Interviewee: Connie Sugiyama
Interviewer: Karen Suzuki
Date: July 11th, 2025
Location: Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, Toronto

**** Note that this interview contains references to an anti-Japanese slur and outdated terminology regarding Indigenous people.**

[Start part 1]

[00:00]

Karen Suzuki: Okay. We're recording.
Vidhya Elango: We are rolling, yup.
KS: Alright, so, as you know, I have to start by saying: today is July 11th, 2025, and we are here at the JCCC conducting a Sedai interview with Connie Sugiyama.
Connie Sugiyama: Good morning.
KS: Good morning. Can we start by having you tell us your full name, please?
CS: Well, my full name is Constance Lorie Sugiyama. No Japanese middle name, but everybody has always called me Connie.
KS: Great.
CS: I was named after a chicken.
KS: Oh, you have to say more about that.
CS: Well, in Slocan, I think my mother was so active my grandfather was worried she'd get bored, so he got her some laying hens, and one of them was Constance. So, I'm named after one of her chickens.
KS: That's a fantastic story. Thank you for that. [chuckles] Where and when were you born?
CS: A long time ago. [chuckles] In Don Mills, [redacted]. Not too far from here, actually, just down the ravine.
KS: And did you feel connected to your Japanese identity growing up?
CS: Always.
KS: How so?
CS: It was my mother- Well, actually, both my parents. But, you know, I grew up being very proud of my Japanese Canadian heritage. And even though my mother didn't really cook Japanese food- I mean, she actually, she was- She didn't know how to cook when she got married, she learned. But she learned to make Japanese food from my grandparents, and that's something that my father really enjoyed, 'cause back then there were no Japanese restaurants in Toronto other than, I think, Nikko Gardens, and maybe one other restaurant. We went to Chinese restaurants, but- Anyhow, my mother learned to, sort of some of the classic Japanese Canadian dishes. But more importantly, I think they raised us with a sense that we were special because we were of Japanese heritage, but thoroughly Canadian.

KS: That's really valuable.
CS: Well, and I think it was- I didn't think it was different at the time, but I think it's different from many Sansei, whose parents didn't talk to them about what happened to them during the war, and I think many Sansei, as I've come to learn, grew up with a sense of shame about who they were. That was not us, was certainly not me.
KS: Okay, that's great. I don't- Can you describe your illustrious career briefly? I know we could do an entire other Sedai interview on just your career, but could you just give us, like, the Coles Notes of your illustrious career, please?
CS: Well, I'm not sure how illustrious it was, but I describe myself now as a recovering lawyer, because I went to law school in the '70s, practiced law for the better part of 40 years on Bay Street. Big law firm, I did mergers and acquisitions, and corporate securities work. But I retired in 2012 and have spent the years since doing some really interesting things. But going back, when I was a young lawyer, I was always connected to the community. And especially during the '80s, when a group of us came together over redress, I think, was sort of a spontaneous grassroots group. And we called ourselves Sodon Kai. A group of young lawyers, actually, because we had all heard an interview on CBC where the government was going to, not apologize, but provide an expression of regret and a community fund, not for us, but in our name. So, basically, a number of us sort of thought, like, "who asked us?" Like, who was representing us, who was- And it turned out that basically they were trying to sweep it all under the carpet. This was the first Trudeau government. And, so, we banded together to try to decide how can we get the community at least consulted. So, that was probably before the mid-eighties, early eighties.

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CS: And that was an interesting time, and an interesting group of young lawyers. It was- There was Shin Imai who went to law school with me, Marcia Matsui, Maryka Omatsu, and then a group of others. And then we added Roger Obata, was somebody I knew from other community engagements, Frank Moritsugu, who basically MCed our first panel discussion here at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. And one of the reasons I've always been grateful to the Centre is that they offered their auditorium for us to have our first big public consultation, and several after that.

[sentence redacted from 05:55 – 06:05]

My position on that was, "it's not political, it's educational." You know, what is more educational for our community than talking about what happened to our grandparents and parents, because so many Sansei didn't know, talk about it, talk about what we think should happen, what the government should do, not what they were proposing to do. So, that was the start of that movement. And I did that while I was a- I guess I was not a partner at that point in time, so. I'm not sure it was a very popular cause on Bay Street, that's for sure. [chuckles] But nevertheless, it was the right thing to do. So, that's a bit of a digression from my career. And I was always a partner in big Bay Street national law firms, as it turned out,

and in leadership at those firms. But I did things outside of law, and I did that because as the only lawyer in a very large family, it was very clear to me, so many- A lot of doctors in the family, and I'm sure they felt very good about their patients, and the patients they helped, and the babies they delivered, and while I love my career, you don't get up in the morning and look in the mirror and say, you know, "god, that was a great trust indenture I drafted." So, you know, the soul, the soul food for me was getting involved in a number of community organizations, whether it was in the arts, or the Cultural Centre, or redress, and healthcare- That was another big passion of mine, so I was recruited to the board of the Hospital for Sick Children and ultimately became the chair. And that was a real privilege. So, those were the things that got me up in the morning. As much as law was- I mean, I loved my practice, which was, like, large transactions, M&A, I really loved the bright young people I worked with, I enjoyed training them, and I was a bit of a deal junkie. But it is, again, very intellectually rewarding, but the emotional part of it can sometimes be lacking. So, the community element of what I did and parallel to that, was really, as I said, for my own sake. And I learned that from one of the partners at Fasken's, my first law firm. Fraser Fell, who was very engaged, I mean, he was on the board of the Art Gallery, the Toronto Hospital, McMaster University, among other things, and he was- So, he was a bit of an inspiration to me that way. There were other lawyers- You know, I had some very good teachers and mentors in my first law firm. There were those who, you know, trained me to be a good lawyer, others who trained me to be a good client-sensitive lawyer, but Fraser Fell was the person who really inspired me to be involved in the community. So, that was- He sort of did both things. So, I thought, "I can do both things." [chuckles] But, it's a- I've had a very lucky, privileged life, and a very lucky, privileged career, I'd say.

