

Interviewee: Roy Akira Nagamatsu
Interviewer: Lisa Uyeda
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PROJECT

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THE JAPANESE CANADIAN LEGACY PROJECT

Lisa Uyeda: Wonderful, so today is November 11th, 2010, and this is an interview with Roy, and Roy, would you please start off by telling us where you were born and when you were born.

Roy Akira Nagamatsu: I was born September the 15th, 1923 in Pitt Meadows, BC, which is now a part of the Maple Ridge region. And we're actually only 30 minutes from Vancouver.

LU: 30 minutes, oh?

RN: By auto, yes.

LU: Is that- so is it north, or?

RN: I think it's from the east.

LU: The east.

RN: Actually, a lot of people use Pitt Meadows now as a suburb of Vancouver. That they live in Pitt Meadows but commute to Vancouver.

LU: Oh, so it would be like Mississauga to Toronto.

RN: Yes, it's only half an hour.

LU: Oh wow.

RN: [You take the highway?] and you cross the river and you're there.

LU: And did you grow up in Pitt Meadows, BC?

RN: Yes, yes, I grew up there, I grew up there. Now it's 87 years ago.

LU: And do you remember going to school?

RN: Yes, I went to school in Pitt Meadows, but we only had up to grade nine in Pitt Meadows, and then for high school you had to go to Maple Ridge. They- we were bused to Maple Ridge.

LU: Is Maple Ridge in Vancouver?

RN: No, Maple Ridge is Pitt Meadows, [Hammond?] and [Haney?] that constitutes Maple Ridge.

LU: Oh, ok.

RN: [Before we were all separated?]

LU: So before, when you went to elementary school in Pitt Meadows, was it called Pitt Meadows school, or? Do you remember the name?

RN: Well, we had the had the certain grades at different locations. We had about, I think, three locations and then after that grade nine, after then you had to go to high school in Haney or Maple Ridge.

LU: Oh. And what do you remember about your school days?

RN: Oh, it was- 'cause I loved sports, and I loved to play, the best time of the day was recess, that's all. And I was quite popular with the people and I was quite good at things so I managed quite well, I enjoyed school.

LU: What were some of your favourite sports?

RN: We played softball, and lacrosse, and basketball, but that's only- we were only a small town, so we had to have any real competition, sometimes it came to New Westminster, to the big arena, and that was really interesting.

LU: Ah.

RN: That's where the big lacrosse playing teams played.

LU: Did you ever win?

RN: No

LU: [laughs]

RN: Well, yes, yes, but we didn't have a good team because we didn't have as many teammates. Our group was smaller, but we had some good players.

LU: Oh wow. [laughs] And growing up, did you have any siblings as well?

RN: Siblings, yes, I've got five sisters and three brothers. So actually, there is nine of us in the family. Nine of us in the family.

LU: That's a big family

RN: Now there's only four of us left. Five of them are gone.

LU: So, who's the oldest?

RN: I'm the oldest now.

LU: You're the oldest?

RN: I was right in the middle, but now I'm the oldest.

LU: Now you're the oldest, mhm hm. Who was the oldest?

RN: My- two of my, my brother. No, my sister, I had two sisters who were the oldest. And they're both gone within the last couple years.

LU: Mhm. So, what was the age range between them? When was your first sister born?

RN: She was 94, so I don't know what years that would be, but she was 94. The other one was two years younger. And then my two older brothers came into it, and then me, and then all the others are younger than me.

LU: Oh. When did your oldest sister pass away?

RN: she passed away two years ago in Vernon, BC.

LU: Oh, okay.

RN: And then my other sister, she died last year or the year before in Oakville.

LU: Oh, in Oakville.

RN: Yes.

LU: Oh.

RN: Yeah. My brother died about four, five years ago in Hamilton. My next brother, the brother just above me, him and I were very close.

[5 minutes]

RN: Just after the war, 1949, I think, after the war finished, they were living with the family in Vernon, and he was working in a logging company in Lumby, BC, just

outside of Vernon and he was having lunch, he finished his lunch, and then he was drinking water and a truck came by, so he said, "Listen, I'll help you unload," and lo and behold, he released something and a log hit him right in the head and just smashed him.

LU: Oh.

RN: Smashed him. Smashed his head. You couldn't even see him, when I went to help with the funeral, they wouldn't even let me see him because he was so badly [unclear]. His head was so badly damaged.

LU: And that was in Vernon.

RN: 1949. Yes.

LU: Were there lots of accidents like that?

RN: There were quite a few. Because most of the jobs are in logging or saw mills, so there were, I know, there were quite a few accidents. I know somebody in Thunder Bay, he got killed cutting logs. This happens quite regularly because this was the main occupation. Other than- they weren't farming anymore, they couldn't farm anymore, so they went to saw mills or whatever.

LU: Mhm hmm. Oh, wow. So, was your brother buried in Vernon, BC?

RN: Yes, he's buried there, and I tried to have him exhumed and all that, but the formalities are just- that I have to go through are so extensive that I just dropped it because my nephews are still living in Vernon, so hopefully they'll look after it.

LU: Mhm. Hmm.

RN: I was going to have it all exhumed and then sell the plot. For the plot, they said they can only pay what we paid for it, so we'd only get 25 dollars. But I'd have to go through Victoria, I'd have to go through all my family to get approval. It's a real extensive process and it becomes quite costly, too. So, I didn't pursue it anymore.

LU: Oh, wow. It was only 25 dollars for the plot at the time?

RN: [nods] At the time. 1949.

LU: Wow.

RN: And that's all they'd reimburse us.

LU: Mhm. Hmm. Oh, wow.

RN: But the approvals you'd have to get from the province of British Columbia, and the province of Ontario, and all that is very extensive. And you also have to get all the complete approval from your siblings. I don't think that's any problem, but-

LU: So, you still have siblings out in Vancouver? Or is it just-

RN: No more. I had a sister in New Westminster. She was married to a Chinese lad, and he died in 1988, and she died in 2005. But she had cancer, and she was sick, she was in the hospital. I visited her in 1992, she was only about 60 pounds, and she couldn't even keep her teeth in, she couldn't eat or anything, so when I left her, I said, "I hope you get well, but I'll pray for you," and I didn't think she'd ever leave the hospital. But lo and behold, the next year I got a phone call saying that she's home. Her legs are weak, and she had [discomfort and?] shingles throughout her body. She did go and survive for 12 years. 12 years at home, and she was happy.

LU: Wow.

RN: Because, you know, when I saw her, 60 pounds, just so frail, she couldn't even keep her teeth in to eat, I thought- I said- I said I had to do everything for her, right. But I guess miracles and prayers do help. I figure that's one prayer that helped.

LU: So, has religion always been a big part of your family? Do you remember growing up with religion?

RN: Our family were all Christians, yeah, United Church. But when I was young, we went to Baptist Church Sunday school and that. Our family was always Christians.

LU: Even your parents?

RN: Yes, they were always United Church [celebrants?].

LU: Mhm, and were they always an active part of the community, or-?

[10 minutes]

RN: Yes. They were, for some reason, my dad was always active, and one of the strong members of the community. So, he lived well, and, you know, we lived well. We didn't have much money, but we were a proud family.

LU: Was it a- It must have been a fairly large house if there was nine children?

RN: Well, homes weren't that big so, naturally, so we doubled up, tripled up, you know, we had to, we had to double up in many cases, and the rooms, the rooms sometimes had two or three beds in it. And we brought a couple of my mother and father's nephews from Japan to help us work, so that we had extra people there, too.

LU: Oh, wow. And was it a farm?

RN: Yes, we grew berries. We had three farms and three homes. They weren't big homes, but they were homes.

LU: So, would you stay mostly at one house? What would you do with the other two?

RN: Yes, yes. Other two- other- Whenever we went to work there, then we would eat there but we never slept there, the home was old. The third one we built for my brother hoping he would get married and live there, but no.

LU: So, what else did you grow, other than berries? Did you have anything else or?

RN: Yes, in the fall. When we cleaned up the patch of strawberries that had to be regrown, we used to grow fields of daikon, and we used to bury it in mounds of dirt, and then we would deliver it to Vancouver during the wintertime because that is where the demand was, in Vancouver. So, I got- I naturally got sick of eating daikon, but I eat it every day, practically, today. [laughs]

LU: [laughs] So, did your family have a truck, then, to deliver?

RN: Well, we bought a brand new small [international?] truck in, 1938, I think it was. But it was a truck, was from Vancouver, that used to come and pick up the berries and pick up the daikon and that. And take it to Vancouver for us. I met the driver here, and he just died last year. Mr. Wakabayashi [?].

LU: That's too bad, and what about growing up on the farm? Were there other Japanese families around in the area?

RN: Yes, naturally we're surrounded by Japanese, by berry pickers, so they're all Japanese. We had Japanese on, Sakamoto on one side, and another family on the other side. I think the Japanese name was Yoshimura [?]. But when they left, when they went to school, it didn't mean anything to the kids but the [god-awful?] Japanese name Gerobatakei [?].

LU: What does that one mean? [laughs]

RN: Means, uh, 'gero' means sex, free sex type of thing. In that land, type of thing. After they went back to Japan and they realized the seriousness of the name they changed it to Higashitani.

LU: Oh. [laughing]

RN: But all the way through school they went through as Gerobatakei [?], and you would never hear that name again.

LU: That was their last name?

RN: That was their last name. That's a real bad name.

