’t realize, but you know, everything you do, you do for good reasons. Try not to do selfish things, you know? ‘Cause life is about how to do things for good cause.

[End of interview]