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CS: So, I'm just- I just feel very lucky. And some people say that I'm one of the few happy lawyers they've ever met, because, I was happy for the most part, 'cause I really loved what I did, and I loved the people I worked with. Most of them. But it's been, well more than a decade since I retired. I've sat on a lot of boards; I'm on a lot of advisory committees. And that's, again, a huge privilege. So, I don't know what more I can say about my career.
KS: That's fantastic.
CS: That's it in a nutshell.
KS: That's great, that is a good nutshell. Can I ask, though, did you ever face any discrimination during your career, and in your work at all?
CS: Well, I'd be lying if I said no. And the discrimination- I mean, I'm asked a lot, "was there racism?" And I would say, "only occasionally." I mean, you didn't have any role models. There was nobody who looked like me on Bay Street, absolutely no one. I think there was one Japanese Canadian tax partner, Barbara Suzuki, and that was about it on Bay Street. But apart from the occasional really stupid comment that the occasional client would make, I can't say that I felt any discrimination because I was Asian. But there was a significant amount of discrimination re: women. Okay, that was- I mean, I would be lying if I said that

wasn't the case. And as someone said, we had to work twice as hard and be twice as good, so that is a much- It was a much bigger issue to overcome. And when I started in practice, girls didn't do big transactions. I mean, real estate, family law, estate law, those were the places where they wanted you to be. When I joined my firm, which was really one of the premier civil litigation firms in the country, there wasn't a single woman in the litigation department, and the firm was more than a hundred years old. And it was a woman who was really, again, an inspiration and mentor to me, Eleanore Cronk, who was actually hired as a corporate lawyer because they didn't want a woman in the litigation department. But she was hired back, and she was really one of the best lawyers I've ever worked with. And she worked her way into the litigation department and ultimately went to the bench and retired as a very senior judge.
KS: Do you think it's changed for young women in the legal profession?
CS: It's a bit better. Now, you have to put this in context. I mean, when I graduated from law school, I think about 20 per cent of my class were women. Very shortly after that, I was just comparing notes with a former partner of mine, it very quickly went to 50 per cent women graduating from law school. And not only was it a large percentage, if you looked at the dean's list, the top of the class, the women were really the stellar graduates. But they weren't being hired proportionally in the big firms, and they certainly weren't making their way to equity partnership. When I left practice, it was still only 20 per cent of the equity partners were women, even though for 25 years before that, 50 per cent of the graduating class was female. So, you know, significant challenges for women that I think, some of those things are better. But the numbers haven't improved as much as one would think in the- They're various levels of partnership now, but equity partnership is what you aspire to. And it's just- I don't know what the current statistics are, but it just has not got- It's nowhere near 50 per cent.
KS: I just had to ask. [laughs] I think I knew the answer, but I just had to ask.
CS: Well- Yeah.

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KS: Let's move on to redress, if you don't mind.
CS: Okay.
KS: You started to talk about it, and I think it'd be great to explore that further. Can you- You mentioned the early stages of it, and that was before maybe it was even called redress. It was just sort of acknowledging the fact that there was this apology and wanting to make sure the community had a say in it. How did that evolve, and what was your involvement?
CS: So, we had- It was very grassroots. I mean, we met- Many of those meetings in my living room, in my tiny little flat. And I really- My role, among other things, was I was recording secretary, so I was the one who kept the notes of our meetings. Now, again, we have to go back to the early 1980s. I mean, there were no computers back then. And so, we- And I've given you some of these, we did the handbills for the meeting at the Centre using Letraset,