LU: Wow. Do you know if they came over from Japan with that last name or?

RN: Yes, they must've, they must've. But when I visited Japan in '96 I phoned them, because I knew where he lived in Yamaguchi, but he said he was too busy. He was about 75, but he said he was still working. But they had changed their name to Higashitani, and his younger brother was living in Vancouver as a fisherman until he died about five years ago.

LU: Oh, wow.

RN: But they were- they were very a crude type of family.

[15 minutes]

LU: Mhmm, what other families were in the area?

RN: There was- It's all Japanese families. There was Satos next to them, and on the corner, there was Iramoto [?]. I think they went back to Japan and they experienced real hardship, and I think said that some of- one of the parents committed suicide because they just couldn't make a go of it in Japan. They thought things would be better when they went back to Japan, eh. And that was before the war, they went back. But things are hard because, when I visit my cousins in Japan, they told me that after the war, things are really, really tough, and they really appreciated what my mother did. My mother sent them clothing and various other things on a regular basis. Otherwise, they said they would have nothing to wear or nothing to do, nothing. With the Americans, when they lost the war to the Americans, they said things are really tough.

LU: What part of Japan were they in?

RN: Kumamoto.

LU: Kumamoto. Is that farther down by-

RN: Kyushu. That's in the southern island, Kyushu.

LU: Mhm. Hmm. Oh, wow

RN: 'Cause we did a couple homestays. We stayed with them two nights when we visited in Japan. Oh, but they- In those days, they were really well off, and they treated us well. We had big dinners and that. And they had nice cars, so they drove us all around. They had brand-new, brand-new homes with the utmost western toiletry and that. And also, they had it split in half, and one side would be the old Japanese floor type of toilet and the other side was the English type, which had heated toilets and everything.

LU: Oh, wow.

RN: It's amazing, I've tried them all, they really work.

LU: [laughs] And was that your first trip to Japan?

RN: Yes, that was my first trip.

LU: What-

RN: And they wanted me to come back but I lost my wife four years ago, so now I'm by myself, so I have no urge to go, but I phone them every year and they come see us again.

LU: What year was that when you went to Japan?

RN: '96

LU: Oh, 1996, oh, I'm thinking it was farther back.

RN: No, no, that's after I retired. I retired in 1988. So I went to Hawai'i, and then we said we want to go see Japan. So, we waited for the tour to come up, and we went to Japan. Same year we went to England. But England we enjoyed the most because historically we know the most about England and we know about the Queen and all that type of thing. We enjoyed England a lot because we went to England, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland.

LU: Oh, wow, just the two of you?

RN: Just the two of us. Well, we went as a group, we went as a group, yeah, so.

LU: Mhm. Hmm. Wow, that's fascinating.

RN: But yeah, England, England is a, almost [a show places?] are castles. And same as in Japan, there's castles and that. They're religious places, mostly.

LU: Mhm. Did you find that there's a lot of variety of religion in Japan? Or is it mostly, what is that?

RN: I found out that, you know, here, the Buddhist Church, and the churches here, they go every Sunday. But in Japan, they never go to church unless it's a funeral or a wedding. They never go on Sundays. They only time they go to church is when there is a funeral, basically.

LU: That's interesting.

RN: I said, "Oh, why don't you people go to church more often?" They said, "This is a custom, we don't go." And yet every time you visit the families, they take you to their family cemetery, and then you have to take a bucket of water, you have to wash, wash the monuments and that. That's every time you visit the cemetery, you have to take some water and wash the monuments clean. But I think there, they don't have much property, so they- Most of the things are cremation there, too, like here. I- my cousin took me to where my mother was born and they had renovated the house, but the people were interested and they showed us the house that, our family house.

[20 minutes]

LU: What did it look like?

RN: Well, it's more modernized because, well, she was born, what, 1894? So she was born a long time ago, and then she had a big family.

LU: Oh, did she?

RN: Her older sister was quite old, and when I visited Japan in '96, the oldest son was 100. He was 100. He died a couple years later. But my mother's youngest son, youngest sister, and we- I phoned, I phone her son all the time because he's my cousin. And she, at the time, she was 102, but she couldn't, she could see, but- she

couldn't speak, so she just sat there, so she come to the dinner table, she sat there she smiled, because, I guess, she recognized us. So, she smiled, she recognized us visitors, so she smiled but- and then she died when she was 104.

LU: Long lives.

RN: Just a couple of years ago.

LU: Wow, that's remarkable. Wow.

RN: And my mother was 92 when she died, and I guess she would've lived longer, except for that she was diabetic and they weren't watching her. She was in a nursing home and I told the administrator, I took everything away from her, candies and wine, everything she had, but every time we went back, she had more. But I told her, I said, "You gotta watch this, and make sure sh doesn't eat any of this stuff, and this stuff," and then I got a call one morning, they said she didn't wake up, so I went to see and she, she was gone. That was 1985 or something.

LU: Oh, so just before you retired.

RN: Yes.

LU: Yeah, mhm. So, what part of Japan was she from?

RN: She's from Kumamoto.

LU: Kumamoto.

RN: We're all from Kumamoto, my father was, too. And I visited the place Tamana Station, my cousin came to take me up, and I stayed at his son's place up at the- he had a brand-new house, and for two nights I stayed there, and then I went to my youngest- my mother's youngest sister's son's house, and he took me around to Mount Aso and various places for one full day. We had a feast there, and then after two days. I went over to my wife's side in the Yamaguchi, which is just across from Kyushu, eh, at the very bottom of Honshu. And we stayed with two families there, two nights each, and that's the most enjoyable thing. They said, "Shall we make bacon and eggs for you?" and we said, "Don't you dare, [laughs] no." I said, "We want to eat what you eat, miso soup, and salt fish, and rice."

LU: That's what they had for breakfast?

RN: That's what we used to have in, most Japanese people used to have, but now, now things have changed a bit, but I said, "No, we'll have the Japanese breakfast that you'll eat." Because they don't know how to fry eggs and that. [laughs]

LU: I'd be worried. [laughs] Oh, wow. So, what do you know about your mother's side of her-?

RN: Well, that's the only side that I really know, because I didn't have time to find my father's side, and I tried to find out if there was anybody in the same area, and strange enough, at the big dinner table we had there was a man, his name was Nagamatsu, and I said, "Are you related to my father?" He said, "No." But- and he was Nagamatsu, and he was married to one of my mother's oldest sister's daughters. But strange enough, his name is Nagamatsu, and he said no, he's not related.

LU: Maybe somehow.

RN: But it's close by, so he said the next time you come, he said, my cousin said, we'll take you over and we'll find out, cause there's got to be some relatives there.

LU: Mhm hmm, yeah, certainly.

RN: Because two of my father's nephews, they came over to Canada to work, and they both died over here.

[25 minutes]

LU: Oh, really?

RN: My mother's nephew came over here, too, but he was right in the middle of the family, and he worked, he was a very nice fellow, he worked hard, but, you know, they found it very lonely. So, naturally, the only thing he'd do was go to Vancouver to play, gamble or something, you know. They were looking for something to do. And we had, to the back of our property, sort of clean up, there were stumps and the trees and that, so my father always used to use dynamite, and they lit the fuse on one and it didn't blow up. So, this cousin of mine, he started to go to check, and lo and behold, he got his head knocked off.

LU: [gasps] And that was your-?

RN: That's my cousin.

LU: From Japan?

RN: From Japan.

LU: Wow.

RN: So, we had a funeral for him, and my mother, I think the following year, I think my mother took his ashes back to Japan. He was a nice man, good-looking guy. But he's one of about ten members in the family.

LU: Wow. And how many siblings did your mother have?

RN: I've got chart made up, I think she must have had six or seven, but the only one that was living was the youngest one, and as I said she died at 104. So, they were long livers, I guess.

LU: Mhm hmm, wow. And your mother's side of the family, were they farmers or fishers, what did they do?

RN: Over there in Japan, I guess they had some property because every New Year's, he sends me these dried persimmons, or *kaki*, as they called them. They used to send them to us pre-war, too, and stopped for a long time. But now, after I started sending them gifts, after I visited them, he keeps sending me some every year. They're dried persimmon.

LU: Wow, so what is that?

RN: You never, you see the persimmons in the store, the orange things? They grow them on the trees, they have trees in back, and he just, he just pick- he gets a good crop, he ties them up and he dries it, and I guess they dry in about a couple of months, because by the time I get them in December they're dry. But they're still fairly soft, so they're very good. You never, you don't know what *kaki* is?

LU: No.

RN: You don't know what persimmon is?

LU: No. [laughs]

RN: [laughs] Next time you go to the store, or Chinese store, or even a regular store, they all have them.

LU: Oh, really?

RN: All the regular markets have them. They have the pointed ones, and the flat ones. The pointed ones are kind of bitter. They leave a bitter taste in your mouth, so buy the flat ones.

LU: Oh, okay. [laughs] Oh, wow, no, I never.

RN: I receive a box every year because I don't think he's very well off and can afford to send much more, but my other- on my wife's side, I send them a salted salmon every year, eh, it's about 70 to 80 dollars, you just order it here, and just- they deliver it from Japan, so she sends me some rice and various other goodies, too, but she orders it from a company in Toronto.

LU: Oh, wow.

RN: But I think she's a little well- better off than the others. The other fellow is retired, so, and even now, he says things aren't very good over there in Japan. The economy is not very good, and he's telling me one of his sons got laid off, and he was worried about that.

LU: Oh, oh, wow.

