

**Interviewee: Roy Matsui**

**Interviewer: Lisa Uyeda**

**Date: August 16, 2010**

**Location: Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre**

**Accession Number: 2010.047**

\*Please note that this interview contains outdated terminology regarding Asian people and people with alcohol addiction.

[00:00]

[Preamble to interview]

[1:37]

Lisa Uyeda: Today is August 16, 2010 and this an interview with Roy. Roy, would you mind starting off with telling us where you were born and when you were born?

Roy Matsui: Yes, I was born in Vancouver in a suburb called Marpole, which is south of Vancouver. And, uh, what else did you say?

LU: And when were you born?

RM: Oh, I was born in 1925, so I am 85 years old now.

LU: And- What do you know about your parents coming from Japan? Or did they come from Japan?

RM: Yes, they came from Japan. I'm not sure why they came. I presume it was to get, to look for a better life. But my father came from Japan to Hawaii and stayed there for a while.

Then, uh, he was married in Hawai'i. I guess he called for his wife from Japan, married in Hawaii, and then he came to Vancouver.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So when he came to Vancouver, I'm not quite sure what he did originally but he was working in a box factory, it's a lumber factory. He was working as a carriage operator there. It was called BC Box Company.

LU: BC Box. Oh wow. And what he be doing as a carriage operator? Would he be delivering? Or-

RM: No, the carriage was a moving saw which sawed logs into strips.

LU: Oh.

RM: So, I guess being called a carriage operator, he operated this carriage which cut the logs longitudinally into strips.

LU: Oh. Oh wow.

RM: So, he was not a fisherman like most- a lot of people were.

LU: Mm-hm. So do you know what part of Japan they came from?

RM: Yes, they came from Fukuoka-ken, a small village called Unoshima, which is close to Beppu Hot Springs.

LU: Oh yes. And do you know what the family line of work was in Japan at the time?

RM: In Japan? No, I don't know that.

LU: And do you know if your father had any siblings or if he was the oldest son, or-

RM: Yes, that's a little fuzzy to me because he was adopted into another family. His surname was not Matsui. His surname was something else. So [laughs] he came from another family and of course my mother was from this village called Unoshima. So I'm not quite sure how they knew each other beforehand. I don't have any of that knowledge.

[0:05]

LU: Mm-hm, it's very common for, um, many sons to go into another family to continue that family name.

RM: Yes. That's right.

LU: A little complicated for the records, but-

RM: That's right. Very complicated.

LU: But very common. So how old was your father, do you know, when he went over to Hawai'i? Was he a young teenager?

RM: I don't really know how old he might have been, but he was quite young. And he was quite a mischievous person. [laughs] He was hired as a houseboy in Hawai'i. And they didn't feed him very well. He was always hungry. So, one day he climbed a papaya tree, and he ate all the papaya fruit. And of course that got him fired. [laughs] So maybe that's one of the reasons he went to- came to Vancouver.

LU: [laughs] That could be why. Um, do you know what part of Hawai'i he was staying in? Or what island?

RM: Yes, it was on the island of O'ahu. My mother worked in one of hotels there. I've forgotten the name of the hotel. I guess they were there, they might have been there for least more than a year because my oldest brother was born there as an American. And I guess after that they, they came to Vancouver.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So that's about all that I know about their history there.

LU: Do you know, ah, what your mother's occupation was in the hotel? Was she a cook or?

RM: No, I think she- I think she was doing the laundry. She was working in the laundry, I think. [laughs] May or may not be true.

LU: [laughs] So do you know when they might have come to Canada? Or-

RM: When they came in terms of number, in years? No, I don't. I think that was- I don't know, I have no idea.

LU: Do you remember what year your, your oldest brother was born in?

RM: My oldest brother, the one that was born in Hawai'i?

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: Ah, 80, 90- Oh, that would be about 90 years ago.

LU: 90 years, Oh wow.

RM: So that would be about the time.

LU: Okay, that would- 1920? Yup?

RM: Could be. Mm-hm.

LU: So how many siblings do you have?

RM: Well, I now, I have to say I had three brothers and three sisters. And the only remaining members of my family now would be the one sister and myself. So the rest of the family is all gone.

LU: It's a big family, though.

RM: Yes, it was quite a big family.

LU: So how many are older and how many are younger than you? Do you want to go by their first names and-

RM: I'm the youngest

LU: Oh okay.

RM: And the next sister, her name is Kiyo. And from there on, everybody's gone now.

LU: And did you have a Japanese first name as well?

RM: Yes.

LU: And what is your Japanese-

RM: Ichiro.

LU: Ichiro. Oh wow. [laughs] Do you know what it means?

RM: Yes, it means one. I guess it means number one son [laughs] because there were families that had a lot of boys that are named Ichiro, Jiro, Saburo, Shiro at this point - one, two, three four.

LU: Oh year. [laughs] So you had number one son title, but you were the youngest.

RM: [laughs] I was the youngest. [both laugh]

LU: And what do you remember about growing up in Vancouver? Did you move around a lot, or did you have one house that you grew up in?

RM: Ah, well we only lived in two houses. The house where I grew up in was in Marpole and it was quite a simple house. I think my father had it built or built it himself. I'm not sure. And I think that's where most of our family was born, in that little house. And from there later on, we moved to a house in Kerrisdale, which is north of Marpole.

LU: Is it much farther north or is it just-

RM: No, it was, let's see, in terms of streets, it would be- we lived on 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, so it's about 40 or 50 streets north of Marpole.

[0:10]

LU: Oh. And what was the reason for moving houses?

RM: Well, somewhere around 1935, my parents took us to Japan for a one-year trip. I don't think it was supposed to be one year, but after one year, we couldn't stand it anymore.

[laughs] So we made noises about not wanting to stay there and we finally came back after a year. And I guess it was a little too cramped to live in that old house. My sister who was my eldest sister never went to Japan. She stayed here. And she had a very good job and when we came back from Japan, she had a house built on 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and we all moved into that house.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So that was uh-

LU: So your house on Marpole, was it occupied when you went to Japan?

RM: Yes, my sister and one brother lived there. So when I went to Japan it was only two sisters and myself that went with my parents.

LU: Was it just the youngest children?

RM: Yes.

LU: And what was the reason for visiting Japan?

RM: Uh, I'm not really sure but I think it was- It might have been in the minds of my parents to actually stay there. But we didn't like it. In fact for me, life for me in Japan was rather miserable in Japan. I was always teased as being the North American person who didn't belong there, so, you know. Kids could be pretty cruel. So, my life in Japan was not all that good.

LU: So was it the other schoolchildren who were making fun-

RM: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Like that was in '35. I would have been about 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

LU: Mm-hm, and would you have other friends who would, I guess, befriend you, or was everybody in the school system not really open to having, you know, a Japanese Canadian coming to their school?

RM: Well, most of the kids were like any other kids. [laughs] They made fun of me, and we had fights and it wasn't all that unusual, I don't think. But this was pre-war, the pre-war years and the sentiment against the West was very strong. And that had something to do with, with the attitude of the kids towards me, I think.

LU: Mm-hm. I didn't know it was that strong.

RM: Oh yes, everything was anti-Western. There were songs that were devoted to hating the West. [laughs]

LU: Oh really?

RM: Yeah.

LU: Oh, I didn't know that. So, what were the major differences between the two school systems? You know, attending school here in Vancouver- did you go to Japanese school afterwards as well?

RM: You mean, here in Vancouver? Yes, we went to ordinary public school, junior high school and so forth during the day, and Japanese school at night. Ah, so the school systems, I guess, weren't all that different. Things like mathematics, I could pick that up quite easily. Ah a lot of the, a lot of the courses were the same.

LU: Mm-hm. So I guess they didn't teach English in the Japanese schools and-

RM: No.

LU: So did you become more fluent in Japanese?

RM: Well, I think having grown up with Japanese parents, I was quite fluent in Japanese.

LU: Mm-hm, did they ever mention that you had a different accent? I heard that many Japanese Canadians who go to the school systems in Japan find that their accents are very different.

RM: Not at that age, I don't think. I didn't encounter any of that.

LU: No? Oh wow. Mm-hm.

[0:15]

LU: And what other subjects would they be teaching in the Japanese schools? You had mathematics and-

RM: I think generally, the same subjects. [coughs] Geography, history, music, things like that. I think they were virtually the same.

LU: Did you have a Japanese class that would have been equivalent to having an English class?

RM: No, no. It was strictly- everything was in Japanese.

LU: Oh neat. Mm-hm. [laughs] And you stayed there for a year. So did you stay with relatives or-

RM: Ah, I stayed, we stayed with- No, we lived in a house. Which I'm not sure where the house or how the house came about, but it was empty. And we moved into this whole house. It was uh, next door to my mother's sister and across the street from one of my brothers. My- this brother was again adopted by my grandmother. [laughs] So he literally wasn't a member of the family as far as I could- I was concerned.