which nobody who's under 50 now would understand what it was. But you bought it and they were little letters that sort of had glue on the back, and you peeled them off a page and then you stuck them on the handbill. And so that's how we made the first handbills. The other thing that I did was I went through the entire Ontario Law List, which is about ten thousand lawyers, and picked out every Japanese name out of the ten thousand names. And there weren't that many, and I got a few who had Japanese last names but weren't Japanese, because they'd married somebody who was Japanese; I got a couple of names that actually were Italian or Polish and not Japanese. But the reason I did that is I wanted to get all of the lawyers who were Japanese Canadian and approach them to say, you know, "have you had your say? What do you think about this? I mean, you're lawyers, you must have a view on the legality of what the government did, on the legalities of what the government is proposing to do." So that was a bit of a laborious process. But again, back in those days, there were no computers, you had to do it by hand. And then we had our first big public consultation at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, and we invited two of the leading proponents from the United States: John Tateishi, who was with the Japanese American Citizens League. And they were seeking group compensation and an apology from the U.S. government. There was another group led by a man named William Hohri from Chicago, who was seeking a class action against the government for the internment, seeking compensation through the courts for the 120,000 Japanese Americans who were interned. And then we invited George Imai, who was the person the government had somehow found and designated as the guy who was gonna negotiate on our behalf. Now, you gotta remember the government was not prepared to apologize. It was going to issue an expression of regret, whatever that is, and they were not offering individual compensation. So, that first meeting at the Cultural Centre was to lay out the options. You know, should we- should we be asking for group compensation, should we be asking for individual compensation? We gave George Imai an opportunity to say whatever he had to say about his deal with the government, and that was the start in Toronto, of a discussion about the various options, and basically, what did we want? So, then there were a couple meetings after that, again one or two at the Cultural Centre that again, were: "Do you favour individual compensation? Do you favour group compensation, do you want an apology?" And it was quite emotional because people really had not had an opportunity to talk about this. And, you know, there were various views expressed; one prominent member of our community said- Didn't think individual compensation was a good idea because it would create a backlash, and it made things- It made it- I think the word he used was selfish, we would look selfish if we asked for individual compensation.

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CS: That's when my mother stood up and challenged him, and said, "Look," said, "I don't care if they give me five dollars, I want something with my name on it that says: 'I am sorry, Joanne Sugiyama, for the almost five years you spent in internment camp, and your dislocation, and your dispossession.'" She said, "I want something with my name on it. I

want something that recognizes me. We were rounded up and put in camps as a faceless group. Not as individual Canadians, not as individual Canadians with rights, so I think it's only right that the government should apologize to each of us individually and give us some form of compensation individually." So, it was very heated and very emotional, but I think a necessary process. And there was a parallel process in Vancouver; it was Roy Miki and Sandra Kobayashi, who did an outstanding job in Vancouver. There's another group in Hamilton, so these things were happening sort of in parallel. But then things got a bit weird, because the government, every time- Now, and this was pre-Art Miki. There was the Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association, who were very sort of opposed to making a ruckus, you know- I think there were many people who really feared a backlash against the community. And then the National Association of Japanese Canadians was sort of born out of that. Gordon Kadota was the head of the NAJC in its early stages, and then Art was elected. But the government tried to undermine us at every- We went through, I think, at least four, maybe five Ministers of Multiculturalism. My perspective on that was, "I don't really want to talk to the Minister of Multiculturalism, this isn't a multicultural issue. This isn't an issue of, you know, diverse language on television or radio, or cultural festivals. This is a justice issue, so I would prefer to talk to the Minister of Justice." Well, that was never gonna happen. They always gave us the Minister of Multiculturalism. And we churned through them. There was only one in that whole group. And remember, this was the Liberal government, at the time of Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Jack Murta, from Winnipeg, who was the Minister of Multiculturalism for a very brief period of time. [chuckles] I remember being introduced to him at a- It was a social function, and whoever introduced me to him put me forward as a representative of the Japanese Canadian community, which I certainly was not, and he actually- He looked at me and he sort of stepped back, and he said, "I'd really like to do something, but my hands are tied." And I thought, "well, that's sort of interesting." But I worried that every time we had a community discussion, something would happen where George Imai was elevated to, like the National Parole Board, or they would stage a public meeting, to which we weren't invited. One of these, I think, was held at the Prince Hotel. So, I started to worry that someone was leaking information to the government. And I've never said this to anybody before. I, through a friend of mine who was in Ottawa, working for the Progressive Conservative Party, arranged for me to have what was a very secret meeting in the mid-1980s. And the meeting was with John Fraser, who was with the- A member of Parliament for Vancouver. He ultimately became the Speaker of the House when the Conservative party came into power, but he was in opposition at that time. So, I went to Ottawa on my own with a briefing book that laid out the chronology, who was who- You know, very factual document about what had happened to date and what we as a group in Toronto were seeking.

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CS: And I said to him, "I don't trust this government at all, and I would like to make sure that there is somebody in opposition keeping an eye on this, okay? Because they are trying,