RN: He tells me that every year, he says very *fukeiki* [recession], which means the economy is bad, eh. But I was able to speak enough, enough Japanese that we had a good time with all the families.

[30 minutes]

LU: Did you go to Japanese school when you were younger?

RN: Yes, yes, we had Japanese school, but in those days, I was more interested in playing, so I didn't learn very much, but we did have a Japanese school. Like, like, we used to go on Saturdays, but Vancouver, I think, they went every day after school. But ours is a farmer's Japanese, but we managed, and they were surprised how much, how much we knew.

LU: [laughs] And where was the school that you went to?

RN: In Pitt Meadows.

LU: In Pitt Meadows. So, they just used one of the- ?

RN: We had a Japanese hall there, and a Japanese lady come and taught every Saturday. We had all the different classes there and it had different teachers.

LU: Mhm, how many students would be there?

RN: Maybe 100.

LU: Wow.

RN: But I've got a picture of the people, the Japanese people in Pitt Meadows taken in front of the hall there, it's a big group picture.

LU: Wow, and would you be there all day on Saturday, or just mornings or- ?

RN: Yes, it's from 10 to three or something, nine to three.

LU: And what would you do for lunch?

RN: We'd take a lunch, I think. We took a lunch. Rice balls, something. We used to sing songs, and we always had to sing the national anthem.

LU: The Japanese or-?

RN: The Japanese anthem *Kimigayo*.

LU: Oh.

RN: It was. But when you're young, some people are very serious, but I was more interested in playing, eh, and most boys are.

LU: Mhm. Did you ever learn how to play the card games that the older people would play? The gambling games?

RN: Gacha [?]. No, I tried to learn, but I didn't have time to really learn it. Can you play it?

LU: No. [laughs] Don't you have to memorize all the characters?

RN: Yes, yes, you have to memorize the characters, yeah.

LU: Yeah. That's probably where I would lose. [laughs]

RN: I'd rather play regular cards than that.

LU: Mhm. So, when did you mother come from Japan to, I guess, BC? Or where did she go?

RN: She must have come about 1920. No, no. she had to come about 1915, because my oldest sister was born about 1916 or something.

LU: Oh, wow. So, she came here 1915, so she would have been just around 20, 20 years old.

RN: Yup, they, she come from close by in Japan. So, what they used to do in those days is one person from that community would come, and then they'd call some more people from over, so they had people that they knew surrounded them. LU: Oh, that's interesting.

RN: They'd kind of stuck together, like, eh.

LU: Mhm hmm. So, who called your mother over, do you know?

RN: I guess they're all arranged, the marriages in those days. Because they don't have time to find anybody. They're all busy working. So, they arranged- they find somebody in the area and arrange the marriage and weddings, and they'd come over, so it was it wasn't the easiest thing for people like my mother to come over to strange country.

LU: Mhm. And have nine children.

RN: What nationality are you?

LU: Half -

RN: From Japan-

LU: Oh, um.

RN: Shiga-ken?

LU: Yes, I was just going to say that, mhm.

RN: Shiga-ken is the most popular, you know.

LU: Mhm hmm. Yup, Shiga-ken.

RN: Are you sure?

LU: I'm pretty sure.

RN: Your mother and your father?

LU: Well, I'm only half Japanese, so the other half is English Canadian and my father's side-

RN: From where?

LU: From, well, they've been, my English side, they've been here in Canada for so long now that- they were originally from, I guess, England in the early pioneer days.

RN: But how come you go by the name Uyeda?

LU: Oh, my father's side.

RN: Oh, your father's side. Your mother's English?

LU: Yes.

RN: Oh, I see.

LU: My biological mother, and then my father is Japanese-
RN: But your features, your features are Oriental.

[35 minutes]

LU: Yeah, I know I look more Asian than I- [laughs]

RN: My grandchildren, all their wives are non-Japanese. But their features are all Oriental. They're all Japanese features.

LU: Oh, really?

RN: And dark hair.

LU: Oh, interesting.

RN: I don't know how that works. It's same as you, see, you look more Oriental than Caucasian.

LU: Mhm. But some of my brothers, one looks really similar to me, but the other two look more Caucasian-

RN: Like your mother-

LU: -than Japanese. Like, you can tell that they're mixed, but it looks-

RN: I couldn't tell, I couldn't tell that you're mixed.

LU: No? [laughs]

RN: No.

LU: Oh, wow. So, your parents went through an arranged marriage, then?

RN: Well, they all did.

LU: Yeah.

RN: Because they didn't have time to go back, and go back and find a wife and that, so that's why they always had a go-between, eh? And they'd arrange the weddings for them. But they're, most of the Japanese old-time weddings, they all worked out, not like these Indian, some of these other groups, where they don't work out. They all stayed together.

LU: Was your father already in Canada at the time?

RN: Yes, he was. He come first, so.

LU: Do you know when he was born?

RN: He was, he was about six, eight years older than my mother, so she was 1894, so he was 1888 or something. Because every time I go to the cemetery, I see his birth date on the stone.

LU: Oh yeah. They're buried here, then?

RN: [nods] They're buried here.

LU: And what- how old was he when he came over? Do you know?

RN: I don't know. But he was he was a good looker when he came over, and he grew moustaches like that [makes a gesture drawing a large moustache over his face], and I've seen pictures of him wearing a bowler hat, and he used to be a real good dresser when he was young. But then later on, he became more interested in alcohol and work and he let himself go. I don't know how you manage to get nine kids. Cause all he did was drank and eat, drank and work.

LU: Wow. And what would he do for a job, where was he working?

RN: Well, that's- they all ended up someplace in the Vancouver Island, and then they gradually branched out, and they came to Pitt Meadows, and they started

strawberry farming. But they all- when they get off the boat, they all gather someplace in Vancouver Island, and then they spread out from there, because I don't think some- a lot of them are here illegally. A lot of them illegal people, but they can't prove it, I guess.

LU: Mhm, not at that time, no, yeah. That's right.

RN: They just come across on a boat and get off anywhere, Vancouver Island, and they get lost.

LU: So, do you know anything about your father's side of the family and their history in Japan?

RN: [shakes head no] No. That's what I tried to find out, but I asked my father's nephew, well, he had died, but I asked his wife whether she knew about his relatives, and she said they've got only one cousin in Osaka, but she didn't know where it was, so I didn't get the chance to, a chance to find out. So, I only know my mother's side.

LU: How old was your father when he passed away? Or when did he -?

RN: He passed away 1962, so he was maybe, even at that time he must have been about 70. He died of cancer, and and he had glaucoma, so he lost complete eyesight. I didn't realize. He's looking at me like you are now, but he lost all his nerves and his eyes are completely shot.

LU: Wow.

RN: I didn't know that until I took him to a specialist, and she said you better take him to another specialist because he's blind.

[40 minutes]

LU: He never said anything?

RN: No, no, but his eyes are wide open.

LU: Really?

RN: Because of the glaucoma. But I've got glaucoma, too, but it's controlled.

LU: Is it. I wonder why he never said anything.

RN: I don't know. I used to take him to the eye doctor all the time. And he said there's something wrong with the eyesight, so I think you better take him to the specialist. He was just going to an optometrist before, a Japanese optometrist.

LU: Wow. So, do you remember having a lot of chores when you were on the farm growing up? What kind of things would you do?

RN: We just always had had to go out, and go out and get up early in the morning, and go out and pick berries, like work on the farm, or do some weeding and that. Our jobs were pretty well committed every day during the growing season. In the wintertime it's a different thing, that's the time I used to go play basketball, and the hall and that, but summer time, played lacrosse, but our working days were all picking strawberries.

LU: Mhm hmm. What, would it be very cold in the winter on the farm, was the house-?

RN: No, it- most years we had a bit of snow, because when we went to cut Christmas trees some years there was snow on the ground, but we don't get that much snow. The worst part was sometimes in the fall we'd get fog, and when you drive into

Vancouver you couldn't see the road. So, I used to stand on the running board while my brothers drove. It's that bad. I don't think it's that bad anymore.

LU: Wow.

RN: Can we stop that? Drink some water.

LU: Yes, of course.

[42:14]

[Conversation regarding interviewer's heritage redacted]

[47:20]

LU: Ok, wonderful. What part were we talking about just a few minutes ago?

RN: We were talking about my father's age and all that type of thing. Which is kinda, guess it gets a bit fuzzy at this time, because, you know, it's a long time ago.

LU: Mhm. So, when he was here and working on the farm, what happened to him during the war, when the war broke out?

RN: Well, that's, that's when we're still on the farm, and we're- we were all herded into Hastings Park. My two older brothers, because they were 20 and 21, they were, they were sent to road camp. But my father, my mother, and my other siblings were all-

LU: Oh, let's just pause while the train goes by. Sometimes the trains are really loud on the- Ok, that one's not as bad as the one earlier.

RN: We all went to Hastings Park. But- and then from Hastings Park they were sent to New Denver, but I stayed in Hastings Park because I was working at the hospital. See, they had the hospital, they gathered all the tubercular patients from Vancouver to the Hasting Park to get them ready to go to New Denver sanitorium, New Denver sanitorium, but the sanitorium wasn't gonna be ready until the spring of 19- 1943, so we had to stay over the winter, and we were the last, the last Japanese people in Vancouver. We all left by train in the spring of 1943 when they said the sanitorium was finally finished and I continued working at the sanitorium in New Denver.

LU: Mhm, so how old were you when the war broke out?

