

**Interviewee: Alma Sumiko Miike  
nee (Kawano)  
Interviewer: Lisa Uyeda  
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THE JAPANESE CANADIAN LEGACY PROJECT

**[Start part 1]**

Lisa Uyeda: Here we go. So today is October first. And would you like to get started off by telling us your full name please?

Alma Sumiko Miike: My full name is Alma Sumiko Miike, formerly Kawano from Vernon, BC.

I was born and raised in Vernon, BC in the Okanagan valley.

LU: When were you born?

ASM: November 30<sup>th</sup> 1926.

LU: Oh wow.

ASM: Okay. Which makes me 84.

LU: You don't look 84, my goodness.[laughter]What do you remember about growing up in Vernon, BC?

ASM: Well, you mean when the war came or prior to that.

LU: Before the war, in Vernon, BC? Were you born at home?

ASM: Coldstream Ranch I was born in Vernon BC Hospital but I was raised in Coldstream Ranch which is five miles from Vernon, BC. And went to school there. And when the war came I was fifteen years old and going to high school in Vernon, I think I was in grade nine about grade nine I think.

LU: Oh wow.

Did you stay, grow up your whole time on the ranch when you were in Vernon?

ASM: Pretty well yes, Coldstream Ranch.

We moved to Mount Lavington which is a few miles[?] for a short while, but we move back to Coldstream Ranch where a few Japanese lived.

LU: Did your family rent or own the houses?

ASM: No, we rented and my father worked at Coldstream ranch for almost thirty years I think it was at the time.

LU: What was he doing there?

ASM: Working on the orchards, in the orchards, apple orchards.

LU: Oh wow. Would you ever help him with the apple orchards?

ASM: No, we had our own garden at home. We used to grow strawberries [laughter], and we used to help out on the farm like that.

LU: And how many siblings do you have?

ASM: I have, I had a brother and two sisters. There were four of us altogether. My brother was seven years older than me and my next older sister was, she was five years older than me and the sister above me was two years older than me.

LU: Oh so you're the youngest.

ASM: Mhmm.

LU: What school did you go to? What public school?

ASM: Coldstream Public School and then to Vernon High School.

LU: Were there a lot of other Japanese students in the schools?

ASM: No, just a few, just a few of us, at Coldstream there was only about two other families actually: Esabu's and Hikichi's and then in Vernon well when high school came there were only a few of us and then when the war came a few people came from the ghost towns to finish high school.

LU: Oh, oh wow. So, what was it like when you heard the Pearl Harbour news, what was your reaction to Pearl Harbour?

ASM: Well actually I guess I was quite shocked to think that Japanese were involved but other than that the people they didn't treat us any differently. You know so like my classmates we were still the same they didn't treat us any differently at the time.

LU: When did everybody start coming to Vernon, BC?

ASM: Probably about 19 - well after they were relocated to the ghost towns it was about 1943 or so I suppose, 42 or 43.

LU: I think '2.

ASM: 1942 they were sent to ghost towns weren't they. And then from there they came up to the Okanagan, a lot of people came.

LU: Where were they staying?

ASM: Well for example at Coldstream they had a bunkhouse for them, built a bunkhouse I think to house these-I remember one time a truckload of girls came in to help with the picking apples and they had built a bunkhouse for them. To stay there.

LU: Were the girls paid to help pick the apples?

ASM: Oh yes they were paid, not a lot but they were paid.

LU: Oh wow.

ASM: And during the war years because they needed help they let us when we were going to high school, they let us students leave school to go and help harvest the apples because it was the wartime and a lot of the men weren't there of course you see they were at war, we were at war so, so yeah we used to help.

[5 minutes]

LU: And did any, you mentioned that some of the people who were coming in would go to the high school with you?

ASM: Yes they did, a few of them came.

LU: So how busy were your classrooms?

ASM: Well normal high school where we went, say thirty to a classroom or something like that. It was a regular high school with different subjects you know.

LU: So what was your reaction to seeing all these Japanese people start coming around?

ASM: Well it was nice because we hadn't had that many Japanese friends you see. So it was nice meeting them, and we made lifelong friends and I met my husband at that time. He came up and I must have been about seventeen when I met him first, you know. Yeah it was nice to meet all these people.

LU: What was the reaction of your friends from before, your non Japanese friends?

ASM: Well, it didn't seem to bother them you know.

LU: And how different was it for, you know, going out and buy groceries or trying to buy things because there were so many more people now in Vernon, BC was it harder to come across?

ASM: No, it was about the same I think, about the same. Cause Vernon it was a nice little town you know, regular small town. I don't know if you've ever been to small towns' but yeah I think they were glad to get the additional business you know. It was nice to meet these people, different people.

LU: Do you remember what their living conditions were like other than the bunkhouses were they staying anywhere else?

ASM: No, a lot of them were in bunkhouses, which were very sparse you know how bunkhouses would be, just a bed. And they had- I know when the girls came up they brought cooks with them, to cook for the girls. I think the girls enjoyed it too it was probably a different experience for them.

LU: It would be different.

And you would have most of your family meals at home?

ASM: Oh yes, we would always have our meals at home, yes.

LU: And what do you remember about your mother cooking family meals and would you help her?

ASM: Oh yes we helped cook, I used to help quite a bit. We just had basic rice and we had - because we didn't have a fridge at the time but we had a spring close by we used to keep our meats and things cold in the spring water. So we had to buy- we ate things more like baloney and bacon and stuff that you know. My father bought fresh meat on the weekend but we'd had to use it up within two or three days cause you know it doesn't keep even in the spring water. But we ate basically Okazu like sukiyaki style a lot.