definitely trying to undermine us." This the same time Pierre Elliot Trudeau went to Japan and apologized to the Japanese and the Japanese Diet. And he was not a stupid man. So, in a way, that was almost mocking us. And so, John Fraser spent the entire afternoon with me on Parliament Hill. It was St. Jean-Baptiste Day, so the House wasn't sitting, but- And he asked me a number of very good questions. You know, for example, he said, "are you sure that there were no incidences of sabotage during the Second World War?" And I said, "Not that we know of." I mean, there may have been those in the community who had, once they're sitting in an internment camp, had mixed feelings about, you know, really if the government is going to treat us like this. That's what led to the people who signed so-called repatriation papers. They basically said, "well, this country doesn't like us, maybe we should go to Japan," where many of them had never been before. So, basically, I left John Fraser with a binder of material and said, "I really don't- I just want somebody to have their ear to the ground, to listen to what's going on, because I know the government has an agenda, and it is not the one that we want to pursue." And years later, it was interesting, because when the Conservative government got into power and he was Speaker of the House, I always wondered what he had done. And it wasn't until- First of all, the redress settlement in 1988. But it was years later when I met- In fact, one of his Cabinet colleagues was a consultant to my law firm, so I had a chance to talk- chance to talk to a number of other Cabinet ministers from the Conservative government, who all said, "that redress settlement wouldn't have happened without John. Because he was the one who basically lobbied his Cabinet mates to give a full apology and compensation." So, that's from very credible sources within his Cabinet. One of whom said, "I would never have approved this. I didn't believe in apologizing. I mean, how many times are we gonna apologize to how many groups in Canada? I was not in favour of it, but he talked me- He talked me into it." Now, you have to say, "Why did he care about this?" Well, what I didn't know at the time I went up to speak with him is he had been born in Japan. His father was an executive with what is now MacMillan Bloedel, a big forestry company. And his family came back to Vancouver just before the war. I think it was pretty obvious Japan was militarizing, so they came back to Canada, and John was bullied and beaten up and called a Jap because he'd been born in Japan. One of his political colleagues told me that he was really badly beaten up in a sawmill where he was working, and it was the nisei men that worked there—this was before Pearl Harbor—who rescued him. But fundamentally, I had an opportunity to speak to him through another intermediary, another somebody who was connected to my law firm who arranged for me to speak to John. And I asked him why he did this. And he said his father took him down to the war memorial in Stanley Park when the Japanese Canadians were being shipped to the interior in trains. And he said, "you know John, I fought the First World War with these men." He said, "they're Canadian." He said, "they died for the country, just like many other Canadians did," and he said, "what we're doing is wrong." He said, "and you must someday find a way to make this right."

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CS: And years later, when Macleans Magazine had- They had a millennial issue for the year 2000, and they asked prominent Canadians, "what was your greatest Canadian moment?" And John Fraser was asked, and he said, "the Japanese Canadian redress settlement." Okay, here's a man who had done so many things and had made so many contributions to Canada, and in this interview in Macleans Magazine, that was what he chose to mention. And he said that the prime minister, was Brian Mulroney at the time, approached him and said, "will you be in the House on this day? Because I'm going to make the announcement of the redress settlement, and I won't make it unless you're in the house." So, what does that tell you? But here's a man who quietly made a difference, and I am convinced it wouldn't have happened without him. That's been verified by any number of his Cabinet mates. And I finally had an opportunity to interview him for Sedai. Fortunately, because he passed away a year or two ago. And I interviewed him in Vancouver, and I had to draw it out of him, because like- Like many people who do these important things, they don't talk about it. They don't talk about it; they don't brag about it. And even trying to drag this information out of him, he basically said, "well, it wasn't- It really wasn't about me," he said, "except that I did turn one very vocal anti-redress caucus member, who was very vocal and opposed to the idea." He said, "I did turn that person around." But it was much more than that. So, he is one of the people that I remember and am grateful to. The other person who, again, quietly, modestly, humbly, made a contribution that turned the whole discussion about redress. A man named Phil Barter, who was a partner of Price Waterhouse in Vancouver. And again, through friends, I had an opportunity to talk to Phil. He passed away quite a number of years ago and sadly didn't have a chance to interview him for Sedai. But again, I asked him, "why did you do this?" Because Price Waterhouse basically did the study on economic losses of the Japanese Canadian community at less than cost. It was almost pro-bono; I think they probably charged some expenses, but that study that they did completely turned the tide of redress. Because until that report came out, the government kept saying, "well, you can't prove what you lost." And we'd say, "well, that's because the one suitcase you let us take to the interior, we generally didn't take out legal papers that proved what we owned. We put those in our attics, then you sold our houses out from under us. So, you know, of course we have trouble proving these things, you took everything." But the Price Waterhouse study put a figure on it. Now, people can argue whether that figure was too low, but it put a number on it. And it said, you know, "at the time, this is the value of those fishing boats, the businesses, whatever," and it was from an objective source, and it was done based on the evidence. So, again, he was behind it. I think Arthur Hara, who was a good friend of his, had sort of convinced him maybe they should do this.
KS: Mm-hm.
CS: But when I asked him, "why did you do it?" He said, "my best friend in Vancouver was Japanese Canadian. And when they were being shipped to the interior, my father took me down to the train station to say goodbye." Which, by the way, very, very few people did. "And as the train was pulling out, my father said to me, as John Fraser's father had said to him, 'you know Phil, these people are Canadian. What we're doing is wrong. And some day,

you should try to do something to make this right.'" So, again, that was sort of his motivation for doing the study on the economic losses.