LU: So one of your brothers went and lived in Japan before you arrived?

RM: Oh yes, I think this happened quite early.

LU: Oh wow. And what was the reason for him leaving to go to Japan to be adopted by your grandmother? Do you know?

RM: I think because my grandmother didn't have a son and she wanted a male offspring, I guess. [laughs] I think that was the reason why.

LU: Was this your grandmother on your mother's side?

RM: Yes.

LU: Mm-hm, oh wow. How many siblings did your mother have, do you know?

RM: Um, two- Two that I know of, maybe three. I think it was two.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: They were both sisters.

LU: Did they stay in Japan? Or did they-

RM: Yes. They were always in Japan, I guess.

LU: Oh wow. And was your father the only one from his family who left, left Japan as well?

RM: I think so, yes. But I don't know too much about my father's side.

LU: Do you have any idea when your parents were born, or what year they were born?

RM: Yes, I have it written down somewhere. [both laugh] I think it's in the- must have been the 1890s. No, I don't know.

LU: Yeah. Probably around then, that range. Late 1880s, 1890s. Mm-hm. Oh wow.

So you were in Japan for a year. What else do you remember about the community in Japan at that time? Did you take any activities after school, or play games, or martial arts?

RM: I don't remember any socializing after school. I'm sure we did something, but I don't remember what it was.

LU: Mm-hm. Do you remember having any chores to do around the house?

RM: In the house? Yes, the normal chores of helping to clean and, and things like that.

LU: For someone who doesn't know Japan and the houses, what would be the major differences between the houses that you were staying in at Marpole and the houses you were staying in Japan?

RM: Oh, the Japanese construction is a little different. The house was built on stilts, that is, it was raised off the ground. And everything was uh, stick built, which means it was made from wood, wood framing. There was no central heating. It was very cold in the wintertime and heating was only through things like *hibachis*, which were like charcoal burners which you put a blanket over, and that's how you got warm.

LU: [laughs] Oh really. Oh wow.

RM: But the house was quite large. It was quite a nice house.

LU: Is it just one storey? Or is it usually two storeys?

RM: It was just one storey only.

LU: Mm-hm. Oh wow. And was the bathhouse separate? Usually, the bathhouse and toilets are separate from the houses in Japan.

RM: Well, the toilet was part of the house. It was sort of on the edge of the bath. We didn't have a bath, *ofuro*.

[0:20]

RM: We used the *ofuro* that my mother's sister had. So, we used to take our baths there.

LU: Oh wow. Would that be an everyday occasion?

RM: It probably was, because that was the ritual.

LU: Uh-huh. Oh wow. What else do you remember about Japan? Do you have any really vivid memories about your time spent there?

RM: Yes, well keeping in mind I was nine years old, uh, the only memories I really have were of things I didn't quite understand or I didn't like. When you entered the school grounds, you had to take your cap off and bow to the statue of the Emperor. This was the Meiji Emperor called Meiji. And the way the kids treated me; those are things I remember. I found that they always wanted to wrestle. That was the only way they knew how to deal with me. One day, I [laughs] discovered that they didn't know how to box. So, I promptly cleaned up on everybody [laughs] which got me into no end of trouble [both laugh]. Those are the funny things that I remember.

LU: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

RM: But there are some interesting guys there that became friends. But the anti-West sentiment was very strong. That's what I remember.

LU: Do you remember seeing it on the news or I guess hearing it on the news?

RM: I don't even remember whether we had a radio there. No, I don't remember that, but, uh, it was, it was everywhere.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: You know, some of the popular songs were banned because they were sort of anti-something or other. [laughs]

LU: Mm-hm, um did you have to wear Japanese-style clothing? Or did you wear Westernized clothing?

RM: No, I didn't wear the school uniform because I didn't have to. So I wore my own, my own Western clothes. That was another source of ridicule. [laughs] So that made me stand out. [laughs]

LU: Mm-hm, but even just everyday activities, if you know, on the weekends, if you didn't have to go to school or going out shopping, it would just be Western clothing or?

RM: Mm-hm.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: So I guess we must have taken enough to last for that one year [laughs]

LU: Yeah. [laughs] What do you remember about the trip going to Japan and coming back from Japan?

RM: Oh, that was a long boat ride. I think it lasted about ten days. That was quite an adventure. I had never been on a big boat before, crossing the ocean. That was a lot of fun. [laughs]

LU: Mm-hm. Did it have numerous floors that everybody was staying on?

RM: Yes, I guess so. We had the lowest class accommodation.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And of course, on the first couple of days everybody got seasick.

LU: Oh my goodness.

RM: It was quite an adventurous trip.

LU: And what do you remember about sleeping arrangements or the food provided on the boat?

RM: On the boat?

LU: Yeah.

RM: Ah, there were bunkbeds. They were tiered, one above the other.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And it was very crowded. I think that was because it was the lowest class of accommodation.

LU: Was it one open room and everybody was in there? Or did you have, each family have their own-

RM: No, I think we had our own room. But it was big enough to accommodate the whole family.

LU: Mm-hm. But there would have been five of you, I guess.

RM: Yeah, that's right.

LU: So, either way, it would be pretty, pretty squishy. So-

RM: Mm-hm.

LU: Mm-hm. Oh my goodness. What else do you remember about the boat, Roy? I've never talked about it before. I don't know anything about it.

RM: I guess I don't remember that much about it. It was just a, a ten days of nothing but water. You didn't see any land. Sometimes it got stormy and, and pretty rough. The boat would go up and down and- it was a lot of fun.

[0:25]

LU: And, uh, were there any activities that they had during the-

RM: I don't remember any. I think we just amused ourselves.

LU: Mm-hm, do you remember seeing a lot of other children on the boat as well going to and from Japan? Or did you mostly just stay with your two sisters?

RM: Oddly enough, I don't remember. There must have been other passengers. I don't remember that.

LU: Mm-hm, oh wow. How funny. I forgot to mention, what part of Japan did you end up living in for a year?

RM: Oh, it was in the Fukuoka-ken.

LU: Oh.

RM: The *ken* [prefecture] of Fukuoka. I guess that's in Kyushu, the southernmost island.

LU: And do you remember which school you went to?

RM: Ah yes. The name of the school? I think it was called Unoshima Primary School

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: In Japanese, whatever it was.

LU: Oh wow. So when you came back and you moved from Marpole to, what was it?

RM: Kerrisdale.

LU: Kerrisdale, and did you go back to school in Kerrisdale?

RM: Oh yes, we went back to school. In fact, since I missed a year, all my friends were in, in a grade above me. So I finally got moved into the same grade that my friends were in. So I missed that whole year.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And it's very peculiar, in that one year, I had forgotten a lot of the English that I knew. And when we first came back from Japan, I remember being sent to buy a loaf of bread. And I had to really pause and think, "How do I ask for a loaf of bread?" [laughs]

LU: Oh my goodness.

RM: So you lose some of it if you don't use it.

LU: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And so did you go back to the same school that you were going to?

RM: Yeah.

LU: So it's probably halfway between Marpole and Kerrisdale? Was it quite a far journey then?

RM: They were very close together. The school I went to, the primary school, was called David Lloyd George. That went from [grades] one to six, I think. And when we moved to Kerrisdale, I was already in grade seven, so I went to a school called Point Grey Junior High for grade seven and eight. And then from nine on, I went to McGee High School. Then from then on, I went to McGee High School. I guess it was grade 10 when the war started. So that's when my education stopped.

LU: Mm-hm. And what do you remember about um, the school days? Did you participate in any activities when you were at school?

RM: Yes, I played, got into all the sports.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: I remember being on baseball teams. Soccer was quite popular there. Yes, I did have quite a good participation in sports.

LU: Mm-hm, do you ever remember going to any outside activities? Like going and seeing an Asahi baseball game? Or concerts or anything of that sort?

RM: Since we were in the southern part of Vancouver, I didn't get to downtown very often. I remember seeing one Asahi game, but I guess the activities we were involved in were school related. I remember being in a choir and singing on the radio, things like that.

LU: Oh wow. [laughs]

RM: And we had baseball competitions, the usual sports.

LU: Mm-hm, mm-hm. And your siblings were all older than you. So was everybody living at home? You mentioned your sister was already moved out and one of your brothers was living in Japan. Where was everybody else?

RM: I think my two sisters next to me, they were still going to school, but then they graduated. I guess they, I'm not quite sure when they graduated. They went through high school, and then they became domestics.