LU: Oops, oh [fiddling with something off camera] I'm just gonna pause this, silly microphone. There [laughs] much better.

ASM: Okay.

LU: Okay here we go. How would you place the meat in the spring water, to keep it?

ASM: Well we put it in a bucket like, you know inside a container and immersed it in water, the whole bucket that would try and keep it cool but it wouldn't keep that cold you know because it's almost- well it wouldn't keep that cold really.

LU: Just cool.

ASM: At least we had that you know.

LU: Did you have underground storage as well?

ASM: Yes, just a cellar. My father built the cellars and we would keep our vegetables in in the winter, all winter.

LY: How big were the cellars?

ASM: Oh not that big but enough to hold like potatoes and apples and things like that for the winter so, you could go in there and walk in there. Maybe about four feet by three feet or something like that, just enough to move around in it.

LU: Oh wow. Somebody just told me the other day about cellars and I was like what do you mean they had a cellar, I never even knew.

[10 Minutes]

ASM: Oh yeah I guess that yeah. Well you just dig a hole in the ground and build a sort of a-you'd have to put a frame over it and cover it with more soil. So it was a little thing sticking up in the ground with like a little hut, actually I should say almost like a wooden- little igloo made out of soil, similar, you know, something like that.

LU: Yeah that's fascinating [Laughter].

What were some of your favorite meals that your mother would cook for you?

ASM: I guess Sukiyaki, probably Sukiyaki.

LU: Did she have a special way of making it?

ASM: No, just basically with meat and vegetables the way we do today. And oh I like the Tsukemono, my dad used to like to make Tsukemono for the whole winter. And I especially like the way he did the cucumbers, you know you'd slice it small and then you put lots of salt on it and you'd pack it down and then drain it and pack it so that it would be really salty and really crispy and then you'd soak it later on and it'd be just crunchy cucumbers. That was my favorite, so I can still make that today sometimes you know when I have a bunch of cucumber.

LU: That's a nice treat.

ASM: Yeah, it's easy too cause you salt it then you drain it and do that about three times and then eventually - well now I just freeze it but in those days it used to keep in the winter cause it used to get quite cold. And you make barrels of Tsukemono for us you know.

LU: Oh wow [Laughter]

ASM: That was in the Okanagan because you know like we did most of the things were kept outside, like Tsukemono had to be kept outside.

LU: What other foods did they make?

ASM: Well, we would eat fish basically the same as most people do but I think we ate quite a bit of baloney though because baloney keeps longer than regular meat. Baloney and bacon we ate a lot of bacon. And we used to have fish because my father used to go to a reservation, Indian reservation and get these carp you know the Koi, big carp. He used to trade - take potatoes or apples and he would trade that for the fish from this Indian reservation and bring it home and he would let the fish swim in the pond that we had - the pond that was built from the spring water that used to come up from the soil. So that's what we used to eat like. It was good, I liked the sashimi. Its different you know.

LU: Oh wow, how big was the pond?

ASM: Oh it was quite big. It was about the size of this room I guess maybe bigger even because it was a real spring that was coming up from the ground and then he sort of - well they made it so it would collect in this pond you see.

LU: Is that where you would gather water as well?

ASM: That's where we got our water, yes.

LU: Isn't that neat.

ASM: And we didn't have electricity in those days so we had coal oil lanterns- lamps. Coal oil lamps and then later on - I forget what you call them came in, they were a lot brighter but basically we grew up with coal oil lamps.

LU: How big was your house? What did your house look like?

ASM: It wasn't that big. It was two story and it had – it was one big room in the basement we didn't have it divided. Upstairs we had the bedrooms it was well I guess about the size of – maybe about the size of this square. Yeah two story.

LU: And how many bedrooms?

ASM: Two bedrooms upstairs but it was just divided by – well yeah my dad had a partition in there he had a partition but not closed the partition.

LU: So all the kids on one side and the parents on the other?

ASM: And then later on he - there was a little house that was available that he brought and attached to our house so there was extra room there. But basically when we grew up yeah the kids would sleep in one room and the parents would sleep in the other room.

LU: Oh wow [laughs]. Did you have any other family chores around the house, you mentioned that you would help take care of the garden?

ASM: And cooking.

LU: And cooking, yes. Were there any other chores you had to do?

[15 Minutes]

ASM: Well, helped clean the house I guess. Yeah like, we had three sisters so one would wash the dishes, one would dry the dishes and one would sweep the floor, that seemed to be the routine. You know [chuckles].

LU: Did you rotate?

ASM: Yeah we'd rotate and just sort of take turns yeah. It wasn't a fancy house, in those days you know they were anything but - nothing was fancy but it was - we were happy growing up there.

LU: What were some of your favorite childhood games to play?

ASM: Oh we used to play hopscotch and marbles. Basically I guess that's about it. Oh we used to go swimming a lot yeah. We used to walk for miles to friends who live down by the Kalamalka Lake and it was a nice swimming place so we used to go swim there in the summertime. We'd walk down there it was about five miles.

LU: That's a long walk.

ASM: It is. But we'd stay at a friend's place and then my dad would come and pick us up at night. You know because we had a car, an old Model T car. [Laughter]

LU: I was going through some of my great grandparents belongings last night with my father and we found one of the big cranks for the Model T cars, for the front of the car.

ASM: Oh yeah.

LU: We pulled it out and I was like what is this, I'm like don't tell me, is this a crank for the car. And he's like you're right, it is.

ASM: And they still had it eh?

LU: Yeah.

ASM: Wow.

LU: Yeah we still have it so I'm going to try to put it out on display this weekend.