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CS: Not something he ever talked about; he's one of the unsung heroes, you won't find his name in any of the books about redress. So, I mentioned these things to say that it wasn't about a few people in our community, okay? There were journalists out there who were very supportive, there were politicians out there who were very supportive, and those people never talked about it, 'kay? They didn't trumpet what they did, they- And in fact, I'm sure that probably, from the partners of Price Waterhouse, they'd much rather have people working on deals that produce money than doing a study for free on the losses we suffered as a community. So, you know, these are very modest, humble people, and the more we learn about some of the institutions that have survived the war, like the Vancouver Japanese Language School, the more we find people like this. There was a young lawyer in Vancouver who saved the Vancouver Japanese Language School from being sold by the government. I mean basically after the Department of Defense was finished using it for offices and barracks, they wanted to sell it. And he- This guy, his name is MacLellan,- MacLennan- Very young lawyer at the time, must have taken tremendous courage for him to stand up to the government. And he said, "you don't own this building, you can't sell it. The owners are the trustees, and the trustees are scattered throughout the interior at various internment camps. And you can find them, but you're gonna have to get their consent in order to sell this property." Which of course, they couldn't, and therefore the Vancouver Japanese Language School is still owned by the community. And again, I know Laura and Deb Saimoto have tracked down the granddaughter of this lawyer, found out more information about him. And there are all kinds of stories like this.
KS: Mm-hm. Do you feel that your knowledge as a lawyer is the thing that helped you navigate that process to find the right people, to get on your side the right allies, and the right sort of methodology to- The steps to take to help move the redress forward?
CS: It did in this sense. I think the one skill that lawyers have is the ability to question, okay? Critical thought is something that we're trained to do. So, looking at what the Trudeau government was going to do, and looking at the arguments, one could say, "unlike the Americans, we didn't have a constitutional guarantee of anything." But fundamentally, common law would say that taking your property, putting it in the hands of the Custodian of Enemy Property, who then sold it out from under you might be a breach of trust! Putting your property in the hands of lawyers, as my grandfather did; the lawyers then sold everything out from under him, took a five per cent commission, and then failed to follow his instructions to make a claim with the Bird Commission, okay? That is- That's a total breach of trust. If you made those allegations against a lawyer and were able to prove these things, which my grandfather could, but for the statute of limitations- He had telegrams from the interior to his law firm, giving them instructions that they ignored. You know, those are grounds for disbarment. So, I think it was helpful to have a group of young

lawyers on the team, but what I didn't understand at the time was, sort of behind the scenes of the politics. The- What went on at a political level, federally, and this was all about the federal government. I mean, they worked and worked and worked to undermine us by elevating a member of our community who was ostensibly the spokesperson, who was going to accept this settlement on our behalf.

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CS: Well, they picked him, we didn't nobody asked us. And then we managed to turn that around, ultimately, but I- It was actually quite a disillusioning experience for me, to see how the government- Now, what they did and what is happening now with the government south of our border are two different things. I mean, the magnitude of the lies and magnitude of the deception is a totally different thing. But I've always had a theory that the reason Pierre Elliot Trudeau was never going to apologize was that this is the man that invoked the War Measures Act in Quebec. Who imprisoned- I don't think there's an accurate number, but thousands of Quebecois, because they had leaflets, maybe, that supported the FLQ. So, he was never going to apologize, because to do that would mean- It was war, you invoke the War Measures Act during war. What happened in Quebec was not war, although he would take the position that maybe it was. Some members of our community said, "well, we never killed a Cabinet minister." You know, and- But he could not apologize to us, because it would mean that he would have to apologize to Quebec.
KS: It would open a can of worms.
CS: It would open a huge can of worms for the Liberal party, because that is their stronghold. So that has never- But the other thing is that we had heard that some form of compensation had been paid to people who'd been wrongly imprisoned in Quebec after the FLQ crisis. But we have never ever been able to find any documentation for that. And it would be very interesting to see if we could find it- Find anything. But I think, someday, that this will come out. You know, and I have to believe that that was behind the resistance that we found. Because, as I said, Trudeau had been the justice minister, he had been a professor of law. You know, he would know that this is not something that you do to Canadian citizens. But for political reasons, they had their own agenda, and it wasn't until the government changed that we were able to get a redress settlement. And I had a chance to speak to the former Prime Minister Mulroney, and he said, "of all the things I did in politics," he said, "that and the North American Free Trade Agreement were the greatest things I ever did." So, that says something.
KS: Yeah, I think when young people look at Canadian history, it's surprising to think that Trudeau didn't do this and Mulroney did. So, it's an interesting idea to think about the politics and the inner workings of those- Those parties, for what they, like, had to do for their own, you know, their own political freedom- Or, not freedom, but power.
CS: We also have to remember that it was a liberal government that interned us, right? I mean, they bowed to the racists in British Columbia who said, "if you don't deal with the Jap problem we have, we're never going to support you." And they bowed to that. So, you know,

as somebody said- And it's probably true, because people were always mystified that a large portion of the nisei population voted NDP, when they would all expect us to vote Liberal. And I would have to explain to people, "well, the CCF Party was the only party that stood up for us during the war. It's the liberals who interned us; it's the liberals who refused to apologize to us." It's taken a long time- I don't think my father ever, ever, ever forgave the Liberal Party, okay? For his entire life, he would not vote Liberal, and for precisely that reason.
KS: So, you've given a really great sort of overall, sort of macro sort of idea- Can we get back into the grassroots of it a little bit?