[0:30]

RM: And they worked for various people, families in Vancouver. My oldest brother, the one that was born in Hawai'i, he- I guess he left home quite early and I didn't really know who he was. I don't recall seeing him until much later in life. But he moved to Vancouver, er- to New York City. And he worked for Brooks Brothers Clothing. He was a tailor.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So, we met later on when I was in the army. I met him for the first time. [laughs]

LU: Oh my goodness. So, does he have dual citizenship, then, between the States and Canada?

RM: No, no. He's an American.

LU: Just an American citizen. Well, isn't that interesting?

RM: Yes. [laughs]

LU: And, um, your older brother who now lives in Japan, or who did live in Japan, I guess he would have been a Japanese citizen, then.

RM: I guess so. I guess he must have become a citizen somehow.

LU: Mm-hm, it's quite the diversified family. [laughs]

RM: Oh yes, it's very confusing. [both laugh]

LU: Um, so after when you came back from Japan, where was your father working? Did he go back to the BC Box Company?

RM: No, no. He didn't work. From there on he didn't work. I guess he was getting to be a senior citizen. So, I don't remember his going to work.

LU: Mm-hm, did your mother ever work when she was in Canada?

RM: Yes, I think she worked as a domestic, here and there.

LU: Oh.

RM: But I don't think on a regular basis. I remember them being home all the time. That's my recollection of life in Vancouver.

LU: Mm-hm. And, um, would you ever have any family occasions or gatherings together? What do you remember about the holidays, or New Years, birthday celebrations? Did you have any of them?

RM: Yes, they were great family get-togethers. A chance for the family to get together. I guess only the people that lived in Vancouver got together. My brother in New York- he never showed up to any of these.

LU: Mm-hm. And would you generally celebrate birthdays? Or was that -

RM: I don't remember celebrating birthdays. It was strictly things like New Years, and national holidays, like that.

LU: Mm-hm, mm-hm. I found that during all the interviews that I've had, a lot of people didn't celebrate birthdays until after the war came along. Then all of a sudden, everybody started celebrating everybody's birthdays. So, there was never a major event, so-

RM: Well, that's probably correct. I don't ever remember having a birthday party. [laughs]

LU: Yeah, yeah. Maybe it's something I guess post-war that came about.

RM: I guess it's more of a Western custom.

LU: Must be, yeah, must be. So when you went to the school and you had lunch break, would you take a lunch with you? Or-

RM: Is this now in Vancouver you're talking about?

LU: Yeah, in Vancouver.

RM: Yes, we always took a lunch. and my mother always used to bake bread. I used to long for having some store-bought bread. [laughs] Because I'd never had any. I remember in junior high school, in Point Grey, kids would eat in the cafeteria.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And I remember they were having sausages and mashed potatoes. It looked so good. [laughs] I think I only had that once. But no, it was sandwiches all the time.

LU: Mm-hm, mm-hm. I was just curious why you wouldn't pack a bento box or anything like that, or a rice ball, or-

RM: No, in Japan, I took a bento box. It had the sections for rice and *okazu* [side dishes] and things like that, but I don't remember doing that in Canada. It was always sandwiches.

LU: Mm-hm, oh wow. When you were growing up, in Vancouver did you ever receive or encounter any racial discrimination or prejudice or-

[0:35]

RM: I don't remember any sign of prejudice while I was in school, all the school years, until the war started. And that- from there on, I remember incidents. But before that, no, I don't remember any.

LU: Was Marpole um, and-

RM: Kerrisdale?

LU: Kerrisdale highly populated with other Japanese people? Or -

RM: Yes. Not so much Kerrisdale, but Marpole, there were a lot of Japanese. It was almost like a Japanese ghetto there. There were so many.

LU: And what about in the school system, in your school classes. Were there many other Japanese students?

RM: Yes, there were. Quite a few.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: I guess typically in our class because the class moved from one grade to another-

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: The same people were in the class each grade. I guess I would say out of a typical size class, there must have been at least a dozen Japanese.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So, there was quite a few.

LU: That's a very large ratio. Mm-hm, oh wow. That's probably the largest I've heard yet.

RM: Oh?

LU: Yeah, so did you have many friends who were Japanese and non-Japanese, or did you find that everybody kind of stuck together, or-

RM: No, I think my recollection is we got along fine with the Occidental people.

LU: Mm-hm. And in high school, before the war started, or just as the war was starting, did you ever find that some of your non-Japanese friends were no longer, you know-

RM: Friendly?

LU: So friendly- so committed to being in the friendship?

RM: Well, it's funny you mention that because as soon as the war started, some of my friends, this is in high school now, suddenly became non-friends. [laughs]

LU: Yeah, yeah.

RM: And it was quite marked, in attitude. But I think that was the attitude of a lot of people on the West coast. That's the way they were brought up and that was the way their families were.

LU: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Did you ever have any, were there any other Orientals in the area, like the Chinese, or, growing up in Marpole and in Kerrisdale?

RM: I don't remember any Chinese.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: I can't even remember seeing a Chinese person other than people that were in the laundry business. But I don't remember any Chinese.

LU: Yeah, I've heard some stories before that. Even in the high school system, in the school system. Once the war started, even the Chinese friends would turn against the other Japanese friends as well.

RM: Well, I can understand that. I've heard that.

LU: Yeah. It's quite shocking for me to hear that.

RM: Because the Chinese are not the enemy. [laughs] We are the enemy. [laughs]

LU: That's right. So, what happened when the war started? Where were you when you first heard about the war starting and when you heard Pearl Harbour?

RM: When the war started, I was living in Kerrisdale. I was in grade 10 at McGee High School.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And I was- previous to that, I had enrolled in cadets, which is a military training activity. Of course, as soon as the war started, we were expelled from [laughs] cadets. So, I guess the attitude changed very quickly.

LU: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Where were you when you first heard that, you know, the war broke out? Do you remember? Did you read it for the first time or did your parents tell you?

RM: No, I think I heard it on the radio

LU: Oh wow.

RM: This was, I think it was 1941, wasn't it? Because the war in Europe had been going on since '39. The war in Japan started. Pearl Harbour was in '41. And uh, yeah, I guess I heard it on the radio. It was quite a shock. I didn't know what to make of this whole thing because it sort of put us in an awkward position.

[0:40]

RM: But I soon found out that everybody regarded us as the enemy. [laughs]

LU: Do you remember seeing notices being put up, or any government officials coming to the door, or-

RM: There were no notices as such. But I think, things like there was a curfew imposed. I'm not quite sure how that was communicated to the Japanese community. But we had to obey the curfew laws. We couldn't be outside during the dark. A lot of people tried to, to beat the system and they'd go from house to house. But by and large, you know we, after dark, we had to stay inside.

LU: Mm-hm, mm-hm. Do you remember ever sitting down and talking with your parents and your family about the war and what would happen? Did you ever try to plan before leaving, or?

RM: I don't- I don't ever remember discussing the situation with my parents. I guess I heard what they were saying about having to be evacuated. And of course, at that time my parents didn't have any property as such because they were living in my sister's house.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And when we were evacuated, my sister, who owned the house, stayed behind because she was working in a rather important position, so I think she got some exemption-

LU: Oh wow.

RM: - to stay. My two sisters found employment in the Toronto area, I think it was Oakville. They, they came as domestics. So, they escaped this evacuation, so to speak. And I'm not sure quite how that got arranged, but the two of them came to Oakville to work as domestics.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So, the evacuation only affected my parents, and, my parents and myself, plus a married brother. So we were all evacuated to Sandon. And Sandon was an old silver mining town. They had miner's houses, a lot of houses there. Abandoned houses. So, we were housed in one of the houses. Actually not bad. The only, the only, I guess, the only thing that it lacked was a heating system. It was a very cold place. [laughs] The only heat we got was from the kitchen stove. And there was lots of snow in that place. [laughs]

LU: Oh my goodness.

RM: It was in the, I don't remember the mountain range, but it was in the interior of BC. It was a very beautiful place.

LU: Oh yeah? Oh wow.

RM: Yeah. And being a teenager, of course, all this was more like an adventure. It didn't impact me economically, myself economically.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: I guess my older sisters and brothers suffered more than I did.

LU: Mm-hm, do you remember when you left for Sandon? Do you remember [indistinguishable].

RM: That was 1942.

LU: Oh wow. Summer, winter, spring, fall?

RM: Let's see. It must have been, it must have been spring. Spring or summer. It was just a few months after Pearl Harbour. And I found a job with the BC Security Commission, who were the custodians of our, of our property. They had an office there. So, I had a position. Well, I don't really know what position I held. But I was asked to survey the whole town, record all the houses that were being occupied by the Japanese, and put them on a drawing.  
LU: Oh wow.