ASM: Isn't that something. Yeah, that's amazing.

LU: Did your father's car have the big crank in the front?

ASM: Yep, yep he had the crank.

LU: I find that really remarkable.

ASM: And the thing I looked forward to every Saturday – we used to go into town which was five miles away to do shopping and then when I got old enough I used to go to the movies with my sister, Grace. We used to – every Saturday – I don't know Nellie didn't care for movies at the time but I used to go with my sister Grace and we used to always go to the movies on Saturday and I'd look forward all week for that you know. Cause I remember when Shirley Temple movies were playing. You ever heard of Shirley Temple?

LU: Oh yeah.

ASM: Well I was young at that time too and we used to really look forward to seeing her movies and there was movies like Jeanette MacDonald, Nelson Eddy and people like that you know.

LU: You don't see movies like that anymore.

ASM: No, no.

LU: Oh wow.

ASM: But it was nice though, a nice place to grow up, very quiet.

LU: How much would it cost to go to the movies?

ASM: Oh I think ten cents that'd cost. I remember I think for a Matinée it was ten cents at night it might have been a bit more, I guess it would have been about twenty cents or so probably.

LU: Did they have popcorn or candy and soft drinks?

ASM: No, we didn't have those in those days. We didn't buy popcorn or candy in the movies, no.

LU: But they had them there?

ASM: Oh yes but I don't think they sold it in the movies at that time. I don't remember, no I don't think so. No, we just went to the movie.

LU: Would the movies be later on in the afternoon or in the evening.

ASM: We went in the evening yes, from seven to nine.

LU: So how would you get home after the movie?

ASM: Well, my dad used to wait for us.

LU: He would wait for you?

ASM: Well, my dad and mom we'd all go into town to do shopping and then my sister and I would sneak off to the movie or, you know, they'd know that we went to the movie and then they'd wait for us. And it was a ritual – and then these other friends – Hikichi's used to live there and every Saturday they used to come too and go shopping and then they used to meet and just chat until we came out of the movie. You know they would meet just to visit. But yeah that was our ritual on Saturdays. My dad – we'd go and shop, he'd buy the meat, fresh meat, things that we needed, flour and stuff like that you know.

LU: How about clothes or shoes, would you make a lot of those or would you buy them from the stores?

ASM: We bought them. I only had a pair at the time, a pair of shoes at a time and when it wore out I'd get another pair. And my mother would sew a bit but not that much but basically we would buy our clothes but not that many. We didn't have much in those days but nobody did, you know. You had one winter coat, one pair of

shoes, one pair of boots and stuff like that. And when you wore out you'd get another one. [And we'd like to do it?] Kids are so spoiled today you know.

[20 Minutes]

LU: Oh I know. My sister has about five pairs of boots at home and they're all over the place.

ASM: I know. It's terrible.

LU: I only have one but- [Laughter]

ASM: Ones enough, you only need one at a time yeah.

LU: That's right. What about on Sunday's what would you do on Sunday's?

ASM: Sunday's we would usually visit. Like we would visit our friends Hikichi's - we had two good friends at that time Hikichi's and Esabu's. And they would visit us or we would visit them. Well sometimes we would just help in the garden you know.

LU: Oh wow. And I guess your father would work every day of the week being on the farm?

ASM: Oh yes he did. Yeah I guess the only day he got off was Sunday I think, had Sunday off.

LU: And would your family ever go to church or were they religious at all.

ASM: Well just, no not religious but my parents were Buddhists and we used to go into town, into Vernon to go to the - they used to go church, when the minister came from another town. See the minister was basically in Kelowna, the Buddhist, oh he wasn't the Buddhist minister - oh we didn't have a Buddhist minister at that time not when I was growing up no.

LU: Oh.

ASM: But when they did have ministers come by we would go to I think the Japanese community hall they had it.

LU: Oh, they had a Japanese community hall? Oh, in Vernon?

ASM: In Vernon, yes.

LU: Was this built before the war or after the war?

ASM: Before the war yes. The Japanese farmers in Vernon - well there was quite a few more people in Vernon, they built the Japanese community hall. That's where a lot of the functions were, like Christmas, New years we'd go there for celebration.

LU: How many people would come to the Japanese hall?

ASM: Oh Mostly people in the vicinity. There may have been about a dozen people that lived in Vernon, more than a dozen I think maybe - families.

LU: Oh wow.

ASM: And the whole community would meet there. It was nice.

LU: Would they only meet on special occasions? Or every week?

ASM: Generally on special occasions. Oh and then they'd try having - teaching Japanese school at that community hall when I was quite young but we didn't go regularly because we were too far away you know like my dad would have to take us there. So we didn't go regularly.

LU: And when you're at home did your parents learn English or did they mostly speak Japanese?

ASM: They spoke but mostly Japanese, but my father taught himself English so he could read the newspaper. He was amazing you know. And then so he became naturalized also in 1907 or something when nobody, no other Japanese were naturalized, I don't know why. And then also later on he tried to teach himself French, and he kept a French diary. I didn't even – I didn't even learn French but he was amazing. But he learned to – he taught himself English and was able to read the newspaper and converse enough in English.

LU: Did anyone help him or how did he?

ASM: No, he just picked it up on his own I think.

LU: Wow. And when did he come from Japan?

ASM: Oh he came 19 – see that book there that gives his story [points off camera], that blue book there. [Lisa hands Alma a book] Or that piece of paper that you moved aside I think that gives his story too, that was the write up that they took it from. [Alma flips through the book] Oh here it is, yeah. See this is my father and mother [shows the book to Lisa, it is out of frame].

LU: Oh this one here?