[0:45]

CS: Sure
KS: Did you-
VE: Yeah, kind of a question on that; I know a lot of sansei were involved, right? Like you had talked about Maryka Omatsu, yeah, other sansei who were involved. Why do you think- Who were those sansei that were involved, and why do you think they were so interested in this cause?
CS: Well, I think because a number of us were lawyers. And one of the reasons I went to law school in the first place was out of a sense of- I remember when the Diefenbaker Bill of Rights was passed, which was just a- It was a piece of legislation. My mother got a copy from the Queen's printer, framed it, put it in the den, got the four of us to come, and she said, "look," she said. "Because of this document," she said, "what happened to us will not happen again to another Canadian." Well, it wasn't- Didn't take me very long in political science to discover that that wasn't worth the paper it was written on, that piece of paper. You know, one of the really, really, I think, horrible decisions our Supreme Court made was in a case called Lavelle, where an Indigenous woman- If you were a status Indian woman, and you married somebody who wasn't a status Indian, you lost all your rights. If you were a status man and married a non-status woman, you got to keep all your rights. So, Lavelle went all the way up to the Supreme Court to say, "well, this isn't equality." And the Supreme Court said, "Oh, it's okay." Said, "doesn't matter. Yeah, they can do that, we can do that." And I just thought, "Okay." I mean, I actually sort of had aspirations to be an architect when I was in high school, and very quickly thought, "You know what? We're overrepresented in the profession of architecture." [laughs] There are so many excellent Japanese Canadian architects. So, in my, you know, sort of 18-year-old mind, I thought, "But there aren't enough lawyers. And maybe if we had known more about the law, we might have been able to fight back better at the time. And when it comes to an apology and understanding the law and why this is right, it might help to be a lawyer. And if it ever happens again, I'd like to be in a position where I understood the law and might be able to do something." So, that's why I went to law school, and I think- I can't speak to the motivations of others who were in the group, who were either in law school or were graduated and were lawyers. But I'm sure that our feelings about the injustice of all of this were shared. And it was, to start

with, largely a group of sansei. Because again, so many of the nisei didn't want to talk about it. They hadn't talked about it. It was painful; I get that. But there were nisei who joined us afterwards. But it was- And we were roundly criticized in the community, and there were articles in *The New Canadian,* which was our community voice before the *Nikkei Voice*, that accused us of all kinds of horrible things. Called us, you know, sansei rabble-rousers, and, in my case, you know, I was a Bay Street lawyer, therefore I must have some hidden motivation for doing this. I mean, some of the things people said were quite awful.
KS: Was there ever a point during that time that you started to consider giving up? Like, what kept you motivated to keep going with this fight, despite the fact that even your own community was questioning you?
CS: Well, you know, I did quit, at one point. And it was after I met with John Fraser. And you know, again, if you- There was a little bit of chaos. And as I said, it was really disillusioning to me, to see how the government was dealing with it, to know that somebody in our group was leaking information.

[0:50]

CS: I mean, clearly, the government had some source somewhere in our group that was feeding them information. And, so, I mean, sort of around 1986, probably, I just decided, "you know what?" I mean, my mother kept in the group, both to take notes, she was sort of the corporate secretary. But at that point, you know, it's about the time when I was pregnant with my daughter, too, so there were a lot of things up in the air. But I just thought, "You know what? I can't do this." First of all, the amount of time that it was taking- And somehow, I always got kicked to the front. So, you know, if somebody wanted- I was the talking head more than anybody else, because others who worked for the federal government said, "Oh I don't wanna be too public about this," right? To which I would say, "Well really, you think this is a popular cause on Bay Street?" But, you know, for example, at one point the *Toronto Star* wanted to do an article on three generations of Japanese Canadian women. So, who gets kicked to the front? I do. So, it was my mother, me, my grandmother- My maternal grandmother was long gone; my paternal grandmother was in Vancouver, and I don't think she would have wanted to speak up, and also her English was not all that good. So, we found a woman who'd actually been one of my mother's schoolteachers. So, we agreed to do this interview, and then all of a sudden, it occurred to me, "Wow. Like, I am-" And fortunately back then there was no internet, but still, people would send hate mail, and you know. I thought, "I put my mother and this other woman in a position that's potentially dangerous." And I remember asking the journalist, I said, "You know, should I be worried about being this vocal?" Because it was a full-page article in the *Toronto Star*, and the worst, most vocal opponents to what we were doing was Canadian Legion, okay? Again- And when we started to ask for redress, they went to the Japanese government asking for 21,000 each for every Hong Kong veteran. And what happened to the Hong Kong veterans was a totally different story, it was a war crime. You know, reparations were certainly due, but it- We were seeking redress because we were

Canadians who had been incarcerated, dispossessed, and ultimately deported. So, they sort of intentionally failed to understand the distinction. But I asked the journalist, "Should I be worried about this?" And her answer was, "Well, maybe you're going to have to delist your phone number." And I thought, "well, you know, it's not like our name is Smith. If you looked up 'Sugiyama,' every Sugiyama in the phonebook's related to me. Anyhow, apart from some- The worst nasty coverage was from our own community. You know, again, accusing the sanseis who were involved of being rabble-rousers and somehow having an ulterior purpose and all of that. But, you know, I really did, more for personal reasons than anything else, decide that it was- it was too disillusioning. But when the conservative government came in, then the tides turned and you had- With the backing of people like John Fraser, you had people who were actually pushing for us. And the other part of it I remember was that the journalists- And there were some journalists who were very good, and we made a push to go to the media. Joy Kogawa and her partner at the time were more media-savvy than some of us, and they were helpful. They got some of the journalists on-side. I went to a number of journalists again, with briefing books to say, "You know, you can't call us Japanese Canadians 'cause you always drop the 'Canadian,' okay?