[0:45]

RM: So, I spent a good part of a year doing that. And I had no skills as such,  
LU: Um hm.

RM: But I knew how to draw [laughs]. So I just did, you know, walked around, surveyed, found out who was living where and documented that and then put the houses on a map. That was the only drawing that I, I, ever saw of Sandon. And it got, I think that someone told me that the drawing that I made is in a museum in Castlegar. [laughs]

LU: Oh really?

RM: [laughs] And some of my relatives saw this map with my name on it. [laughs]

LU: Isn't that neat?

RM: So when I went back to Sandon later, in later years, I found this map in a museum.

LU: It was there?

RM: Yeah. [laughs]

LU: Oh wow. Isn't that neat?

RM: But that was my job, to survey and record all the people that were there.

LU: Mm-hm, oh my goodness. Now what, did you have a house to your own, for the family?

RM: Yes. It was a-

LU: Or did you have to share?

RM: It was a small house. It just had a kitchen, and a place to eat

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: It was like more of an adjunct to the kitchen, I think. And then, uh, two rooms. That was where we slept. And there was an outhouse outside. I didn't mind so much because I was a kid, but it was tough in minus 30 and 40, winter. [laughs]

LU: Oh yeah, that was pretty cold to be going to the bathroom. [laughs] So you mentioned your older sister stayed behind in Kerrisdale. Where was she working?

RM: She was working for Powell River- [faintly says "BC"] it was a pulp and paper firm.

LU: Oh wow.

RM She, she was a manager there, I think.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: She had a pretty good position. She stayed behind and tried to dispose of the house. And that happened, I guess, in 1942, sometime. And then she obtained a position in Montreal with a, a, consulting engineer, engineering firm.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: So she went all by herself.

LU: Oh. Was she married at the time?

RM: No.

LU: On her own. So, she was able to miss the whole internment camp experience.

RM: Yes, except I think she suffered the loss of her house, I think, and I don't think she got very much for it.

LU: Mm-hm, mm-hm. I guess everything else, left behind, too, all the furniture and-

RM: Yes, I'm not quite sure what happened to them. Some of the projects that I had made during high school like woodworking, I very carefully wrapped them in paper, and I stored them in the high school, McGee High School, with the agreement of the woodworking teacher.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: Of course, they disappeared. When I went back, when I was in the army, because I was in Vancouver, I went to look for them. And of course, they were all gone. [laughs]

LU: Oh wow. Do you remember what it was that you had made?

RM: Yes, I have pictures of them.

LU: Oh! What were they?

RM: One was a night table, another was something like a coffee table. I was very proud of them.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So somebody, I guess, hijacked them. [laughs]

LU: Oh yeah. Someone saw them and thought, "They're very nice. They'd look nice in my living room."

RM: Well, I had them stored in a very remote location in the basement. [laughs]

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: However, I don't- I don't miss things like that. [both laugh] So in Sandon, I think I was there for a good part of the year. And there was no facility for education, no social life, lots of bickering between the younger generation and the older generation as to how youngsters should behave. And you know, typical conflicts. [laughs] I got sort of tired of that and first opportunity I got, I left.

[0:50]

RM: And the opportunity was a job in Toronto. So, two people- we were the first to leave. So I left Sandon with Kitty. And the two of us took a train from Sandon to Revelstoke and then to Toronto. It took quite a while. I'm not sure why. I remember riding freight trains. And their luggage got lost. When we landed in Toronto, we had nothing. [laughs]

LU: You never found your luggage?

RM: It came, about a month later. [both laugh]

LU: Oh, nice.

RM: We landed in Toronto. And fortunately, we were met by a nisei called George. I'll leave his last name out. He was good enough to have found us accommodation, a room on Maitland Street in Toronto.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: And I was very grateful for that because without that, we would have been lost. I remember getting out from Union Station and looking across the street, across Front Street- big city, [laughs] it was very intimidating. And the first thing I did because I was

hungry- Kitty and I both went to look for some food and we ended up in a place called Bowles' Lunch. B-O-L-L- B- O- W- L- E- S. We later found out that was where all the rubbies hung out. [laughs] I think we had something to drink there. And then George had found us our room. We didn't have much luggage because it was lost. The landlady at this place where George had found us a room was horrified because we were Japanese. And I think the day after we got there, she came to us and said, "I'm afraid you have to move. I just don't want any Japanese in this house". But she said "You don't look like Japanese. You don't have buck teeth and horn-rimmed glasses." [laughs] So I explained to her that was the creation of these cartoonists. [both laugh] We don't look like that.

LU: Oh my goodness.

RM: But she was quite terrified. She didn't want us around. So we were out in the street again. And we walked down the street and we finally found another room. That was where we stayed for a good part of our stay in Toronto. We had a job prearranged from Sandon, arranged by the Security Commission, to work at an electronics instrument factory called Starks. And that's where we worked, and I was quite surprised to see about half a dozen Japanese were working there already.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So, I think I worked there for about a year and half until the army situation came up.

LU: Mm-hm. Did you have to get permission to leave Sandon to go to Toronto?

RM: Yes.

LU: How did you go about that?

RM: Yes. Well, it was announced. Because I was working for the Security Commission, in the office, I knew when these notices came out. An RCMP officer who was there mentioned to me that there was an order which permitted unlimited number of people to leave if they wanted. But they would have to go east of the Rockies to Ontario locations. So I jumped at that chance. And the jobs were pre-arranged by the Securities Commission. And for the first time in my life, I earned money. You know, I was- it was strange to have money.

LU: Yeah.

RM: We were paid 33 cents an hour, and we worked 40 odd hours a week. The first paycheck that we got, of course, it was a real novelty to have money. [laughs]

LU: Well, you were fairly young at the time, too.

RM: Yes, I was 16 or 17.

LU: Yeah.

[0:55]

RM: So we didn't know how to manage money. I got into the habit of listening to jazz music with other friends. So, we, we got- With the money that we had, I went and bought jazz records. That was more important at the time, until I found out I had no money to eat with. And that was a real good lesson in life. [laughs]

LU: Oh yeah.

RM: To be hungry. So I learned that I had to manage my money somehow. Those were good lessons. But the climate in Toronto wasn't all that good. There was some discrimination on

the street. People would stop us and threaten to [laughs] blow our brains out. [laughs] So we encountered some of that.

LU: How would you get out of situations like that?

RM: Oh, I'd just walk away.

LU: Yeah. I think I'd run. [both laugh]

RM: There was no point in trying to create an incident.

LU: Yeah, no.

RM: We would always be the losers.

LU: So, did you manage to make a lot of friends at the start of the company that you were working for?

RM: Yes, it was a nice place to work, all young people and they were all working in the war effort, you know. So, the instruments were being made for the armed forces, I guess.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And people that ended up working, the Japanese that ended up working there were quite high profile people. There was George, who got us our first accommodation. Then there was Kunio, who later became an instructor in the army Japanese school in Vancouver. And there were maybe another four or five Japanese.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: And while I was working, I decided- Are you running out [of tape]?

LU: No, I'm just double checking. [laughs]

RM: I decided I should do something about my education, so I enrolled in night school at Jarvis Collegiate. And tried to catch up on my grade 10 education. And of course, the army solicitation came up, so I left Stark and together with quite a few friends, we enlisted. Why we enlisted, people keep asking me- us- that.

LU: I was just thinking that.

RM: It was not because we had a lot of national pride in us. It was I think merely to sort of show that we wanted to fulfill our obligations as Canadian citizens. That we were just as good as any other Canadian citizen. So I think that's the main reason why people did enlist.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: So from the Toronto area, I guess there were at least 30 or 40 that joined up. We took our basic training in Brantford, Ontario. And that was purely basic training that all the army recruits go through. So it was infantry training. Then after six months we were shipped to Vancouver for advanced training, which was intelligence training.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: I, I think the plan was to take people like us in the Canadian army and use them as fifth column spies behind the enemy lines. Our training was essentially studying Japanese army tactics, strategy. So we became quite knowledgeable about how the Japanese army operated.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And recently I came across a stack of stuff [laughs] in my locker room. I didn't know what to do with it, so I shredded it.

[1:00]

RM: But it was a pretty tough course.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And because I had some basis of Japanese language before, I was in the advanced class. So we graduated. We were the- I was in the first graduating class. But after graduation- I should first mention we were billeted in Vancouver Tech grounds, Vancouver Technical School. And we were not allowed to leave because we were told we should not be seen outside in public. So all during that training, we had been confined to barracks there. But after graduation, we were allowed one night out, [laughs] to go wherever we wanted, and to behave ourselves. So of course, some people went to some public meetings that had to do with, I think, disposing of the Japanese property that was confiscated. [laughs] They stood up and objected to a lot of things. That was reported in the press. That was exactly what the army didn't want. A lot of us went to try to get into movies. We hadn't seen a movie in ages. And the manager looked at these people wearing Canadian army uniforms and became alarmed, and called the police, [laughs] thinking we were [laughs] the enemy, [laughs] dressed in-

LU: Trying to sneak in or something.