ASM: This is my father and mother and my brother Melvin.

LU: Oh wow.

ASM: See this is a book that was made for the people in the Okanagan in 1994. But there's bits and pieces. See this was used to advertise and that me in that little one there.

LU: Oh my goodness.

ASM: See Coldstream.

[25 Minutes]

ASM: Okay my dad it says born in Hiroshima, Japan. And 1896 went to Hawaii where he worked in the sawmills for about four years. He immigrated to Canada in 1900 and worked for a time fishing boats along the BC coast and then proceeded inland working various jobs including CP Railway between [ Sigmund Rails? ], East Kelowna Orchards and the [unclear] irrigation district. Became naturalized citizen while living [unclear] in 1907.

LU: Wow. That's really neat. What was this one for again?

ASM: This book was published by – it's the Kelowna – it's the Okanagan in the 19 – Historical sketch of Central Okanagan Japanese Canadian families and that was in 1994.

LU: Wow.

ASM: So that's our Model T car.

LU: Oh isn't that neat.

ASM: During the war – yeah, during the war years it was nice to meet all these people. The only thing at the time, when I was young, I felt we were – it was when I turned 16 I go to the RCMP and register and had my fingerprints taken and have a picture. Did you hear of anyone having to do that?

LU: Yeah but they didn't really talk about it. No.

ASM: No, it was just something that we did you know that was different and if we wanted to go anywhere like when – from a few years in I went to Montreal because I

couldn't get a decent job in Vernon except domestic you know. And then we had to get permission to travel. That was the only restriction I found at the time other than that we were treated well you know by friends and by the RCMP and everyone.

LU: Who would you have to receive permission from, go to the RCMP office?

ASM: Yes, I don't know, I guess they wanted to know where we were travelling. It was sort of considered enemy aliens at the time, you probably heard that eh. You know isn't that silly, but anyways that's what we went through. But other than that we weren't treated badly I don't think.

LU: When you went to get your card made was there a long lineup?

ASM: No no, no there wasn't. I've got a copy - I'll show you mine after.

LU: Well, we can look after okay.

ASM: No there wasn't. It was cause- it's just when you turn when you turn 16, prior to that everyone who was older probably had their picture and fingerprints taken. But when we turned 16 - I didn't - so when I turned 16 I remember having to do that.

LU: And did you have to go get your picture taken first and bring the photograph in.

ASM: I think we had to supply our own picture at the time, if I remember.

LU: Oh wow, that's kind of silly. [Laughter] And what about your mother, did she come - was she married first and then came over with your father.

ASM: No, he called her over and she came over after and they got married in Victoria. You know they had what you call picture brides. But they had known - the family had known each other in Hiroshima before. But its still- when she grew up it was arranged, that's how it was.

LU: So is that where your father's family and I guess your mother's family is from, is Hiroshima?

ASM: Yes they are both from Hiroshima, on my side of the family yeah.

LU: Were your parents families' farmers or?

ASM: Yes.

LU: Do you know what kind of farming they would do.

ASM: Well they worked in the apple orchards, we did apple orchards.

LU: Oh in Japan?

ASM: Oh in japan. My mother said her father was a carpenter. Her father was a carpenter I remember her saying.

LU: Did she come from a big family?

ASM: Quite a few but I don't know exactly how many there were in the family.

LU: Was she maybe one of the younger siblings or older siblings.

ASM: Older, one of the older. So, years later I forget how many years ago. Year was 1980 sometime - when my husband and I went to Japan we saw her younger sister. Met one of her younger sisters in Hiroshima, yes. She had a store at the time you know a little grocery store.

LU: Oh isn't that neat.

[30 Minutes]

LU: Hmm, just seeing if the mic is picking up sound.

ASM: Oh you can shut that window.

LU: Oh okay.

ASM: Shut the window.

LU: Close it there. [Sound of window closing in the background] Wonderful.

ASM: And you know like we didn't have to relocate but then at the time of the war when the war broke out my brother was in – my brother was twenty two and he was working a wood slabber. Well he was not allowed to go home, whereas a lot of people had to go elsewhere ehh, you know like my husband he had to go to roadcamp and – but my brother was able to come back to Vernon because we were there and then my sister had just gotten married to a fellow from Ganges Salt Spring Island and the month before she had got married – so she, they had to leave their home and go to Hastings park and then they went on to sugar beets in Alberta because you know as a family you could go to sugar beet. She didn't realize how hard the work would be there. I guess you've heard the stories of people at sugar beet.

LU: I've heard a little. Does she ever talk to you about the sugar beets?

ASM: They say it was very back breaking, oh it's horrible. Well my husband's family also went to sugar beets after, during the war. And they say it's the hardest life you know because the sugar beets would be so heavy and they'd harvest that and it was so cold and everything. And they'd be back breaking and oh it was so terrible, so my sister could only take it one year. I know Seb's Family they did it for a few years but my sister couldn't take it, so they went to work on a dairy farm for a while in Alberta after that. And then as soon as they could they went on to Montreal.

LU: And did they stay in Montreal?

ASM: Yes, then they lived in Montreal for, oh, years after. And he was a photographer so he had photo studios eventually, he had two photo studios in Montreal. And then eventually because of the political situation in Quebec they moved back to Vancouver. And they're still there today, but they're both in very frail health because well my brother in law is 90 and my sister is 88 going on 89 and they're both in very poor health but they're still living, they're still living.

LU: Long lives though. That's what I've noticed, Japanese people live a very long time.