RN: 1941?

LU: Yes, when Pearl Harbour-

RN: I was 18.

LU: 18. So were you finished high school by then?

RN: Yes.

LU: And what were you doing after that? Or had you just finished high school?

RN: I was ill for a while, I had- and just as the war broke out, I had, I was recovered and getting well again. So, by the time I went to Hastings Park I was completely well.

[50 minutes]

LU: What were you sick from?

RN: I had- not TB, but I had pleurisy, something near my lungs, not in the lungs, but near my lungs. So, they said, "No, you don't have to go to hospital for that, you just

stay home and rest.” And they said it’s not contagious because it’s not like tuberculosis. So, if it wasn’t for that, maybe I might have went to the road camp, too.

LU: Maybe, yeah, mhm.

RN: But when I went to Hastings Park and I asked for a job, and they gave me a job as a fireman there, so I worked there ever since. We were the last group of people to leave Hastings Park, and I enjoyed it because the RCMP were quite lenient, and they used to give us a pass to go downtown Vancouver as often as we wished.

LU: So, did you require any previous knowledge about being a fireman before you signed up?

RN: No. All you do is just shovel coal and make sure the fire is going and that, you don’t need a license like that, you just have to make sure you stoke the furnaces and make sure they burn.

LU: And would those furnaces heat up the whole Hastings Park building?

RN: They had, they had a hospital there, they had, I think, two or three, to make sure the whole place was heated because they’re all patients, all patients, eh.

LU: Oh, wow. So, when did your family have to move from your farm to Hastings Park?

RN: Well, we all had to go to Hastings Park in spring of ‘42. Cause the war broke out in December ‘41, didn’t it? That was Pearl Harbour, and they, they told us to get ready to relocate in spring of ‘42.

LU: What were the living arrangements like? Did you stay in the Hastings Park building that has all the bunk beds or-?

RN: [nods] Very, very bad. Because it’s a livestock area. And you know, after livestock and therefore they go every exhibition year you can’t get rid of the stench, the smell. The odour is horrific, and you got no privacy because they’re all bunk beds, so we had to hang sheets and blankets to get some privacy. My family didn’t stay there very long because they were able to go to New Denver, and in a very short time they went to New Denver, and- but I stayed behind working. And then my family, short time in New Denver, and then they purchased, I don’t know how they were able to, but they purchased a home with a little bit of property in Vernon, so they moved to Vernon. And they grew strawberries in Vernon.

LU: And what year was that? I guess it was ‘42-

RN: That- they moved to Vernon, I think, in 1942.

LU: Oh. That is relatively quick.

RN: I don’t know how they let them do that, but- because they weren’t supposed to, I think, Japanese were considered aliens and weren’t supposed to purchase any property or anything, but they managed it somehow.

LU: And what happened to the three farms that you had, and the truck?

RN: Just gone.

LU: Did they compensate for anything?

RN: No, no. I think it was in the 1960s I got a letter from a lawyer in BC saying that, is your name Nagamatsu? And they wanted me to respond, and if so, they said they have some money for me. And the money was only 400 dollars because- because they were delivered more, but then they took- they reduced it by all the expenses and that. I got a cheque for a little over 400 dollars, and that’s the only thing we saw for the three properties we had.

LU: Wow. And the car?

RN: And the car-

LU: Or the truck-

RN: Well, they took everything.

[55 minutes]

RN: We weren't supposed to use cameras, we weren't supposed to use radios, or anything, but in Hastings Park I took a lot of pictures.

LU: Oh, so did you get a new camera when you went to Hastings Park, or-

RN: [shrugs] I don't know [laughs] I don't know, I guess I must have bought another small camera, I've always taken pictures. But we weren't legally allowed to- supposed to have cameras or radios.

LU: Did you, before going to Hastings Park, did you see the RCMP in Pitt Meadows?

RN: Well, the BC Security Commission, but yes. But, in 1941, before Pearl Harbour, my brother, my oldest brother, was 22 or something, and he was told by the Canadian government that he had to report to the armed services for service. So, he was getting all ready to go, and then Pearl Harbour came, and then he became an enemy alien so he couldn't go. So, he was very disappointed.

LU: Mhm hmm. Did you have to get an identification card?

RN: Yes, yes, we all it. We all had ID cards, I don't know where mine is now.

LU: Do you still, do you think you still have it, or is it maybe gone?

RN: I might have it in my drawer someplace.

LU: Mhm. That's interesting. So, did you have to go get a picture taken and then bring it in or-?

RN: Yes, I'm sure because there was a picture on there. I guess you wouldn't know this because of your father's a nisei-

LU: A sansei.

RN: A sansei, yes, yes, your grandfather would've had the card, your father probably wouldn't have a card.

LU: No, no. My father wouldn't have one, and I don't think my grandparents had one either, cause they were young.

RN: All niseis had to have it.

LU: Even if you're 10? 10 years old during the war year?

RN: I would think so, that's an ID. He's only 10 at the time the war broke out?

LU: Around 10, yeah, he's born in the 30s, 1931.

RN: I saw it a few years ago, but it was so, so, old and it's becoming illegible.

LU: Oh, wow. And, um, what was I gonna ask? So, being in Hastings Park, other than working, what else was it like in there?

RN: It was enjoyable for us young people because we made a lot of friends, and people came from Vancouver Island and other parts of BC, and there were a lot of young people in there, so we became quite chummy, but then they were gone in a matter of weeks. Weeks or months, they're gone. But I caught up to some of them in the ghost towns, and I meet the odd one here in Toronto that I used to know. We used to give small pictures, and I got them in my album of the ones I met in Hastings Park.

LU: Oh, yes.

RN: There were boys and girls, we had a good time. And we all had to go to the mess hall to eat together, so I think they young people had a good time.

LU: What would they serve at the mess hall?

RN: God only knows, I can't remember now. But it wouldn't have been anything tremendous, it wouldn't have been anything good.

LU: Mhm. So, after your family went to New Denver and you're staying there still working, did you still have to stay in the hall, in the Hastings Park hall with all the bunk beds, or were you sleeping somewhere else?

RN: No, no, they give us another, another living quarters, which were much better than the livestock area, near the hospital. So, we're all together at the- near the hospital, the group became smaller, so we didn't have to stay in the livestock area anymore.

LU: How many firemen were there?

RN: There was only me, me and another fellow, because we had to take turns, we had to stay there all night, so we had to take turns.

LU: Oh, wow.

RN: And the only people that were there were the complete kitchen staff, and the nursing staff, and all the patients.

[60 minutes]

LU: Mhm hmm, and were they Japanese as well?

RN: Yes, they were all Japanese. Except the nurses, some of the registered nurses were hakujin. Because there weren't too many registered nurses that were Japanese. There were- two or three of them were Japanese, but the rest of them I remember were nurses' aides, just the people who clean up the messes.

LU: And how much notice did your family have from leaving their farm?

RN: Well, Pearl Harbour was December, and as soon as that happened, they told us to prepare for- to prepare to be evacuated in the spring of '42. So, we only had maybe three months.

LU: Did you get a letter, or did somebody come to the door?

RN: I think it must have been- We must have got the information from the RCMP or something.

LU: It's interesting. What do you remember leaving behind?

RN: We were allowed to only take a certain amount. So, they told us to pack a certain amount that you can carry. And other valuables they told us to store in a safe place in the house and store it away so people wouldn't see it. And if did that, we stored a lot of our valuable china and that in the attic, and we nailed up the door and everything, and when I was in Hastings Park waiting to go to New Denver my mother contacted me somehow. She said, "Would you go to home and see if you can get some goods?" So I did, I went by bus to the house, I still had the key, so I got in and I went upstairs, and it was broken into and everything was gone. So much for the Security Commission's information that they would be in safe keeping until we retrieved it later on. I think that most people experienced the same thing, it was

broken into and it was all gone. And there's- I don't know about the BC Security Commission, but but they didn't work on our behalf because I know our property there, I think they subdivided it, and I think they built a new house there, because I got- they sent- the inhabitants gave me a picture of our homestead being torched and burnt down, eh? And then they built a bungalow there. And he, he said there about [the certain people that were there?] in forty years and they were gonna move because the strawberry patch that we had was all nice and clear but they hadn't been looked after at all, it had big weeds and brushes on there. And at the back of the property every weekend teenagers and young men and women would gather, and they do beer and drugs and that, so they were getting ready to move and eventually they moved to Chilliwack. I still get a card from them every year because they were quite interested in helping me, and, I've kept in touch with them ever since, I met them 1982, I think, that was the Expo year, when we went to see Expo in Vancouver.

LU: Ah, oh, wow.

RN: I visited Pitt Meadows and I visited my schoolmate and they- she had bought one of my Japanese friend's farms, and her and her husband had a domestic blueberry plantation.

LU: Is she-

RN: Her and I were good friends, so she gave me a big, a big box full to take back to Toronto.

LU: Is she Japanese?

RN: No, no, no. She's Norwegian or something, but she was a very lovely girl.

LU: I'm just gonna switch this one here.

[beeping noise and noise of tapes being changed]

RN: I couldn't find many other school chums they, they were, were all gone. In 1982 that's 40, 41, 40 years after the war.

[65 minutes]

LU: Yes, mmhm, and I'm sure lots of your schoolfriends have moved away as well.

RN: I know there is one here in Toronto, and I've got to contact him. He used to be in my class, but I found out that he's living here in Toronto.