RM: Yeah, I think a bunch [clears throat], a bunch of people got arrested [clears throat] But there were funny stories.

LU: Just for going to a movie!

RM: Yeah well, [laughs] we weren't to make a disturbance, you see. [laughs]

LU: [unclear] Didn't know that would be-

RM: This was considered unbecoming behaviour and something that shouldn't be done, so we were chastised the next day for causing this disturbance. [laughs]

LU: Oh my goodness! [indistinguishable]- I didn't know that. You would think though, that going to a movie would be-

RM: Well the manager was the one that got frightened. I guess you can't blame him. He thought maybe that a submarine had landed some Japanese troops. [laughs]

LU: Yeah. Oh my goodness.

RM: [coughs]

LU: So what kind of tactics did you learn about the Japanese army when you were studying in the Canadian army? Do you remember certain things about what the Japanese were doing that you learned about? Or-

RM: Well, I only remember the general things, like how the army strategized, how they planned their attacks. Things like that.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: So they weren't all that interesting to us, but they were supposed to be backup information that we might need. Fortunately, of course, none of us needed to use that because the war ended. But from the first graduating class, after graduation, we were given leave to come back to Toronto. So we all took our leave, and uh at the end of our leave, I- I think I phoned back and asked for an extension. I wanted to stay a little longer. I was given the extension. But the other people in the class that I graduated in, they were all called back. I was, I was the only one that got an extension. I couldn't figure that one out until I got back to Vancouver. I found that the class that I had graduated with had been all shipped out. They had gone to the Singapore area, I guess. And I found out that I was picked to

become the captain interpreter at Angler. Now [laughs] that was a real blow to me because that was not the reason why I joined the army. [sighs]

[1:05]

RM: So there was nothing I could do about that, I guess, being an army decision. So I went to Angler. And the first thing that happened as I got off the train at Angler was I was called to the commandant's office and asked to accompany him into the compound to address, he was going to address the inmates, the Japanese inmates, and he asked me to accompany him. So I went in and stood with the commandant and [laughs] looked around and I see all the people that I knew. Now that's a real shock. There were Japanese school teachers there that I recognized, some other people that, you know, other people that I recognized. It was very embarrassing. So apparently there was some sort of uprising, a minor uprising, in the camp, because of the quality of food or something. [laughs]

LU: Oh yeah.

RM: And the commandant, camp commandant, was trying to solve this problem. So he gave his address to the gathering. And then, much to my surprise, he turned around and said, "Okay." I was a sergeant-major then- I was given the rank of sergeant-major. He says, "Sergeant-major, please interpret what I said." [laughs] So that was my [laughs] my first duty in Angler. I don't know how I got through this. [laughs]

LU: And there you are, standing in your Canadian army uniform-

RM: That's right, with the former Japanese school teachers, standing there, looking at me. I really didn't know how to say some of the things that the commandant had said. [laughs] But my main duty, I found out, was really not to be an interpreter. The only thing that I could see was my duty was to censor the mail. So I had to censor all the mail coming in and going out. They were allowed only so many letters a month. And letters that came in, I had to censor. And that was a pretty big job because I think there were a few hundred, I think there must have been over 500 inmates.

LU: Oh my.

RM: So that was, I think, that created a workload that resulted in something like 12 or 13, 14 hour days. That was a heavy workload.

LU: You're the only one.

RM: Yeah.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: And because I was so- Well I, I guess I had some feelings about being left behind. And that was really annoying to me. I think that, that stayed with me for quite a long time. Because I felt betrayed, and the only thing that I was doing was censoring the mail. I must, I might have gone overboard [laughs] in censoring some of the mail. But I had my instructions that I was not to let any of the following stuff go through, and I had a list of things, anything to do with the Japanese army. I was to black out everything that I was instructed.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: There were some lighter sides, too, because I found some letters that were coming in to inmates inside that were from former girls that I knew. [laughs] I guess that nobody

knew about them, but I had some lighter moments reading these love letters. [both laugh] But that, I guess, lasted only about a year before the camp broke up.

LU: Mm-hm. So the other members of your graduating class, were there other Japanese Canadians in that class as well-

RM: Oh yes.

LU: -that went over to Singapore?

RM: Yes, they were all nisei.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: I think there were twelve of them. And you know, they had quite a lot of fun over there. [laughs] Because they used to write me letters saying what they were doing. And here I was sitting at Angler, sort of seething because-

LU: Because you were just reading letters all day.

[1:10]

RM: Yeah, because the government chose to betray my purpose.

LU: Mm-hm. So what kind of activities were they doing in Singapore?

RM: They were interrogating prisoners and trying to record, I guess, uh where these prisoners, where they came from and what they were doing and just the general history, I guess.

LU: So there were other Japanese prisoners- Who they were. I guess-

RM: These are the Japanese army prisoners that were taken prisoner by the Allied Forces.

LU: Mm-hm. Oh wow. That would be interesting.

RM: Yeah. I think they had a lot of fun there.

LU: Mm-hm, mm-hm. How long were they in Singapore for?

RM: Well, it wasn't really Singapore, so much as places like Kuala Lumpur, places around there, around there I guess, where the Japanese prisoners were kept. Some went to Tokyo to do some administrative work. I think a couple- No, from, from the Far East. I think most of them just stayed in and around that area. They were posted in interrogation duties.

LU: Oh wow. And whatever happened to your parents then? Did they stay in Sandon the whole time, or?

RM: They stayed in Sandon until the, uh, camp was closed, and they were moved to Lemon Creek, I think.

LU: Oh.

RM: That's near Slocan. And there's an interesting thing about my parents. When I decided to join the army, I wrote to them and said I've decided to join the army and gave my reasons. And of course that was a horrifying piece of news to them, because [laughs] they were maltreated by the government and evacuated from the West Coast. And they just couldn't figure that out. They had strong feelings and they said, "If that's what you've decided to do, then you have effectively exited from our family." [laughs] I was no longer a family member. So I could understand that. So I said, "I'm sorry you feel that way, but this is what I have to do." And after the war ended, and these internment camps in BC started to close, then they had to make the decision to go back to Japan or be dispersed east of the Rockies. And my mother and father decided to come to Toronto to join us. When they came,

it was a very strange reunion because I didn't know what to expect [laughs] because of the way that the army issue was received. However, when they came, it was like nothing had happened. I guess it was embarrassing for them, in a way, to have said what they did. But uh, well we, life resumed like normal, [laughs] which I was grateful for.

LU: Yeah, yeah. So did you have very much contact with your other family members when you were in Toronto, or even before you left for Toronto and you were living in Sandon with your parents? Did they have very much contact with your sister and brothers?

RM: Oh yes. Yeah. there was mail. Mail was the only way of keeping in contact and there was lots of letters back and forth.

LU: Mm-hm. Do you ever remember reading any of those letters and what their experiences were like at the time? Or?

RM: Well, when we moved from our house into a condo about 8 years ago, I came across all these letters. [laughs]

LU: Oh my goodness.

RM: And it was kind of interesting to read them. But there were a lot of letters written between brothers and sisters, when I was in Japan also and when I was in Sandon. And so we kept up to date with each other quite regularly.

LU: Mm-hm. Did you keep the letters?

RM: No. It was just too much. [laughs]

[1:15]

LU: That's what we've been having problems with, with a lot of individuals, moving, you know, downsizing their houses to something more reasonable. But you have all this stuff and you can't store it anymore.

RM: That's right. Yes, we had to make a decision. We said, anything that we haven't used within two years, we have to throw out. It was the only way to deal with it, because when you keep something for years and years and years, it gets to be unmanageable.

LU: Oh, I know. I should go by that rule at my house. [both laugh] But um, so being in Angler, did you ever communicate with you know, the people that you knew that were being imprisoned in Angler? Or what was your interaction with the inmates there?

RM, Ah, virtually none. Of course it wasn't proper for me to interact with them. But there were young people in there, too. And, no, I don't ever remember socializing with anybody inside. In fact, at first, I was a little afraid for my, my life, well because people would be looking at me as I walked inside, [laughs] and I knew how they might feel about seeing one of their own in a Canadian uniform.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: But after a while, that sort of settled down, and years later, after I was practising as an architect, I was interviewed by Don Harron. Do you know the name Don Harron? No? He was a newscaster. But he had a morning program on CBC.

LU: Oh.