ASM: Some of them do yes, some too long you know. [Laughter] But you know. It's too bad that a lot of Japanese lost their properties and personal effects, you know valuable things. But in the long run for a lot of us it was a blessing in disguise because otherwise I'd be stuck in Vernon, I don't know, you know. And anyway most of us have come east and been able to pursue our hobbies or vocations that we wanted and have become quite successful out here. So, do you find most people have done better by moving out east?

LU: That's what most people say, is that they've had a better life after moving out east, they really had. But then some people say too that they probably would have moved out east regardless of whether they were forced to or not so, because they were interested in learning about Toronto and Ontario. So they would have tried to come out here but- Maybe their reaction would have been different and they would have went back home, you never know.

ASM: Yes that's right. Well I think the reason like I came too is because by the time - we made some good friends when the people came through and when they all

started moving out east, you know I didn't want to stay behind. Not only that I'd only do domestic work but you know I felt that I wanted to come out east too and so I lived with my sister in Montreal. And then my other sister, she and her husband moved to Toronto and then later on my husband and I – well my [boyf-]. I'd gone out with Seb in Vernon briefly but not that long but then after years when I was in Montreal and he was in Leamington, we got together again and got married.

LU: Did you stay in contact when you had left Vernon to go to Montreal?

ASM: No, just briefly. Not right through. We sort of went our own ways and had our own boyfriend, girlfriends you know. In between and then we got together again.

[35 Minutes]

LU: So when did you get married?

ASM: 1952 so we've been married now more than 58 years, about 58 years. That's a long time.

LU: It is a long time.

ASM: Are your parents still living?

LU: Yes, yes and my grandparents are still living.

ASM: Oh how old are they?

LU: My Jiichan is early 80's I think, maybe 82.

ASM: We'll have to ask Seb if that's him after.

LU: Well have to ask and see. And then my grandmother is a few years younger, so she's still in her 70's.

ASM: oh wow, your grandparents are younger than we are.

LU: Yeah [Laughter]

ASM: Well your parents will still be young then.

LU: Yes, my father is only 47. Yes, so he's young

ASM: And where did they – Is he Japanese, he's Japanese of course.

LU: Yes, he's Japanese.

ASM: Oh yes that's right. Now, Mike was your uncle?

LU: Yes.

ASM: Oh we know Mike. How's Alice?

LU: She's good, she's been keeping together. We haven't had too much communication with her lately. We've been so busy and she's been trying to resettle.

ASM: Oh where is she? Did she move somewhere?

LU: No, she's just trying to get everything back in order again.

ASM: Does she still live in a house?

LU: I think so, Yeah. As far as I know.

ASM: Good for her. Yeah we knew Mike and Alice. And your father is which one?

LU: Mark. Yeah, it's Tosh's son. So Tosh and Mike were brothers

ASM: Oh okay.

LU: And Tosh is my Jichaan.

ASM: Oh okay, yeah. And where are they now?

LU: They are still here in Toronto, they live by Bloor Street. And they're always around, they're you know.

ASM: Do they still live in a house?

LU: Uh huh.

ASM: Yeah, were debating what to do about - you know we figure we're going to live here as long as we can I think. Because you know my husband likes to putter around and he said we had our name in Momiji for years because Jerry used to work there. And she said you better put your name in and cause the waiting list at that time, 8 years - it's beyond 8 years since we put our name in but were just not ready to go yet even. But at least if we had to go I guess at least our names are in there, although we'd still have to wait. But my husband doesn't want to go there, he says ah there's nothing for him to do. The women seem to like it but the men don't.

LU: Yeah, yes. Well because everybody's there, you can socialize and get together with everyone. Momiji is really beautiful, I love going there.

ASM: Do you know Sandy Miike?

LU: No.

ASM: She's Chairman of the board there now.

LU: Ah, okay. No I haven't met everyone there yet.

ASM: She's our niece too.

LU: Oh is she?

ASM: We have so many relatives.

LU: You do. [Laughter]

ASM: And at one time, Seb's brother and two sisters were at Momiji. But they've all gone now, you know passed away.

LU: So does Seb come from a family of four?

ASM: Family of eight.

LU: Eight, wow.

ASM: He had a sister in Japan and he had two brother and the rest were sisters, here. He's the youngest and he's the only one left now.

LU: Oh wow. How come the sister in Japan, was in Japan?

ASM: Well you know way back then, the Japanese often left one there to be educated in Japan. I guess thinking they'd go back to Japan. And she was left in Japan to be educated and then she never did come here to live but years later we all tipped in for her to come and visit us. So she'd been here to visit us about three times through the years, well she's since passed on too but she was left there to be educated. But she had a hard life there too, because apparently her step father or something wasn't very nice you know and then she was married to an alcoholic at one time. She had a hard life over there but then eventually she - when she was alone. And she's a very religious person, you know she had a good life after. Yeah we visited her there about three times.

LU: Oh wow. What was your first trip to Japan like and when was it?

ASM: I think our first trip was about thirty years ago. So how many - what would that be? 1980, yeah about 1980 we went for our first time. And as a matter of fact we stayed with Jerry Housage- George and Jerry at the time. You know I mean, we went there and they happened to be there so we visited them one night like stayed there the one night. That was our first trip, oh we loved it. Went to Tokyo and then our second trip I think we went to Hiroshima, visit Hiroshima.

[40 Minutes]

LU: Oh wow.

ASM: Have you been to Japan? Oh it's a beautiful – you'll have to go – It's a beautiful place but overcrowded, oh my god. You go in – Tokyo – if you go to a department store when it opens you should see they're all lined up to greet you, it's something to see.

LU: Really?

ASM: Yeah, they're all – it's so neat. You walk in the door and all the sales people are lined up to greet you – you walk through. It's something to see you know, it's beautiful yeah.