LU: Do you still have class photos?

RN: Yes, I do, I have one class photo, I took it and showed her when I went to Expo, I took it in case I met some of my friends, but she said most of them aren't there anymore.

LU: Mhm, that happens. So, what do you remember taking with you when you had to leave your house and you were packing to go?

RN: Well, we took- my mother and them took mostly whatever dishes they could take, eh. They all had to be carry-able and they couldn't take boxes or anything, so they were limited to what they could take, that's why she wanted me to go back and get more. But, as I said, everything was gone. And that's only within a matter of a couple of months.

LU: So, dishes, and clothes, and what else-?

RN: Pans and all sorts of valuables. You wouldn't put a lot of clothes in there, 'cause we didn't have good clothing to put away. Whatever clothing we could take, we took with us. It's mostly dishes and china, pots and pans, they're all the good Japanese type of stuff, and that's why she wanted me to go get it.

LU: Mhm hmm, and so after Hastings Park, and you went to New Denver for a little bit, what was New Denver like?

RN: New Denver, New Denver, the air was nice, and I think that's why a lot of the patients recovered. But we lived right in a shack, right next to the, right next to the hospital. We had fun there, we had a baseball team. In the wintertime, up in the hills there, they had a pond they froze over, so we used to go skating every winter.

LU: Where'd you get the ice skates from?

RN: I guess we must have bought them because [unclear] you order stuff by mail-in, but most people took some of the basic things, eh, they took the skates or something like that with them, and I had my skates with me. And so- and we used to- every month they used to bring movies from Lemon Creek or another ghost town, two ladies used to come and show us movies, and we had the occasional dances. We had fun.

LU: For the younger groups, the dances?

RN: Yeah, yeah. There were mostly teenagers because the older guys were all in the road camps, eh.

LU: Mhm, and what was it like staying in contact with your family? Was it difficult to-
RN: It wasn't- I didn't keep in touch with them that much because I knew where they were, and I could contact them whenever I wanted to, like when my brother was killed, they told me, so I flew out there, but I didn't keep in that close touch with them until, until 1951, they decided to sell the property and pack up, and said they're coming to Toronto, where I am. I said, "No, go to my brother in Hamilton or my sister in Oakville," and they said, "No, we don't want to go to their places." They wanted to come, and come where I was. So, I had to scurry around, and I was a bachelor having a good time, eh, so I had to scurry around and buy a house, and I had to- a younger brother and sister I had to put through school, I had to put them through high school.

LU: You were?

RN: Huh?

LU: You were putting them through high school?

RN: Yeah, because I was responsible for them, eh.

LU: Oh, how come?

RN: [shrugs] Because I was the oldest one here. And my mother and father relied on me, and they didn't rely on my brother at all, so when my other brother died he didn't even go back to the funeral, so I said I'll go back and look after everything and that, and I looked after everything. So, I've been closer to the family than my older brothers.

[70 minutes]

LU: Mhm hmm, so you flew back? Or-?

RN: Oh, yeah, yeah, you have to fly to Calgary and then take a small plane to Kelowna, and then by bus to Vernon. My brother had a truck, but my younger brother was only 15, so he wasn't able to drive, so I drove it, but I left it when I came back, so I guess when he got 16 he must have got a license to drive.

LU: Oh, that's interesting. And what about your brothers who were in the work camps then? So, they ended up coming to Hamilton?

RN: They- no- they- No, they didn't. In 1945, when the war ended, they went to Vernon where the family was. And one worked in the logging camp, in the sawmill, the logging camp. And the other one, he worked on the farm, and he came to Hamilton to see how things are like, and then he met one of the girls from back home and they decided to get married so they, he took her back to Vernon and they got married, and my mother and father thought they were gonna stay there but no, they just snuck off and went back to Hamilton, and on the pretense that they were just going for a holiday and that they'd be back, but no, they went to Hamilton, bought a house and stayed there. So, they've been estranged ever since. 'Cause, you know, they expected them to come back, so that's why, I guess, my other brother being killed, they decided to back it up and come to Toronto.

LU: Mhm hmm, so where did you buy your first house in Toronto?

RN: It was on St. Clair and Vaughan Road, it was an old house but it didn't have much time to [do it, so I bought one there?], well, there's only three kids and the two parents so- and I was able to walk to the bus depot and take a bus downtown to work.

LU: Where were you working at the time?

RN: I was working for a [motor exclusive?] supplies right downtown. Until we moved up to up to Keele and Lawrence, and then from there then we moved up to Weston.

LU: So, coming from New Denver and then Vernon, and then coming to Toronto, did you have a sponsor to bring you out to Toronto?

RN: [shakes head]

LU: Oh, you went to Hamilton first-

RN: You just have to get permission from the, from the, I guess, the Security Commission, and they said once you get a job in Hamilton you come back and see us. So I got this job at Kraft Containers, so they said, "OK, you can leave, you can leave."

LU: And what were you doing there?

RN: Working at- just, just labouring work.

LU: Just factory work?

RN: Yeah, just factory work. There were about several Japanese working there when I went.

LU: Oh, wow. Do you know who owned the factory or?

RN: No. And that company was operating for a long time, because my brother-in-law used to work there until a few years ago when they got laid off, so I don't know whether, I think, they changed the hands, I think.

LU: Mhm, maybe.

RN: But it was quite a popular working place for a lot of people. There's only two places, I think, that were hiring Japanese at the time of the war. One was a pottery company, and one was Kraft Containers.

LU: Oh, really?

RN: I didn't expect to stay there long, anyways, so I just wanted to get out of New Denver. But I was in Hamilton, and I think the V-E day was in 1945, the war ended in Germany, I guess, so I come by bus to Toronto. I got off at the Bay Street bus depot and I couldn't move for all of the people, because the war ended and everybody was roaming around. So, I just went into the first rooming house I saw, it didn't even have sheets on, but I just went in there to get away from the crowd.

[75 minutes]

LU: Oh, really.

RN: It's horrible.

LU: Wow. I never would have thought.

RN: I never saw such a crowd of people, you couldn't move.

LU: Were they just happy that the war was over?

RN: I guess. They were all walking around and yelling, and me being a newcomer, a newcomer to the area, so I didn't know what to do, so I just got into a rooming house there and stayed for a day, and the next day it was alright.

LU: So, the first couple nights being in Toronto, did you have a place to stay other than just- or did you just stay in a rooming house or a hotel?

RN: Well that's, that's when I moved to Toronto that, that long time after, eh, because when I went from Hamilton to Montreal and stayed there for a couple days, and then I come back to Toronto. So I stayed at a relative of mine's near the Toronto Western hospital, they put me up for about a year. But after my family came, then I think I sold the first house, we bought two other homes after that. We had to keep moving because the homes weren't very good.

LU: So, when you went out to Montreal did you have a sponsor there, or did you-?

RN: No, no, well, once you come to Hamilton you don't have to worry about sponsors, it's just to get out of BC that you needed a sponsor.

LU: So, what did you do once you got to Montreal?

RN: Well, Montreal was a good city because the Jewish people, they liked Japanese people working because they knew we were hard working, so most Japanese were working for Jewish companies. So I didn't have a job when I went to Montreal, but then I got a place to stay, and I got a job right away with the Dominion Lock Company, which is making locks and that, and I was given the job as a lead hand, or foreman, in charge of a bunch of French girls. I wasn't too keen on that, there were quite a few Japanese working there, too, but they were in supervisor jobs. I wasn't too happy there, so then I went to work for another sheet metal company, and then a screen-printing company, and eventually at the screen-printing company, I met a screen printer from Toronto, and they offered me a job in Toronto, and they paid my expenses so I could come to Toronto. And that's when I stayed with my relative. And things weren't very good, and then I got the job working for Moyer[?], but the income wasn't good, so I used to stay in a rooming house and help with the chores and that, so the lady gave me free room and board, and I used to do some odd jobs and that until my income improved. But I stayed with the company for 41 years until I retired.

LU: Oh, wow, that's a long time.

RN: It is, yeah. I worked, stayed until 65 and then I retired, and I've been retired for, what, now 22 years.

LU: And would you only speak Japanese to your parents, or did they understand a little bit of English as well?

RN: They understood very little English. Very little English.

LU: So, they never had the chance to learn?

RN: [shakes head no] They didn't have the time to learn.

LU: I guess then it wasn't really necessary for them to learn Japanese on the farm.

RN: No, no, because they were property owners and that- they were able to get crops sold, and that so that's the main thing. It wasn't- they didn't have any social life they had to go to where they had to speak English. No, I don't think my mother knew much English, either.

LU: What about going to church, was it in Japanese or-

RN: Yeah, yeah.

LU: English?

RN: But there were, she was quite a devout church goer, and she used to go to the Japanese United Church until she went to the nursing home in Beamsville. Even at that she kept in touch, so I had her funeral at the church.

[80 minutes]

LU: And when did you meet your wife, how old were you?

RN: I met her in '56, 1956, '57. She was, I didn't know her then, she was a very popular girl because she was good at badminton, she was- she used to get, go to all sorts of tournaments and win. She was very good at it. So I used to read about it in the Japanese newspapers and that, so I was going with another, another girl at the time, but she was Catholic, she was Japanese, but she was Catholic, and she said she wanted me to take lessons at the Catholic church because she, guess she wanted me to get married. So that's when I started to get cold shoulder, so I told her no, and we just broke it off. And then I met this, I didn't even know this, my wife at the time, but I phoned her, and I asked her for a date to see a movie, and she said OK, and we hit it off ever since.