[0:55]

CS: "We are Canadian. We're Canadians of Japanese heritage. So, really if you wanna talk, you wanna describe us, you should call us Canadian Japanese, or Canadians of Japanese heritage, because people don't get this, okay? The Canadian Legion doesn't get this, people on Bay Street don't get this. I mean, I remember going up the elevator with a bunch of guys—they weren't from my law firm, they were from another law firm—who were very vocally saying, "What do those Japs want anyhow? We were at war with them. You know, why should we apologize and give them compensation?" I even had Jewish partners of mine who said, "Well, this never happened." I took one of them to task and said, "I can't believe you're saying that, okay? It absolutely did happen, okay? I can give you chapter and verse from my parents' and grandparents' experience, and by that time, *Obasan* had been published, and *The Politics of Racism*, and a number of good books. And I bought copies for her, and I said, "here you go. And by the way, I never want to hear you say that again." Okay, now this person was a card-carrying very active member of the Liberal Party, which was sort of interesting. But again, to say it never happened was- So, these were the things that we were fighting against daily, and very visibly. So, anyhow, so I took a hiatus, and after the 1988 settlement—was the year, my daughter was born—then I was asked if I would serve on the board of the Japanese Canadian Redress Foundation. Which, I think, was one of the most gratifying things that I've done in my life. It was a very good board, and I think we did really, really good work. To take 12 million dollars, which is really bupkis when you think about it, eight million of which was to go to capital projects, four million to programs. And we spent a lot of time thinking out, you know, "what are the parameters?" How would we look at these grant applications. So, for example, I don't know how many applications we got for kimonos for odori groups, and drums for taiko groups. Well, you could spend all

four million dollars on drums and kimonos. So, we set up some rules, that were: no, we're not giving to individuals. If you want to partner with an existing organization in the community, then you can make your case why you need drums for a taiko group, and we would fund that group. We also decided that we would only- Because we didn't have the means of doing detailed due diligence on the applications with big capital grants, that what we would require- So, we would require each community applicant to demonstrate that they had equal community equity in their project, or sweat equity in their project, before we would consider funding them. And that turned out to be a very good way to look at things, because again, we were stewarding what was a relatively small amount of money and trying to make the biggest, most sustainable impact across the country. And there were groups that came forward and we thought, "well, how sustainable is a little museum in the interior of British Columbia gonna be?" But then we made a decision; like, those things were important, even if the Japanese Canadian population in Kaslo, New Denver, was moving out, okay? That's clearly a community that's going to disappear over the years. But memorializing that location was important. And we met, I think it was- It was probably a weekend a month for years; my daughter was very young at the time. And we basically met in various parts of the country. But I think we turned that 12 million dollars and eight million dollars in capital projects into, I think, more than 90 million in investments, because we required people to get funding from other sources, and we were lucky because it was a high interest rate cycle, so we managed to earn money on the dollars we hadn't spent.

[1:00]

CS: But I think, back to your question about whether it helped to be a lawyer, I think it helped to be a lawyer for the Redress Foundation. We ran into a situation where there- I think it was close to two million dollars left in the individual redress bucket that the government had set out, and there were those who had been repatriated to Japan. And there were claims from those families and from their children. And the government's position on that was, "no, we don't have to compensate you, because if you did not come back to Canada when the war was over and hostilities ended, then you're not entitled to any of that money." Well, I mean, first of all, they had no money. They were sent over having been stripped of all their property. Very difficult existence for those who went back, because many of them, they had never been to Japan, they didn't speak Japanese, they were treated horribly; Japan was in the middle of reconstruction after the war, there wasn't enough food. So, their ability to come up with a passage to come back to Canada was severely limited. But then, I had a law student of mine do some research, and it turns out that when the War Measures Act was repealed, the government, under the Immigration Act, enacted some really awful regulations that said, "if you were an enemy alien, or you had been deemed to be an enemy alien, you were barred from entry to Canada." Now, I think six months after they passed these regulations, they exempted all Germans and Italians, so the only people this regulation applied to was us. We were the only people who had been deemed to be enemy aliens, so basically, under those regulations promulgated

under the Immigration Act, not the War Measures Act, people like my aunt in Winnipeg and her family, couldn't come back until 1952, 1953. So, we went to the government and said, "no, they couldn't come back. You wouldn't let them come back. So, they absolutely are entitled to compensation." The government had to back down, 'cause they wanted to claw back the two million dollars, okay? But we said, "look, these people suffered, and you passed these regulations that barred them from coming back. So, they couldn't even if they had the money and the inclination to do it, they couldn't come back. So, that's where it probably helped to be a lawyer. It helped to be a lawyer when we set up the rules on conflicts of interest for the Redress Foundation. At some point, somebody who didn't get a grant threatened to sue us. And not only did- It was somebody whose father had a lot of money. So, you know, we had our lawyers write them a letter to say, "you know what? Knock yourselves out. You wanna sue us, fine, but you have to deal with our lawyers." So, we had a meeting in Winnipeg, and who shows up but this guy and his lawyer at the meeting. Well, people just lost their minds, like what're we gonna do? So, they said, "well, you chair the meeting." [laughs] So, I said, "fine, I'll chair the meeting." I said, "you know, you have no standing here. You're going to have to leave." To the guy, the father of the person who didn't get the grant. And the lawyer said, "well, I'm not leaving." He said, "I'm not leaving, my client's not leaving." I said, "I'm throwing you out, okay? You have no standing here. And by the way, did you not get a letter from us, that if you want to take this further, you have to deal with our lawyers." I said, "where I come from, okay, as a lawyer, when you're given a letter like that and then you show up unannounced, uninvited with us, not through our lawyers," I said, "that's unprofessional conduct. So, leave now." So, they did, and we never heard from them again.
KS: Wow.
VE: They made you do everything.
CS: Pardon me?
VE: They made you do everything. Chair the meetings, talk to the media.
CS: Well, that was the Redress Foundation. But, you know, that- I think we did a lot of good work.