RM: And it was called the "Morning- something," I've forgotten. And he interviewed Barry Broadfoot, who had written this book. I have his book here. [reaches for book]

And one of the inmates at Angler, Tami Marubashi- Here's the *Years of Sorrow, Years of Shame*.<sup>1</sup>

LU: Oh. Can I see?

RM: So, he was one of the people interviewed by Don Harron. So it was Don Harron, Tami Marubashi, who was an inmate, and myself. It was a very interesting interview, because he asked a lot of questions about how come I was in the army, and how I felt about being at Angler. Tami Marubashi was asked about how they felt about my being there. It was a very short interview, but it was an interesting interview.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: I have a tape of it here. [laughs]

LU: Oh do you? Oh, isn't that neat? Is it like one of these tapes?

RM: No, it's an audio tape.

LU: Oh, it's an audio tape.

RM: It's one of the old audio tapes. [reaches for the tape] You may not be able to play it.

LU: Oh.

RM: It's one of these. [shows a cassette tape] You have to have an old audio machine.

LU: Mm-hm. We have, well it's my father's machine that we use here. But um as long as there's something that can play that tape, we can convert it over onto a CD or a DVD.

RM: Mm-hm?

LU: So if you ever want me to convert it for you onto something like a CD, then, yeah, no problem, I can do that for you.

RM: Well, no, I don't really want it anymore.

LU: Oh!

RM: It's nice to have, but- I don't want to lose it, but if you want to make use of it, you're free to do-

LU: Yeah! If we could use it for the Heritage Collection, that would be more than generous.

RM: Okay.

LU: Thank you.

RM: Okay.

LU: We'd love to make a copy of that. Thank you!

RM: But Don Harron was a famous character. He had a nickname on one of his programs. His nickname was Charlie Farquharson and he played the part of a typical uh, I guess outdoor type person. And he became quite famous. So I was quite surprised when he, he was uh- I've forgotten who arranged this. I think some Japanese Canadian person arranged this with Don Harron.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: And I, I remember-

[1:20]

RM: But anyways, where was I now? After coming back from the army, I wanted to finish my education. Fortunately, I had credits now from being in the army, so I could take

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<sup>1</sup> A book written by Barry Broadfoot about the treatment of Japanese Canadians during WWII.

courses up to the limit of my credit. So I enrolled in Ryerson Rehab School, where Ryerson is now, only it was called Rehab School, strictly for, for upgrading and continuing the education of veterans. So I, I got into that course and I took my grade 11- no, I skipped grade 11 entirely and I started grade 12 and 13. And I completed that in something like six or seven months. It was the most difficult thing I've ever done in my life.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: I, I don't know many subjects I took but there were something like- There were over a dozen subjects. But I got my senior matriculation that way and, uh, from then into university. It's really strange how I got into architecture. Because in Vancouver, at McGee High School, I had a teacher called Chippendale. He was a descendant from the Chippendales in England. And one of the courses he taught was a mechanical drafting course. And he, he used to say to me, "You know, you should do something with your drawing skills." He said, "You should become an architect." [laughs] And I used to have conversations with him. I used to ask "Why?" And he would say, "Architects generally create the world. He said, "They're the most important people in the world and they, well, they become leaders in society and all this." [laughs] And I don't know why, but when I finished rehab school, I figured, "Well, I might as well try architecture." There was no good reason for me to do that. People in those days didn't have very good reasons for taking courses that they did. As an example, when I was in line to register for this course, I came across somebody that I knew, and then he said, "What course are you taking?" I said, "I'm going to enroll in architecture." He said, "Hey, that sounds like a good idea." [laughs] And that's how he enrolled in architecture. Just chance decisions.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: So I was fortunate enough to be carried through the whole five-year course by army credits. I only had credits up to two years, I think. And then they carried me if I got honours. Each year, they carried me for another year.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So, I got five years education from the government, which I thought, "Well, that was compensation for [laughs] what they did to me." [laughs]

LU: Oh yes.

RM: So I was thankful for that.

LU: So which university was this at?

RM: It was Toronto.

LU: Oh, University of Toronto. Oh wow. So what year did you graduate?

RM: '52.

LU: '52.

RM: Yeah. So that's a long time ago, isn't it?

LU: Mm. It's almost si- 60 years now.

RM: '52 and of course from there, just a series of, of offices that I worked in, until- Well I guess from '52 after graduating, the economy wasn't very good, and uh people were having trouble finding jobs. I began to wonder why I had spent five years in university going to find- I couldn't find a job. [laughs] So I had to take jobs, you know, bits and pieces of jobs that I could find. And worked in various offices until I settled on a small architect who was practising in Etobicoke from his house.

[1:25]

RM: And he was looking for an architect. So I joined him. And that's where my architectural career started, really. I got a partnership with him and then I, uh, entered into various other partnerships. So, my career in architecture was very enjoyable. It was- it was, a most interesting way to spend my life.

LU: Mm-hm. So you were living at Toronto still at the time, though, after you graduated?

RM: Mm-hm.

LU: And, so you were living in Toronto. Um, were you still living with Kitty or did you have a branch after you arrived in Toronto for the first time?

RM: Well when I arrived for the first time, I don't know what happened to Kitty. I run into him occasionally. I should ask him one of these days. But I found this room on Maitland Street with a fellow who worked at Stark, the same place. His name was Sus- Susumu, [laughs] and I lived with him until the time I joined the army. Having come back from the army and being discharged, I lived with my sister, one of my sisters who had come early during the war. She moved from Oakville to Toronto, and, and she managed to fit me in with the, with the place where she was working as a domestic. So, I lived with her uh for, I lived with her until I joined the army. Even after being discharged from the army, I lived with her. We got a flat together. We called them "flats," and yeah, I've forgotten the year now. When you get to be 85, you lose track. [laughs]

LU: That's a lot of years to keep track of, though.

RM: This place was an old house owned by a Jewish person, and we had the top, the second floor. And, uh, the floors, I remember the floors were all slanted. Woke up in the morning. [laughs] You started off on one side and you were on the other side. [both laugh] But during university, oh yes, during university, my parents had come to Toronto and my sister, who had the house in Vancouver, had bought a house for my parents. It was very small house, so I moved in with my parents while I was going to university. So that was fortunate for me, so someone was providing for me. And, and in fourth year, fourth year architecture, I got married. So, then I had to establish my own place. And I worked for various firms like Marani and Morris- it's an old firm who practiced Georgian architecture. I knew nothing about Georgian architecture because that was not the way I was trained. I worked there for a year and finally got frustrated because [laughs] I couldn't do anything for them. And I ended up really being in a partnership with sometimes three, four, five other architects. And in the, we- in the '60s we had a very good practice because in those days, it was very easy to find jobs. So, we did a lot of churches and schools, until the late '60s. It was really difficult to- the economy, the economy was down, we couldn't find work.

[1:30]

RM: And uh, we were, we were, mostly doing institutional and commercial work. That was very hard to find, because nobody, nobody was building.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: But in my, my last partnership, I was fortunate enough to somehow get Momiji as a client. And I worked with them for about five years to, to uh-

LU: Oh wow.

RM: It was a long process, five years altogether, to finally get that project up. And that was my last project. I really enjoyed that.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: But I put a lot into that. I spent about, oh, two or three times as much time as I should have. But it was worth it.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: In fact, after I retired, they still call me when something [laughs] goes wrong. As late as, uh, probably two weeks ago. [laughs]

LU: Oh wow. You're the Momiji expert. [laughs] Oh my goodness. So when did you meet your wife?

RM: Oh, my wife. Well, when I first came to Toronto, there was a maybe two or three families that had moved directly from Vancouver to Toronto. And my wife's family was one of them. And of course, I had no- I had not known her. I had known her sister from Vancouver. So, one day I went to uh, this sister's house to see if I could arrange for a date. Of course, she was so popular by that time that she didn't want anything to do with me. [laughs] But Mary, who is my wife, she answered the door and said "No," her sister wasn't home. That was the first time I saw my wife [laughs] and I guess during the, by the time I enlisted in the army, I was- That was when I, I got to know her.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: So that was during the war.

LU: In what year was she born in?

RM: She was born in '28, 1928, so she was three years behind me.

LU: Oh wow. What was her experience like in Vancouver? Did she stay in the camps, or-

RM: Well, her experience is quite different because she was in the- her family was in the cleaning business. And I think that her family knew people in higher places and they were able to move directly from Vancouver to Toronto without going through all this evacuation. So, they came directly to Toronto and I think they worked in the, in the cleaning business. And I think they rented a house. So they were quite well off-

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: -as far as treatment was concerned.

LU: And did she have any other siblings other than her sister?

RM: Yes, she had a sister and a brother.

LU: Oh, so a much smaller family.