LU: Just like that.

RN: We got married in 1958.

LU: Oh, wow, and where were you when you met her? What part?

RN: In Toronto.

LU: In Toronto.

RN: And then I think the home I was in was in North York, Willowdale.

LU: Oh, wow. And children?

RN: My first girlfriend that I had in New Denver, I was gonna marry her, but then she got sick again and she died in 1953.

LU: Oh. What was she sick from?

RN: She had tuberculosis, and she was a survivor and she got well again, and she was in Montreal, and she trained as a nurse, and she came to work in the sick

children's hospital and that, she got sick again, and [shrugs] naturally she didn't recover.

LU: Was tuberculosis very popular, or common, I should say, back then?

RN: It was. A lot of the friends that are active here now they've all had tuberculosis, and my brother-in-law, too, my brother-in-laws, after they got married to my sisters, they had tuberculosis. So, but now it's non-existent.

LU: Isn't that interesting?

RN: Mhm, but it seems to be more common with guys than girls, I don't know why.

LU: Mhm, I don't know. And how long are you usually sick for if you get tuberculosis?

RN: Well, some are until they die, I guess, but generally with the medication now they recover. And a lot of people that went to New Denver, they did recover but we did lose quite a few, too. It's like any sickness, eh, some sicknesses are curable and some aren't.

LU: So, would they generally be sick for about a year?

RN: Sometimes years.

LU: Wow. That's a long time.

RN: And sometimes they become unable to walk and that, eh, and that's kind of sad, they get bedridden. But in New Denver, they had a solarium there and they could open the solarium and get the fresh air all the time, and I think that helped.

LU: Mhm. When you're in New Denver, were you there long enough to be working?

RN: Yeah, I worked there for about a year and a half.

LU: What were you doing?

RN: I was doing the same thing. I was stocking up the fires at the sanitorium. I was doing the same work.

LU: Mhm. What else do you remember about New Denver? Anything else come to mind?

RN: New Denver, well, one fall, I think of '44, right in the fall, we borrowed a rowboat, and we went across the lake, and somebody told us there was lots of mushrooms there. It was very hilly and there were lots of pine trees there. And sure enough, we had it lucky, and you could smell it, eh, under the trees. [Japanese Matsutake?] they're about 100 dollars a pound now. But we found a lot.

[85 minutes]

RN: So, we brought them back and preserved quite a bit for future use. And then, and then I was gone, I come to Toronto, to Hamilton, so. I didn't go back again. But it- and then I guess when, 1993, when I visited New Denver it was still- a few of my friends had bought those old shacks and they reinforced them, and they stayed there because people that used to live there got the shacks for free. But if you're a newcomer you had to buy them, eh. But quite a few of my friends are still living there.

LU: So, did they tear down the other shacks?

RN: Yeah, most of them. Most of them are gone.

LU: So, there's only a couple still?

RN: Yeah, they kept two or three for the museum, and then the people that wanted to stay there, there were about- maybe a dozen Japanese families that are still there, they got the home for free, but they had to fix them up. And really insulate them and grow gardens around it. They enjoyed it, and I guess the living expenses are really low there, so they stayed there.

LU: Did your family have a garden as well at their house?

RN: Well, they were at Harris Ranch [?], and I don't think they stayed there long enough to do that, because then they went to Vernon. They're more interested in growing strawberries again then, trying to make some income.

LU: Mhm hmm, that's right. Do you remember the types of foods you would eat during the war years? Cause I know some things were rationed like sugar, butter, I think.

RN: In those days I wasn't diabetic, so I could eat sugar and that, but I was working at the hospital, so my meals were all at the hospital. I had free meals at the hospital. Even in Hastings Park, getting all free meals. The cooks are all Japanese cooks, they prepared meals for Japanese people.

LU: And would it be Japanese food mostly?

RN: [nods] Lots of rice. Lots of rice. 'Cause even now I have rice about every other day

LU: [laughs] Me too, I think.

RN: You too?

LU: If not every day, yeah. [laughs]

RN: I have it every other day, I try to have potatoes every other day.

LU: I usually manage to sneak in a rice ball at some point.

RN: Your mother likes it, too?

LU: Well, my dad is remarried now, and my stepmom really enjoys it.

RN: She didn't?

LU: My first biological mother didn't.

RN: Oh.

LU: So, we grew up with just a little bit of it.

RN: How did you learn how to make rice balls?

LU: Oh, I didn't. [laughs]

RN: You said, you said you knew.

LU: I buy them here. [laughs]

RN: [laughs] Oh you buy them here. You buy the triangular ones.

LU: Mhm. Onigiri?

RN: [nods] Mhm.

LU: They're very good.

RN: But ordinary people just make round and put stuff inside, inside [to eat it?], eh.

LU: So how do you do it, you just-

RN: You have to season the rice a bit. I, I, I'm only been single for, what, four years and I told my wife, you have to show me how to make all these things, and she never showed me how to cook, so I'm learning myself.

LU: Well, we have the new cookbook [referring to the *Just Add Shoyu*] coming out soon.

RN: I know.

LU: It'll be here for the conference next week.

RN: But it's 40 dollars. 39.95.

LU: Yes.

RN: Plus, 10 percent for members.

LU: If you buy three of them, though, and give the other two away as presents then its 29.95, if you buy three or more for members. Good deal.

RN: Are they gonna have them for next week?

LU: Yeah, yeah. They should be arriving tomorrow. They should be here tomorrow, hopefully. So. They're being printed and shipped over.

RN: I got dozens of cookbooks that my wife used to have so I don't know whether I need anymore.

LU: Yeah. [laughs] This one will be nice cause it has history in the cookbook as well. so it has stories about where some of these recipes came from.

RN: Oh. you've seen it, eh?

LU: Mhm hmm it's really nice. It's very nice. but all I know is that you take the rice, you kind of form it a little bit you push a hole-

RN: But. but it's got to be seasoned.

LU: That's right. Season it.

RN: Season it. yeah.

LU: Put a little bit of something in it. whatever it is you want-

[90 minutes]

RN: Yeah, if you want to put *umeboshi* or whatever you want, then you gotta put some *goma* on the outside of it or seaweed.

LU: Seaweed usually. What's *goma*?

RN: It's that- it's a seed that they put on-

LU: Sesame seed?

RN: Sesame seed. You kind of heat it on the stove and kind of fry it a bit and then you put it on.

LU: Oh, that's different, I didn't know that.

RN: But I buy, I buy those nigiri, too, but I like it with the black cod inside.

LU: Mhm.

RN: Because Taro Fish is right close to me. He's a good, that's a good fish company.

LU: Mhm hmm. What other favourite Japanese foods do you have?

RN: Oh, I like all Japanese foods. I like sushi, I like *manju* and that, but I have to be careful of *manju* because I'm diabetic, eh, so I can only eat so much, but I like sukiyaki, I like sashimi, I like everything.

LU: What's sukiyaki?

RN: Suki-yaki? That's a vegetable cooked with beef, and that that's one of my favourite things in Japan, sukiyaki.

LU: Is it always beef or?

RN: They use a good- In Japan, they use a good Kobe beef and it's very tender. But its good when it's got a lot of fat on it.

LU: More flavour.

RN: Yeah. I got to a place at Victoria Park and Sheppard and they, they serve it in a little pot, which is good, for about 17 dollars. With rice, and it's good.

LU: Wow, sounds good.

RN: You don't know what sukiyaki is?

LU: Well, I know- I know the food when I see it, and I know the English terms, like we usually just call it stir fry, beef stir fry, but we don't usually go by all the Japanese terms, it's kind of lost in our vocabulary.

RN: You have a Japanese store out there? Sandown is out there, isn't it? Japanese store.

LU: Um.

RN: No, maybe in Etobicoke.

LU: No, the closest one to us is a Korean store, Pat's Korean Store, and there is also T&T, it's pretty close.

RN: T&T is Chinese.

LU: Is it? Oh.

RN: But it's owned by Loblaws.

LU: Yes, Loblaws just bought it out.

RN: But their sushi and that, they're not the same as ones made by Japanese. Korean one's horrible.

LU: The rice is hard.

RN: Mhm, mhm.

LU: Mhm, mhm.

RN: They don't know how to make proper sushi or *manju*. You like *manju*?

LU: Mhm mhm. I don't like the Korean *manju*, though.

RN: What, that's the most tastiest one.

LU: The Korean one?

[both speaking-unclear]

RN: I thought you said green.

LU: No, the green one's good.

RN: Ya mugi[?], that's best. But one that's good is the *ohagi*, the one with the *adzuki* all around it, all around the rice. There's a bazaar at the Buddhist Church on Saturday and they will be selling a lot of it there. You don't go there? You never been to the Buddhist Church Bazaar?

LU: No, I don't think so. No. It's hard to get there for me because it's in Toronto.

RN: You don't drive?

LU: Well, I come from Mississauga, but wasn't the Toronto Buddhist Church- isn't there hardly any parking, though?

RN: Well, there they got a small parking lot there and you can park on the street there.

LU: Oh mhm. We don't go too often. Like, our parents do-

RN: They got a parking lot for about 50 cars in there. But then they said you could park on the street, but the centre-

[1:34:00]

[Conversation redacted]

[1:34:16]

[LU: What other family events would you- like, what about holidays, did you always celebrate holidays when you were growing up?