LU: Oh wow. What was it like going to Japan? Were you able to communicate with anybody there?

ASM: Not really, see we don't – at least I don't speak Japanese. You see, speak a little bit and they come back and they expect you to know everything. Our Japanese – so limited we got better by just not – pretending we didn't know anything. But we managed because – uh how did we manage now? Well sometimes we'd go with his sister shopping but we managed somehow you know, yeah.

LU: Yeah.

ASM: I think some of them spoke English at the time over there too, they were starting to speak English.

LU: So when you were growing up at home, would you speak Japanese to your parents or English?

ASM: Yes surprisingly we did, in our broken Japanese. But yes I could speak Japanese to them. And even in Hiroshima – when I went to Hiroshima, yes I could understand what they were saying but I went – when we went to Kumamoto, their dialect is so different I couldn't understand what they were saying. Isn't that funny, different dialects.

LU: Yeah.

ASM: But Hiroshima, it was just like my parents talking. So one time we were in a cab, and we were going and this cab driver was talking to my I think – she was talking to somebody and so we weren't even there my husband and I weren't even there but I could understand what they were saying. You know.

LU: Isn't that funny.

ASM: Yeah, it was so funny. They were talking about us, saying “aren't they funny that they don't speak Japanese” or something like that you know, in Japanese.

LU: [Laughter] Oh wow.

ASM: It was quite an experience.

LU: And does Seb speak Japanese or understand a little bit?

ASM: Oh yes he can speak Japanese quite well, actually.

LU: And where was his family from?

ASM: From Marpole.

LU: Marpole, oh.

ASM: Oh and originally from Kumamoto. His parents were from Kumamoto.

LU: So, could he understand the Kumamoto dialect when you went?

ASM: No, he had trouble understanding them too because they had a strange, they have a strange accent or dialect.

LU: Oh wow. I find it so fascinating that even though everybody is speaking Japanese you might not be able to understand one another.

ASM: That's right, yeah. I have trouble understanding a lot of Japanese even here. You know because my - it's limited, my Japanese is so limited.

LU: I don't speak any, no. Our grandparents don't speak, speak any either.

ASM: No, they wouldn't. Because they're our generation eh. Isn't that funny. And Linda and Vern they don't speak any Japanese, they're our children you know.

LU: [Laughter] Oh wow. So when you moved to Montreal to go live with your sister, did your parents stay in Vernon?

ASM: Oh yes, they stayed there.

LU: Oh, did they eventually move out east or did they stay there for the rest of their lives.

ASM: No. They eventually, they did at one point moved to Montreal briefly. But they moved back to the Okanagan, they just went there for a while.

LU: And when did they pass away?

ASM: Well my father passed away in - It's a good thing I got these notes here. He passed away in 1967 and then mum moved to Kelowna in '71 and passed away in 1982.

LU: Oh wow.

ASM: My father was eighty I think the time he passed away and my mother was eighty three, I remember that much. And then my brother passed away when he was only sixty three.

LU: Oh. That's so young.

[45 Minutes]

ASM: That was young, he died of an aneurism in his aorta.

LU: Oh.

ASM: An aneurism if it bursts, that's it.

LU: Oh wow. And do you know when your parents got married and or when your had mother come over?

ASM: Yeah, it says: In 1917, about 1917 Dad - Mr. Kawano married Hatsuyo Tanaka who was from Hiroshima too. And they moved to Coldstream Ranch near Vernon in 1918 and remained and employed in there for then next thirty years while at Coldstream Ranch. Coldstream Ranch, yeah.

LU: Oh wow. [Laughter] And where did you work? So, you came out to Montreal and lived with your sister and what were you doing then?

ASM: Well then, I got a job in a place called Canadian Consolidation Agencies which was a wholesaler for cosmetics. And then while there I met a man who was a bookkeeper, he told me "oh you should go work for the government" because apparently he used to work at the government, at one time. And so I tried out for the Government, Federal Government for air services and I got a job there. And I worked there until I got married in 1952. I was only there a few years though, I think I moved out in about 1948 or something to Montreal. So I worked basically from '49 to '52 for these air services at the airport, they moved you to the airport. That was a nice job and then - so when I came to Toronto - I had to leave because my mother

was very sick at the time. So I – she had to have an operation, and so I left before I was getting married. I was engaged at the time and getting married the following year '52 but I left Montreal to go home and look after my mother who had this ulcer, three quarters of her stomach removed. So, I went home and looked after her and then when she got better we came to Toronto and I got married in 1952. But, what was I going to say now?

LU: Where you were working.

ASM: Oh yeah. So I had to quit that job then. So when after I married, I thought I'd try somewhere else, so I tried and got a job at a place modelling shoe. I didn't like it, you know I didn't like the job because I was all by myself. And so I quit that before I got really started which was a good thing and I got a job back with the air services, the government department of transport. And this time with air regulations, where they investigate aircraft accidents. You know when there's an aircraft accident they have to go and investigate, that was quite interesting. So I worked there until I got pregnant with Linda and at the time, that time we couldn't continue working if we were pregnant. You wouldn't believe that was in 1963. Yeah, we couldn't get maternity leave or anything. We just had to quit. So I quit working in 1963 or prior to 1963 and then after I was able to work again I went to work for the city of Etobicoke which is just over here and I had a nice job there, just across the highway there is the city of Etobicoke. And that's where I worked until I retired in 1991.

LU: Oh wow. [Laughter]

ASM: So, it was a good place to work. It's good to work for, you get a good pension you know.