RM: Mm-hm. So, yeah, she didn't go through this evacuation experience, which I thought was a, quite an adventure. Being young. [laughs]

LU: Mm-hm. Did you ever hear, after the war ended, from your relatives and family member in Japan at the time of the war? Do you remember what they, what their experience would have been like, or-?

RM: Well, I guess the only family there was the brother that was adopted. And I think his offspring, I think they were trying to come to Canada, I guess.

[1:35:00]

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: I guess to try to find a better life. But I never really got too involved with them because all the correspondence was in Japanese. By that time, my Japanese was not all that good.

[laughs]

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: In fact, my father went back to Japan. My mother, my mother died when I was going to university. I think it was after I graduated. And my father then decided he'd like to go back to Japan. So, I corresponded with him by letter. It was quite agonizing to have to learn how to write Japanese. [laughs]

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: I remember it took me about 3 or 4 hours to write a letter because I'd have to look up the dictionary and words. Of course, I never found the right words. [both laugh] I think I still have some of those letters. [laughs]

LU: Yeah? Wow. And so he passed away in Japan?

RM: Yes. He said to me, "Please come and visit me before I die. But after I die, there's no point in coming," which is quite logical. He said, "Come while I'm still alive." I never did, so I have that regret.

LU: Did you ever go back to Japan after that?

RM: No, oh, yes, I went back to Japan as a tourist,

LU: Oh!

RM: Because my wife had never been to Japan. So, we did a tour of Japan on our own. I did the itinerary myself. It was quite interesting, because the train schedules that I got from the Japanese tourist bureau here, I was able to figure out which trains to take to go to such and such a location. And it was easy, easy, because the trains in Japan run on time, and you can almost set your clock to them. And all the travelling in Japan was on the *shinkansen*, which is the bullet train,

LU: Okay.

RM: And we had quite a nice trip. We went from Tokyo to all the tourist places, including the alps in Japan-

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And then places like Kyoto, Nara, and Hiroshima.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: And a most beautiful place called Itsukushima, the famous photo with the *torii* in the water.

LU: Yeah?

RM: Beautiful place.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So that was one trip. On another trip we took to Japan and went north, rather than south because we wanted to see what had happened to the Ainu. They were the aboriginals that occupied the northern part of Japan and I guess their history is similar to the aboriginals here. They were maltreated by the Japanese and their race is practically decimated. Not many of them left. But they don't look like Japanese.

LU: No?

RM: They look like, well, their origin is more Russian, I think, so they have, they're bigger, and taller. And they don't look Oriental.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So that was an interesting trip, uh, to see what was left of the Ainu culture. We managed to dig up a, a little bit of their history. Interesting place, this Hokkaido. It was a nice trip.

LU: And what year was it that you finally went back to Japan, for your first and second trip?

RM: Oh, it was '97, I think, the first trip. And the second trip was 2001 or something like that.

LU: Oh wow. So recently. Mm-hm, isn't that neat?

RM: I wouldn't mind going back again but I'm not sure I'm up to that kind of travelling anymore. [both laugh]

[1:40:00]

LU: Well, it's quite far. Actually, my friend left this morning for Japan.

RM: Oh, oh.

LU: His first visit there.

RM: Really? Did he take a direct flight from here?

LU: Um, I think he might have a layover, somewhere. I'm not sure.

RM: Because Air Canada has a direct flight to Narita from Toronto. And the times that we went, we had to go to Chicago.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: From Toronto to Chicago to Narita.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: It's a thirteen-hour trip from Chicago. It's a long trip.

LU: Oof. Yeah, well he's probably still flying. [both laugh]

RM: So, I guess I don't have much more history that I can tell you about.

LU: What about religion? Was religion ever a big part of your family? Or-

RM: Yes. My mother and father were devout Buddhists, and of course after they, they went, I didn't have too much to do with religion anymore. And my wife is an Anglican, so I did go to some of the Anglican services with her. But no, I'm not a religious person anymore.

LU: Mm-hm. Oh wow. And were you ever a big part of the Redress? Or-

RM: No, I wasn't active in that. I think some of my, I have a niece who was active in it. But I just was a benefactor of their, their, efforts.

LU: Mm-hm. Oh wow. What do you remember about Redress? Say you're speaking to somebody who doesn't know anything about it. What would you tell them a little bit about it?

RM: Hm. The Redress process? Well, I think that was a very gallant effort by those that pursued this. It was to- I guess if I were to, to tell somebody, or try to tell somebody about it, it was a gallant effort to recoup some of the wrongs that were perpetuated by the government. And it was quite a struggle for the people that were working on Redress, but they did a great service to the community.

LU: Mm-hm. Do you remember reading the newspaper, or seeing it on the news, or hearing it on the news, um, about the rallies going on in Ottawa?

RM: Yes, yes.

LU: What was your impression on that?

RM: Well, I think that was very good of these people to go. My sister went to the Ottawa rally.

LU: Oh really?

RM: My sister was quite active in the community. She was married to Kobayashi and her name remains here in the Kobayashi Hall. That's my sister and brother-in-law. [laughs]

LU: Oh really. Isn't that neat? Oh wow. So yeah, so she was a big part of the redress.

RM: Yeah, I'm not sure that she took a direct part of the process but she certainly supported it actively. Because she was active in the JCCC.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And I remember all the food. I guess it was called Caravan at one time. Remember Caravan?

LU: It sounds familiar.

RM: It was a food festival put on by Toronto. Or various ethnic groups had put on pavilions. Like all the European people had their own, and Japanese, JCCC put on their caravan and promoted their food. And they had displays and generally, I guess it was mainly food related. My sister was active in preparing the food.

LU: Oh wow.

[1:45:00]

RM: So I don't know of anything else that-

LU: Um well, were you ever a big part of the JCCC community, or even the JC community after, when you were, after the war when you were working and- did you ever take part in martial arts classes or anything like that?

RM: No, I think part of the reason why I didn't was because of my army experience. You know, I was, so- Well, I felt really betrayed by the Canadian, Canadian government. And that, I think, influenced my whole life for quite a long time. I didn't even participate too much in the veterans' get-togethers. Because the other guys all had different experiences and I was still sort of stewing about that, [laughs] being sent to Angler.

LU: Mm-hm. Where were you staying in Angler? Did you, were you put in, like, the room and board with all the other army men that were there to-

RM: More or less. But then, my quarters were adjacent to the camp. That was, I guess, sort of a storage room. So, I bunked there by myself. The main quarters for the army staff were away from there.

LU: Oh.

RM: They had their own place. But this place was- oh, Angler was such a cold place. It was minus 40, minus 50 and no heating system, you know. My little hut that I stayed in was heated by coal stove. I would bank up the coal before I went to bed. In the morning, I'd wake up and the coals would still be there, but the kettle on top of the stove- the water was frozen. It was that cold.

LU: Oh my goodness!

RM: It was [laughs] a really cold place.

LU: How far north is Angler?

RM: Angler is near the town of Schreiber. It is on the north shore of Lake Superior. The nearest town to Angler was Marathon. It's a pulp and paper town. Angler is no longer there. It was just a train stop. But even the train station is no longer there. I went to find it on one of my cross-country, cross-Canada trips. I stopped on the highway and hiked in to where Angler, I thought, was, "There's nothing there!" I- [coughs]

LU: Oh wow.

RM: I found pieces of eavestroughs and remains [coughs], the remains of a bridge over a creek. And I knew that it was in that location, but there's nothing there. Nature had taken over the whole place.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: And the trees that were growing there were, you know, like that, so-

LU: Pretty young still [indistinguishable]. Oh wow. How many inmates were there in Angler?

RM: Well, one time there were about 700. And when I, when I was there it was more like 500.

LU: Mm-hm. Do you know anything about the housing that they had for inmates, or-

RM: Yup, they were typical army huts. They were called H-huts.

LU: H-huts?

RM: H-huts, in the shape of an H. [gestures]

LU: Oh.

RM: So, there were bunks, bunks, on both sides and then the cross of the H was where the washrooms were.

LU: Oh.

RM: So it was like any other army hut.

LU: Oh, and so how many people would staying in one hut?

RM: Oh, I think each hut would probably have about a hundred, a hundred people, maybe.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So, there'd be about five or six of these huts. But some of the experiences I had at Angler, socially, were quite interesting. We used to roam around the country. It was really wild country. That's why, that's why, the POW camps were there, I think. Some days I remember in July we used to, we built a raft to sort of paddle around the north shore of Lake Superior. And in July there was still, there was still ice on the shores.

[1:50]

LU: Oh, my goodness.

RM: A very cold place.

LU: Who was it that you were building the raft with?

RM: Oh, these were army, army guys that were there, the staff.