RN: Yes, I've got five kids, two of my sons have nice homes, so they, they take turns, and they have Thanksgiving, we had roasted a turkey, Christmas everything the same, roasting a turkey. For holidays we always get together, and summer sometimes we get barbeques and that because they have nice homes.

LU: And what about when you were younger and you were a child, would you celebrate holidays as well or was it not as popular then?

[95 minutes/ 1:35]

RN: Well, in those days the only holidays that we could remember was Christmas, we had to go cut a Christmas tree. But the food that I liked when I was younger, you know, you have some leftover cold rice, I used to pour milk in it, and it's really good.

LU: Really?

RN: Instead of putting tea I put cold milk in it.

LU: Mhm, anything else with it or just rice and milk?

RN: [laughs] Just rice and milk. And eat it with fish or whatever else we would have. Everybody laughed when I used to say that I used to like milk in my rice, but then you get this rice pudding, that's got a lot of milk in it.

LU: Mhm hmm, well that's new, yeah. [laughs] I've never heard that before.

RN: I don't- it's not a common thing. But we used to always have fresh milk, so I used to pour fresh milk on it and eat it. Most people put green tea in it.

LU: If you were having a special meal what would- what would it be typically?

Would your mother do all the cooking?

RN: My wife, my mother did, yes. But after I married, my wife was a good cook. We- every New Year's, we used to have a sit-down meal for about 30 people with all my cousins and relatives, and she did most of the cooking.

LU: And what types of foods would be there?

RN: It's all the well-known Japanese. Sushi and chicken and sashimi. She made all the Japanese stuff; she knew how to make it all. I guess she learned it from her mother.

LU: Mhm, maybe. What part of Japan was her family from again?

RN: Yamaguchi.

LU: Yamaguchi, that's right.

RN: Which is right close to Shiga-ken, I think.

LU: And when- did do you know when her family came over? Or why they came over?

RN: [shakes head no] No. Her father was born in Hawaii. And then I think he went back to Yamaguchi, and then he come to Canada, and then he went back to marry her and then they-

LU: And then they came to Canada?

RN: Yeah.

LU: That's interesting.

RN: But we stayed with two, two of her cousins in Yamaguchi, two nights each. They treated us really well.

LU: Would your wife make chow mein as well?

RN: Oh yes, she made chow mein, and we used to make the Cumberland chow mein. You know what that is, with the white noodles. And my son still makes it and people like it. But you can't get the proper noodles here. The noodles that you need are Farkay[?] noodles, and they only sell it in Vancouver. But- so, I think we buy the substitute, which is yakka mein, which is not the same but that's the closest thing to it. But I speak to the people that- from Cumberland, and they said that whenever somebody goes to Vancouver they make sure that they bring back the Farkay[?] noodles because they can only get it in Vancouver.

LU: And isn't it true that the chow mein is a Canadian dish? If you go to Japan, it's not-

RN: No, no, it's not a Japanese food. That chow mein that they sell here at the bazaar, I bought it one, I couldn't even eat it. I threw it out. So that's why I said I'll never buy that again. But the ones at the Buddhist Church make it and it's not bad, it's not Cumberland chow mein, but their chow mein is made a little more fresher, I think because they lost all of the good senior volunteers that they don't know how to make it, I think.

LU: Yeah, that's the unfortunate thing about a lot of the bazaars from the years before, they would be-

RN: Yes, yes, they don't have the people that can do the work. But the Buddhist church apparently has that for a while, I guess. They're losing their people, too.

LU: Mhm hmm. What about when you were younger and you were still living at home with all your brothers and sisters, what would you do for family gatherings or special occasions?

[100 minutes; 1:40]

RN: She, she would make sushi and all that, too. She'd make sushi, and that is only on special occasions, eh, they only make it for special occasions.

LU: Oh, really?

RN: Because they couldn't, they don't have the time to make it on a regular basis. So we only had it on special occasions. But what I enjoyed the most was when we used to go wild blueberry picking, and that because we had a pickup[?] there, and we used to go all day, and she'd make some nice rice balls with *umeboshi* and something in there, and that's the best type of lunch. Yeah. I still like the nigiri.

LU: Mhm, me too. And what about since you had so many berries growing up, would you always make pie? Or-?

RN: No.

LU: Jams or anything?

RN: No. We used to make some jam there but everything was taken to cropeter[?] for sale.

LU: Oh, wow.

RN: The truck used to come pick it up.

LU: I guess it's a different type of farming, so you wouldn't need big machinery to help farm-

RN: No, no, no, it was strawberries. I guess today, maybe some of them use machinery, but it's all handwork.

LU: That's a lot. So how many people would it take to work a field?

RN: Every summer, because we need extra people to pick the strawberries, we used to bring people in from Vancouver. Some older people. Some younger people. We'd bring about a dozen people from Vancouver for the summer.

LU: Wow. That's a lot.

RN: It's a good income for them, too, I guess. Frank Moritsugu always writes about going berry picking. He used to go to Mission.

LU: Do you remember how much they would get paid?

RN: [shakes head no] No idea.

LU: You're not sure. And you had mentioned before, when you were a fireman you were making-

RN: Just twenty-five cents an hour. Well, that's what I got at Hamilton, too, when I went to Hamilton Containers when I started working there.

LU: Oh, really?

RN: 25 cents an hour. And yet I was able to save enough money to go to Montreal and that. And I had to pay for my room and board.

LU: That's a lot of work.

RN: That's that the common income during the war. 25 cents an hour.

LU: Mhm hm. And what about afterwards in, in the later years with Redress, were you ever a part of the Redress?

RN: I was not active like most people, but I was happy to get the Redress in 1988. Got 21 thousand dollars. I bought a new car; I bought a new car with it.

LU: Mhm. Your wife received it as well I would guess.

RN: Yes, but she doesn't drive so we banked hers, or we took a trip with hers, maybe.

LU: Mhm.

RN: But it's funny, because at the time there was a certain element of people that that spoke against the individual Redress, they wanted just the group Redress and it kinda confused the government because they didn't know what to do. But it- but in the end the Redress people won out.

LU: Mhm, that's right.

RN: Your father is, he may not have gotten Redress, eh? Your grandfather would?

LU: Mhm, my grandfather.

RN: Your father's too young. You had to be 55 or something to get the Redress.

LU: Mhm, yeah, he's not even 55 yet. [laughs]

RN: Cause you had to be born during the war or something like that to get it.

LU: Mhm. Mhm. And what about the Cultural Centre when it was first being established, were you a part of that?

RN: I've been a part of that, I've been a member ever since.

LU: Really?

RN: I was on the Board of Directors, I think in 1971, '72, you have to be on for two years, eh. But my brother-in-law was very active in there to start it up and that. I didn't want to get on the Board right away, but I did get on the Board about 1972, but then after that, after the kids grew up, they weren't interested so, you know, you lose touch kind of. But I've been a member of it since.

LU: Oh, wow. And what kind of roles would you have as a Board of Director back then?

[105 minutes] 1:45

RN: Well, you had to sit around the table and have meetings, and you become a chairman of a- some activity or something, and all my presidents at the time, they're both gone now, they both died. But I wouldn't go back to it again because it's a very, very different type of group again now. Half of them are non-Japanese members. Are you gonna go on the Board?

LU: I'm gonna go away to school first.

RN: You're going to university?

LU: Mhm.

RN: You haven't finished university?

LU: Well, I've finished my undergraduate degree but I'd like to work towards my Master's.

RN: Oh, Master's, and maybe a PhD?

LU: I'd hope to, but it's not in the near future for my PhD.

RN: Your PhD might take you ten years.

LU: Mhm. Yeah, average is 7 years, so.

RN: What are you interested in?

LU: Archive studies and museum collections.

RN: Archive work?

LU: Mhm hmm

RN: You want to become a curator?

LU: Mhm hmm mhm hmm. I'd like to, yes.

RN: Work for ROM [Royal Ontario Museum]? [chuckles]

LU: That would be my dream job, I think. [laughs]

RN: [laughs]

LU: A museum like that that would be wonderful.

RN: So, so you're finished, you went to York or U T?

LU: U of T.

RN: U of T

LU: U of T, yup.

RN: They have quite a bit- I was reading an article people refusing to go to U T because there are too many Chinese people there.

LU: Really?

RN: Just recently articles in there, and some people Chinese people are complaining about all this, the comments that are bad in the paper recently, it said that some people are refusing to go to U T because there are too many Chinese there.

LU: Wow. I haven't heard that before.

RN: Just, just in the weekend paper. Just recent paper.

LU: I'll have to check and see. I have it written down here you have a story about the *New Canadian*.

RN: Yes, I remember when Mr. Shoriyama[?] and Mr. Higashi [?] wanted to start off, start printing the *New Canadian*, and they had to get subscribers, they come to Pitt Meadows and the farm patch where we were and we were one of the first ones to sign up. It was Mr. Higashi [?], and we've been subscribers ever since and then now it's the *Nikkei Voice* now.

LU: Mhm hmm, that's right.

[1:47:33

[*conversation redacted*]

[1:49:00]

LU: Mhmm. And then I also have here that when you first learned how to drive the truck-

RN: Yeah, that's when we bought the new truck and- I knew how to drive, but I wasn't old enough to drive, I was only 15, so my brother let me drive it up and down the street. It's fun because it's a brand-new truck.

LU: Were you actually going anywhere or were you just going up and down?

RN: No, no, just going up and down the street, and going to the middle of the town and back, back home, because if my parents saw me, they'd get after me for driving the car, so he wouldn't let me drive near the house.