LU: And what was it like when you left Vernon to go to Montreal and then to come to Toronto? You know what was the reaction of the people around here, were they okay with Japanese people coming and working?

ASM: Oh yeah, they were. That's the nice part of it, I don't think anybody's met any discrimination out here or at least I didn't. They were very nice, people were very nice. And you know, you weren't discriminated against for getting jobs or anything. And most of us were quite happy I think.

LU: Oh wow.

ASM: People have been very nice you know, friends have been – Hakujin people have been very nice to us.

LU: What about Seb? You mentioned that he was in the road camps.

ASM: Yeah he went, well he was 17 at the time because he was 2 year older than me when the war broke out. And then the young men had to go to road camps if you were a certain age and so his two older brothers were going to road camps so he went with them. I think he just turned – he was just old enough to go, he didn't want to be left behind I don't think. Cause the mothers and the wives now had to go – they went to ghost towns eh, they went to Slocan. But he went to road camp with his brothers.

[50 Minutes]

LU: That's right.

ASM: So he went to Salsqua and uh Three Rivers and I forget the other place anyways. He went to road camp, that's where those pictures are taken.

LU: And where was he originally from?

ASM: Marpole.

LU: Marpole, oh yeah that's right.

ASM: Outside of Vancouver.

LU: Oh wow.

ASM: But yeah. Then after road camp he came to Vernon to work at a saw mill, and that's where I met him. My brother came home too and worked at Summercall and Lumby, BC. Well Lumby is only about 16 miles from Coldstream. So that's where some Japanese came to work, Japanese men came to work in the saw mill there for a few years. And then after that, like ah – I guess at the time Seb's family decided they should go to Alberta because it can stay together. So then he joined the family, went to Alberta and then from there went to Leamington and then to Toronto.

LU: So Seb had to work on the sugar beet farms?

ASM: Pardon?

LU: So Seb worked on the sugar beets?

ASM: Yeah, yes he did. Yeah they had a hard time. And they said it was such hard work you know. And cold back breaking work, you see they say sugar beets would be pilled up with dirt you know and they'd have to shake it off and it'd be so cold and you know. And then I don't know, must have been a horrible life because they'd wake up in the morning and the water would be frozen in the – because they just lived in shacks eh, in the sugar beet places. I don't think the houses were insulated very well. They'd wake and the water would be all frozen and I think they had a horrible life in those days.

LU: Oh my goodness. That's very tough.

ASM: Now how about your parents, where did they have to go?

LU: They went to Lemon Creek. Yeah.

ASM: Oh, Lemon Creek. And then from there?

LU: And then from there I believe. Well my, I don't know because my baachan's family. They, for some reason I want to say they went to the farms for a little while but I think that was down in Ontario. They left Lemon Creek and went to the farms in Ontario first and then came to Toronto. But she won't really talk about it.

ASM: Oh well, you need to document their story.

LU: I know, I know! Well I did Jichaan's story and he was originally from Steveston and then they went to Lemon Creek and then he came out here and started working. So yeah, yeah.

ASM: Have you spoke to any people who've gone back to Japan?

LU: Only a couple. Yeah.

ASM: Have you been able to get them to talk?

LU: Kind of. Some of them are pretty hesitant about talking. But there's gonna be some going to be coming to the conference, so I'm looking forward to that. But um, yeah unfortunately it was really hard for them to go back to Japan and nobody wanted them there and everyone treated them poorly for coming home, so it wasn't very welcoming. So, they don't like to remember it.

ASM: Well talking about Lemon Creek. I think Kiyoshi Ito, have you heard of him?

LU: No.

ASM: I think, well he went back to Japan and he married a nice girl and they've been friends of ours for all of these years. He would be one if he'd be willing to talk.

LU: Oh we'll have to ask him.

ASM: Yeah, Kiyoshi Ito.

LU: Oh wow.

ASM: But I don't know. See some people are hesitant to talk, especially like my husband. Have you had trouble with some people?

LU: Yes, Yeah. It's about 50/50. Some people don't mind talking and some people do not want to talk. So, yeah.

ASM: I know.

LU: That's our biggest problem right now is that, you know all the younger generations like myself, the yonsei's and now there's gosei's around and they're starting to wonder. You know what their Japanese heritage is like, and yeah so it's hard for us to get the answers right now, so.

ASM: Yeah, that's why like a few – several years ago when I was still able to write. I wrote a story for the grandkids to look at.

LU: Oh.

[55 minutes]

ASM: This one, but Seb doesn't want – See I just want to leave a story for them and this maybe your parents can do too, something like this. That's Seb's on the- briefly. But don't bother reading it now because it will take up time. But he doesn't want me to, he says he doesn't want his name mentioned [laughs].

LU: Oh wow, see that's wonderful.

ASM: And then you know, it's just to leave something for our grandkids.

LU: Yeah, oh and then this is yours.

ASM: I basically did that for them. Cause they like - it's nice for them to have a history of your health, you know.

LU: Yeah, that's right. Especially when you're trying to look at family history too. Oh that's wonderful, your kids are lucky.

ASM: Anyway that's – yeah we – and when we worked for the airline we were lucky we were able to travel a lot, you know. Well when we went to Japan though, each time I think we paid a little bit so that we wouldn't get stuck there, we went on when there was a special package deal. And in Hawaii when we used to go to Hawaii only one time we got sort of stuck and had to go back to the hotel. So we – but we haven't been there for years. We used to go every year for a while.

LU: Wow.

ASM: We haven't been for years because now it's hard coming back. You know like, going it seems to be easy to get on but coming back we'd have trouble getting a flight. So now we - then the last few years we started going to Vegas instead. But we paid on our own because one time we were going to Vegas and went on our pass, we were stuck at the airport the whole day.