LU: Were there other Japanese Canadian army guys there?

RM: No, I was the only army person.

LU: Oh wow. And the letters you were censoring, were most of them written in English or were most written in Japanese?

RM: I think half and half. Half of them were in Japanese and they would deliberately write it so I couldn't decipher it. [laughs] Of course, I had no trouble with the English. [both laugh] But some of the things I that censored, later I figured that I probably shouldn't have done that, but I did it out of, out of a rage. [laughs]

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: But they would write things that were quite natural for them to write about, you know, like the war and how they felt about the war. But a lot got censored because of the criteria established by the army.

LU: Mm-hm. So what were some other things that they weren't allowed to write about? Or to talk about for their correspondence?

RM: Well, this is not so much that they weren't allowed to write about it, but the army were interested in the attitude of these people, and how they felt about the war, and whether their loyalty was with, with Japan or with Canada. So, any references to that- I was requested to excerpt and send them to Ottawa.

LU: Mm-hm. Did you ever find any that were, you know, some Japanese inmates that were more loyal to Japan?

RM: Oh yes, some of them were very strongly in favour of Japan winning the war-

LU: Oh really?

RM: -and they felt that any day now, they'd see the Japanese bombers overhead. [laughs] Things like that, you know.

LU: Oh my goodness.

RM: But you can't blame people for feeling like that. That's the way they- that was their background.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: But by and large, I think, most of them were quite peaceful.

LU: Yeah, oh wow. That would be interesting, to read those letters.

RM: [laughs]

LU: To see what, out of curiosity, to see what everybody would be talking about.

RM: Yeah. But a lot of people were concerned about their families, who were in internment camps.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: But the fellow who was interviewed by Don Harron, Tami Marubashi, he is no longer with us. But he was, I think he was 19 or 20 years old. And he, I think he said that he had quite an adventurous time there.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: Again, I think the younger people had problems with the older, older Japanese. Like when you get a mix of people like that, there's always some kind of friction. [laughs]

LU: Yeah. Like in Sandon, you were saying.

RM: Yes. Mm-hm.

LU: Mm-hm. When you were in Sandon, and I know you weren't there for very long, did you have any interactions with the local community that lived in that area? Or did nobody live there before?

RM: Ah, I think the population of Sandon, when we got there, was something like three. [laughs] It was really a ghost town. And I guess it was the former mayor of Sandon that lived there. His name was Harris. And he was really accommodating. And he helped us quite a bit.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: But when you say, "Did you have much to do with the people there?" There was nobody there. It was a ghost town. [laughs]

LU: Yeah. How far away was the next closest town?

RM: The next closest town was New Denver. This was another internment camp. So that whole valley was an old mining location. And I have [reaches for and displays "Sandon" book] when I was on one of my trips back to Sandon, I came across some people doing some research.

[1:55]

RM: They wrote this book on Sandon. [laughs]

LU: Oh wow.

RM: There's a section on the Japanese here.

LU: Oh, isn't that neat?

RM: Not very much, but a lot of the stuff that's written here is taken from books like that. So [puts book down] it's interesting.

LU: Oh wow. What did they generally say about the Japanese in that book?

RM: [Looks through book] Well, they write about how unjustly they were treated. Just glance at that. [passes book to interviewer]

LU: Oh wow. So, was there, was there much to do in Sandon? Like did anybody, the people that were living there, were they able to get jobs, or were most people just-

RM: You mean, the Japanese people?

LU: The Japanese people.

RM: No, I guess some of them were able to get jobs, like running the hydro plant. One of the reason why Sandon was selected for relocation was that there was a town with some houses and there was an electrical plant there. So much of the facilities were still intact.

LU: Oh, mm-hm. Oh wow.

RM: Even though they were out of date. The majority of people had nothing to do.

LU: Yeah!

RM: I was lucky to have a job.

LU: So, did Sandon close down before all the other camps did?

RM: Yes, I think it did.

LU: Was it much before, or-

RM: I think it was one of the first to close.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So, in that group, there was Sandon, New Denver, Kaslo, Slocan, Lemon Creek. I think Sandon was the first. And, uh, you know, my parents were moved to Lemon Creek. So when I went back to Sandon, it was very interesting because it was so long after we left that

everything was virtually gone. All the houses were collapsed and, and [laughs] they were virtually turned back into the soil.

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: And I could only surmise where the house was that we lived in.

LU: Oh wow. Wasn't there a flood or something-

RM: Yes

LU: -that went through?

RM: Yes, there was a creek. It was called Carpenter Creek, that ran right through the town. And uh, the town was built right around this creek there was a boardwalk right over the creek. So the creek flowed under this thing. It was virtually a wide street and buildings on each side.

LU: Oh wow.

RM: So, it was quite an interesting place at one time. The history of it is such that when it was booming, there was quite a town there. [laughs]

LU: Mm-hm. So, when you were living there, what did you do for food and clothing and shopping, if you needed anything?

RM: Food was easy because food was brought in, and it was sold directly to us. So, there was no problem with food. Mail service was okay. The only thing lacking was a social life, and the young people were certainly at odds. They had nothing to do. They tried to organize activities, which the older people objected to. [laughs] They wanted to have dances and things like that. The older generation said those were frills that we shouldn't engage in. [laughs]

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: So, I was glad to get out of there.

LU: Oh yeah, yeah. Well, Toronto must have been much more exciting then.

RM: It was a new experience in such a big city. It was quite intimidating at first.

LU: Even after the war ended, did you ever receive any or encounter any other discrimination or? Did the community in Toronto feel much more open to the Japanese Canadians at that time?

[2:00]

RM: I think after the war, I didn't really experience too much discrimination, as such. Just the odd time. But by and large, I think that we were treated quite fairly.

LU: Mm-hm. Even in regards to finding housing and jobs and-

RM: Yes, I think so. 'Course there's always this lingering, the underlying discrimination that the older generation have, but I didn't experience too much of that. Of course, it didn't bother me as much as it bothered, say, my wife. It really bothered her. When she encountered this kind of stuff. I'd tell her, [laughs] "No, forget it, don't pay attention to it. It's not worth it."

LU: Mm-hm. Well, I don't know if I have any other questions that I can think of. [laughs] Is there any other favourite stories that you usually talk about, or something else that I missed, or-

RM: [looking at a document, laughs]. I always think about it afterwards. [laughs]

LU: With your, in regards to your family, do you find it important that they learn about the Japanese Canadian history as well, and that they know a little bit about what happened to you and your family and your parents?

RM: You mean in my family?

LU: Mm-hm.

RM: Yes, I think, uh, lately, and I say lately after my kids were mature and finished school and working, they began to get more of an interest in what happened. And my daughter has been bugging me to do my memoirs. And I started them and I sort of left it [laughs] because I lost interest in it. But she's always asking me when I'm going to finish this. So, she's interested in what happened. And I told her I was coming to have this interview and about this conference, and she said she'd like to come for the conference.

LU: Yeah.

RM: So yes, there is an interest there.

LU: Mm-hm. And what do you think about the future of Japanese Canadians, as a community together, and trying to teach them about what happened during the war years? You know, is it worth it, or do you think it's better to just leave it?

RM: No, I think it's very valuable. I guess it's a little late to collect some of this information, but better late than never. I think it's very important as part of the history, not only for Japanese Canadians, but for, for everybody. Because not everybody knows what happened. In fact, we come across people that have no knowledge of what happened to us as a community. And I am always surprised that there are more people than I think know about the evacuation.

LU: Mm-hm. Well, I remember for the first time learning about it in grade 10. Somebody turned to me and they said, "Well, aren't you Japanese? Was your family in the camps?" I said, "Well, no, because they would have talked about it" but-

RM: Where was your family?

LU: Lemon Creek, yeah.

RM: Really?

LU: But I didn't know about that, until-

RM: Where were you born?

LU: Toronto.

RM: Oh. I see.

LU: And my father was born in Toronto.

RM: Your father was born-?

LU: So, my grandparents were from Vancouver.

RM: Oh, I see.

LU: I guess you could call me naïve at that time for not knowing but-

RM: No, how would you know?

LU: It was never mentioned.

RM: I know. The older generation of Japanese never bothered to relay anything to their kids, including the nisei. I never, I don't remember talking about this to our kids. It was only after they grew up, [clears throat] that they saw books like this on my shelf. [clears throat] Now, now they are quite interested. [clears throat]

LU: Mm-hm. And the questions come out. [laughs] Well, is there anything else that you would like to add?

[2:05:00]

RM: Don't think so.

LU: [laughs] Perfect. Just at the end of the tape. Well, thank you very much. I'll turn this one off here.

RM: Well, I don't know what value that has.

LU: Oh no, it's great.

[Interview ends]