LU: Mhm hmm, what would have happened if you had gotten in trouble?

RN: Nothing in those days, nothing, cause there's not that many policemen around to impound you or anything.

[110 minutes] 1:50

RN: It's not like today where you get fined or things like that. I don't think anything like that would have happened in those days, as long as you don't hit somebody. And I didn't get- I was a good driver, so.

LU: And what about your parents, though, if they had caught you? How-

RN: They would- they would give me- give me the dickens, but they wouldn't be able to do very much about it. I think we did it so they wouldn't find out.

LU: Mhm. [laughs] How big was the town?

RN: It- it's only a small town 'cause it's mostly farm areas, so the population wouldn't be that large.

LU: Mhm hmm, what kinds of stores did they have there?

RN: Well, we had one big- one major store, grocery store, and we had one garage, and everything was in the middle of the town type of thing, near the railway tracks, we had a post office there. And I think when I went in 1993 we found that there was a Japanese company had built a golf course in Pitt Meadows, right on the highway. And we had our reunion there, so we went to the reunion there, it was a nice golf course.

LU: That's interesting.

RN: Where did your grandfather come from?

LU: Steveson.

RN: Oh, you said Steveson. Your dad was born there or here?

LU: Toronto.

RN: Born here, eh.

LU: Mhm hmm. So, in the grocery store, what was your favourite thing that you could buy there? Did they have-

RN: They had everything-

LU: Chocolate bars-

RN: All groceries. That was the only grocery store in that town, eh, so they had everything that we needed, meats and fish.

LU: Oh, wow, and what about sweet treats, would you go as a family gathering and go get ice cream or anything like that?

RN: I don't remember an ice cream store in Pitt Meadows. I don't remember an ice cream store there. But sometimes they have it in the confectionary stores, eh. Sometimes they have it in confectionary stores, I don't recall eating a lot of ice cream and things like that. Maybe we couldn't afford it.

LU: Would your family do any family gatherings today or have a family day? I know it's hard with the farm because you're always working-

RN: Well, the main get togethers were either weddings or funerals or at the church, they'd have picnics and that, but that's about it. New Year's, sometimes the neighbours would get together, but the gatherings weren't that big at the- 'cause I don't think we could afford a big, big gathering with a lot of food.

LU: Mhm. Do you remember anything else about growing up in Pitt Meadows?

RN: Well, all I remember is I had a bicycle and I like going to the city hall there where we could play all kinds of sports like basketball and lacrosse, until- and I was very active. I used to get along well with all the school kids.

LU: But not very many people had bicycles?

RN: Oh yeah, all the young kids had bicycles because that's the only way we'd get around. 'Cause we were quite far from the downtown area.

LU: How long would it take you to bike?

RN: To go the hall, the main hall to play it only take me about 10 minutes, we were close.

LU: Mhm hmm, and what about going to school, would you take your bike to school or?

RN: No, we, we used to walk. We used to walk to school. But we were really fortunate there because in our first home we were on a road, and that road led right to the Fraser River where there was an Indian reservation. So, whenever we wanted we, we would, late in the day, we- after working, we'd go down there and ask the fishermen, ask the Indian fishermen came in we'd buy the fish for 50 cents or a dollar, we'd always had fresh fish.

[115 minutes] 1:55

LU: Wow.

RN: 'Cause they freshly caught, eh, and they would give it to us for maybe 50 cents or a dollar.

LU: Oh, wow. And how big were the fish?

RN: Oh, they're, they're big ones, [gestures with hands] big salmon.

LU: That's incredible.

RN: In those days.

LU: Mhm.

RN: In those days. In those days a dollar was a lot of money.

LU: Wow. Mhm. Anything else that you remember? Any other activities or?

RN: No, I think, I think that's, that's probably it. I'll have to do some thinking for next weekend but I don't know whether to read my notes or to speak. Am I going to speak?

LU: Mhm. Yeah, share your story. Just like this. Just asking questions and-

RN: Yeah, because to write that all [I sat down there?], you think about things chronologically and as it happened so, so it, it all comes from here. It's never- nothing's written down because we never spoke about this to our kids. We never spoke about the evacuation with our kids. I guess, you know, it happened, but they never asked. And we never spoke to them about it.

LU: How come you felt that you didn't need to tell them?

RN: I don't know. We're not the only ones. You find that most niseis are like that. They, they kept it quiet. They kept it quiet, and that probably is a mistake because now, now they- people don't know about this part of history. Good or bad. And we should, we should be pushing it more. Cause the government has acknowledged that it was the wrong thing to do. Definitely the atomic bomb, that's- that should never ever be used again.

LU: Mhm. Do you think if your children had asked if what happened if- if you would've told them about it back then?

RN: We never got into a position of conversation with them in that regard. You know, too busy with various activities. But we never got into the historical part. They enjoyed going to things like Expo and that, and we went to expo in Montreal and expo and various things, but we never talked about what happened, and they know because some of them went to the property that, I took them to the property where my schoolfriend was, and they knew that was our home before, and- But they never showed any interest. Maybe we're the ones who should have created the interest for them, but we never did. But you find that- I'd be greatly surprised if you find too many niseis, like me, that have spoken about the evacuation completely to their kids.

LU: It's very rare.

RN: Very rare.

LU: Mhm, not very many people.

RN: Well, you're, you're, you're yonsei, well, you're kinda far removed there, but I betcha even your father wasn't told very much about it.

LU: No, no he wasn't.

RN: Your grandfather wouldn't have told him very much, eh? But your grandfather's still young, in the seventies, so he's a nisei, so.

LU: Mhm hmm. I know he doesn't remember too much of it because he was younger.

RN: There aren't too many niseis who are in their seventies, they're all older, much older than that now.

LU: Mhm hmm, he's a young nisei. But no, it's just interesting that not a lot of niseis had mentioned it, and it's understandable, it was a difficult time, and it's not something you'd want to talk about.

RN: I guess to some people it's an embarrassing part of life, I guess. So they, they kept it quiet, they never mentioned it to their, to the children. Never brought it up in discussion, even with my parents.

LU: How was it embarrassing?

RN: [shrugs] I don't know. Well, we're all kicked out of the BC area so we're outcasts, in other words, eh, we're outcasts, we're considered enemy aliens.

[120 minutes]

RN: Which is strange considering we were born in Canada. My brother was most disappointed when, when he was told he couldn't go to join the armed forces when the Pearl Harbour happened. Cause he was all ready to go.

LU: At that time there was no Japanese Canadians in the army yet, was there?

RN: Well, there were. There were, there were quite a few Japanese who went to the First World War. The last one, the last one that went there died a few years ago in Hamilton, but quite a few of them went and they got killed in the First World War.

In the Second World War, naturally, you know, you see the picture of Frank Moritsugu and that, you know, in front lobby there, there is a picture, but they weren't really army people. They were only interpreters or whatever, you know.

LU: And how do you think your parents felt about moving and leaving their farm, and did they ever mention it, how they felt about it?

RN: The only word was *shikata ga nai*, you can't help it. You had to, it was a loss, you know. They never expressed disappointment about this, but I know they were hurt because they lost everything except the money that they had. And we're in Pitt Meadows, we're one of the families that were better off than most people, eh. My father [liked to do to things up?].

LU: You mentioned before he liked to buy all the new stuff, like the new sewing machines and-

RN: That's right, it- and he- anything new that came out he'd buy, I guess he could afford it, maybe. But these people came from Vancouver to, naturally, to sell, and always would drop in at our place and try to sell us something and whatever they tried to sell we bought. But they- The fish monger that used to come from New Westminster, her, one of the daughters is a member here, Sutherland Hashi[?], Sutherland, he, he used to bring fresh fish once a week, but he'd always make sure he'd come to our place at lunchtime. And one week he would bring a bottle of whiskey, and the next week my father would have the bottle of whiskey. And they had to finish the bottle of whiskey before he left. I don't know how he drove away. And yet my father came back to work and he was OK until nighttime.

LU: [laughs] Oh, wow.

RN: 'Cause he liked to drink, and this fish monger, he liked to drink, too, so they- he timed it right. And we used to buy tofu and things like that from him, eh.

LU: Oh, so you wouldn't make tofu, you'd buy it?

RN: No, no, he used to bring it, he used to sell it.

LU: What else do you remember about, about- I don't know, anything else, I guess? Anything else come to mind?

RN: I guess whatever else I know it'll probably come out in the discussion because I will have to- in my mind, I'll have to think chronologically, eh, from the time, I think it's basically from, uh-

LU: '41 until-

RN: 1941, eh.

LU: Pearl Harbour until the end.

RN: Pearl Harbour, eh.

LU: Mhmm, yeah.

RN: But the end is, is the most interesting part, as I said, because we wanted to see the other part of it. We went to Hawaii, and we went to Japan to see the Hiroshi and the Nagasaki and that. Now, now we know the whole picture.

LU: Mhm, that's interesting. Mhm. Well, we're almost at the end of this one. Thank you very much, thank you, that's wonderful.

RN: You've got me down as one of the speakers, do you?

LU: Mhm. Yes.

RN: Who's going to be on my table?

[125 minutes]

LU: I don't know yet. [laughs] I have a rough idea on who's gonna be at the tables but I don't know each list off by heart yet, so.

RN: Who do you think will be?

LU: I don't know, I can check my notes and see who's there. We can do that. Let's turn this one off here.