LU: Oh no.

ASM: You know, we go in the morning then they'd – you list yourself but then it would book up and then you'd have to wait. Finally we got there 8'o clock at night and we thought no, it's too – you know were too old to be doing this. So, the last few years that we went we would just pay our own way. Which is fine because it's not too expensive to go to Vegas if you go with a package deal you know. But the last couple of years we haven't gone.

LU: Oh wow. Did you ever notice that there's lots of Japanese people in Hawaii?

ASM: Oh yes. There are, yeah. Have you been to Hawaii?

LU: Yes, I went once. I went for school.

ASM: Yeah, it's beautiful. So many – it's almost as though you're in Japan I think, so many Japanese there.

LU: Yeah. I would walk around and people would think I was local and that I belonged there and they'd ask me for directions and I'm like I really don't know.

ASM: Where did you stay, do you remember?

LU: We stayed on the main island. Or- yeah the main island. So, we were up on North Kohala which is the very northern tip of the big big island.

ASM: O'ahu? Of O'ahu?

LU: No Hawaii island.

ASM: Oh you went to the big island. Oh the big island, oh the big island. Oh you didn't go to Honolulu then?

LU: No, we did afterwards. Yep, we took a trip over only for five days I was there but. Spent the rest of the summer digging in the dirt for archaeology.

ASM: Oh is that what you took, in school?

LU: Yeah, yeah.

ASM: Oh did you. So are you still into that at all, are you gonna pursue that.

LU: Well I don't know if I'll pursue archaeology going out and digging anymore but I'm still going to pursue the history as well, so yeah.

ASM: Oh so, are you working now other than the center?

LU: No, just at the center. Just going to pause that there while we talk about me. Just at the center is where I'm working now, so yeah.

ASM: Oh I see. Well that's good.

LU: Yeah that's what were doing and still going to school, going back and forth.

ASM: Were you hired just to do this project?

LU: Yes, yes that's right.

ASM: Oh, I see.

LU: So it's my full time job to collect as many interviews as possible and I believe you're my 40<sup>th</sup> interview, 39<sup>th</sup> or 40<sup>th</sup> so far.

ASM: Oh is that right?

LU: Yeah, since May is when I started.

ASM: Well what was it, about 60, did you not collect about 60 or something.

LU: Yes, in total. There was 25 interviews completed before I started.

ASM: Oh okay, ah okay, I See.

LU: Yeah, so now were over 60.

ASM: And how do you find the interviews? Like most of them are people that went to ghost towns are they? Most of them.

LU: Yeah. It's hard to find stories that are different. Um, like each story is different on its own and everybody's memories are completely unique. Um, so you're always hearing something new that's for sure. But a lot of similar places like Tashme or Slocan City and it's hard to find the people who didn't have to go to the internment camps or that were out in Ontario during the war years.

[60 Minutes]

ASM: Have you spoke to any of them, anyone else?

LU: I know Ms. Sumi Uno, who is at um – she's part of Wynford Seniors. She was in Ontario in 1942 I believe.

ASM: Oh I see.

LU: So I've been trying to get a hold of her to do an interview and she's a busy lady, so. [Laughter] But other than that, nobody else.

ASM: Nobody else?

LU: No, no. And I have an interview with Setsuko Thurlow. She was a Hiroshima survivor.

ASM: Yes, yes.

LU: Yeah.

ASM: Oh well that's good. Where is she now?

LU: She's now in North York, North York, close to the center.

ASM: Oh, she'd be a good person to interview wouldn't she?

LU: Yeah, yeah. No that'd be interesting.

AMS: Oh, when do you see her?

LU: A couple weeks, in a couple of weeks. Yeah, she should have a really nice story. Well I don't know if it will be a nice story but an interesting story.

ASM: Yes, yes.

LU: Something different. It's hard to get a hold of people and to sit them down and ask them to spend an hour or two with me, so.

ASM: Yeah I know, it would be yeah.

LU: Um, was there anything else that you wanted to include with it or any other stories that you can remember?

ASM: No. Is there anything else you'd like to ask me?

LU: I can't think of anything. Oh, were you part of redress at all? Or what do you remember about redress?

ASM: Oh yes, I got my 25 - no 23 thousand each, something. Yes I got it.

LU: Oh good.

ASM: Yes, that's how far- At first, I didn't like the idea of asking for that money but in the long run I guess we all benefitted you know.

LU: And how long have you been participating at the center for? And coming to the center?

ASM: Oh not that long, like we don't go very often. It's only Seb happened to notice that George was speaking and so he – you know, we went that day. But normally we don't go that often. But we will be going tomorrow and the following day.

LU: Oh I'll be there, you'll have to look for me. I'll be running around like a chicken with my head cut off I'm sure.

ASM: What do you have to do there?

LU: Oh um. Try and help set up for the reunion and then on – and promote the conference too and ask people to register for the conference, so yeah.

ASM: Ah, okay yeah.

LU: Well thank you very much.

ASM: I hope I helped you a little bit.

LU: Oh, yes of course. Yeah. Really interesting stories.

ASM: Thank you.

LU: Nobody else really knows – you know lived in Vernon at the time and didn't have to move out and, you know, it's a different experience.

ASM: Well we thought it would be a different perspective. All these people coming through. And we made some nice lifelong friends there you know when they came through.

LU: Yeah, that's wonderful. Well, thank you.

ASM: Oh, you're welcome.

LU: So, you'll get a copy of this one here as well and you can show your children and I'm sure they're – your daughter seems like really interested.

**[End of interview]**