[1:05]

CS: And so, being on the Redress Foundation, the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre was one of the organizations that sought funding for, I think- And it took them so long to get their act together, and they almost missed it. But finally, Steve Oikawa became president, and—terrific person—and he got the application in, so they got the funding. And then when I stepped down from the Redress Foundation, I got sort of voluntold to be on the board of the Cultural Centre and then voluntold to take on the capital campaign. [laughs]
KS: Alright. Well, I want to get into that stuff later, but before we move onto that, I just wanna just touch back on, sort of, the whole redress process, and- Can you talk a little bit about specific- You mentioned Joy Kogawa, of course yourself; can you talk a little bit about the women's roles in the redress movement and how you don't see a lot of their names in

all the books and stuff like that, but I know they were there.
CS: Well, I think Maryka Omatsu is- You know, her name's out there, she was in the photo with the prime minister, but, you know, I think actually it's interesting, because a number of Japanese Canadian women- It's a little bit of a back-handed compliment in a way, but said, "we went to law school because we saw that you women with law degrees were the only ones who were listened to in the community." [chuckles] And, so, that's good, if we inspired other Japanese Canadian women to go to law school, that's a good thing. I think the original Sodon Kai group was fairly cohesive. I think, again, we were very careful to say, "we don't have a position on redress. What we are doing is, we just- We want to know what our community wants, okay? Is there a consensus in the community about an expression of regret versus an apology, individual compensation versus group compensation? You know, suing the government, which was probably not a wise choice, and in the United States, that choice did not prevail. But I think the women were treated respectfully, and we had a voice. I mean, I'm trying to think how many male lawyers, but Shin Imai was the only male lawyer in the group. So, yes, I think we made a difference. One more footnote to the whole redress thing that really hasn't- You know, there's an expression that "success has many mothers and failure is an orphan," okay? So, people will sort of- And they've written books, they've made careers out of redress, but again, never would happened here without John Fraser, but it never would have happened period had Ronald Reagan not first made an apology to the Japanese American community and made an offer of redress of- I can't remember if it was 20,000 or 21,000 US. It was pretty hard for the Canadian government to resist doing the same when the American government did it, okay? And the difference between the American government and our government was the Americans commissioned a study, and it wasn't called, you know, "Redress for the Japanese Dash Americans." It was called "The Wartime Incarceration of American Citizens." And it was a study not just about the American Japanese community, but it was a study also on what happened what happened in the Aleutian Islands, where people were interned. But very wisely, I said- I mean, because the issue was not that- We weren't seeking redress because we were Japanese, per se, we were seeking redress because we were Canadians, okay? And what happened should never happen to a Canadian or to an American. So, again, in terms of who gets credit for what, nobody has really said in all of this- You know, we have to say that what Reagan did first made a huge difference. Because then, of course, he and Mulroney were sitting in a room singing "When Irish Eyes Were Smiling," right?

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CS: I mean, they were good buddies, and so it was very hard to say, "no, no, we won't do it." And, also, there's a huge history of what our Canadian government did that was way worse than what the American Government did to Americans of Japanese ancestry. Which is one of the reasons I wanted to create Sedai. Because there was Densho, to which we aspire, who captured the stories of the American Japanese. I went to- And this is another story; it's a very interesting set of coincidences that led me to Seattle. But I went to Seattle to meet with

the Densho team, and did a lecture for a group of them, including some of the historians from the University of Washington, to say, "look, if you put these things side-by-side, what your government did and what our government did, what our government did was way worse, okay? Way worse. I mean, first of all, as US citizens, you had a constitutional right to property, so your property couldn't be confiscated. I mean, when it was derelict, it was sold at many cases at distressed prices, but the government couldn't take your property if you were an American citizen, 'cause you had a God-given constitutional right to that property. Japanese Americans spent- It was less than three years in the camp before the US Supreme Court said, "you can't imprison American citizens without cause." [scoffs] This no longer stands in the United States, but the Supreme Court said, "habeas corpus, you can't incarcerate American citizens without due process." So, everybody had to be released from the camps, 'kay? We spent more than four years in camps, all our property was taken, and then after the war we had the horrible choice of going East of the Rockies, 'cause they didn't want any Japs in British Columbia ever again, and that's one of the reasons they dispossessed our property, so we'd have nothing to go back to. Americans didn't do that, they didn't deport—then—American citizens. And the other thing that made a huge difference was that if you were an American citizen, you could join the armed forces, 'kay? We were barred from service in the Second World War, other than that little Japanese Language group, of which Frank Moritsugu was part of- It was actually the British army came to recruit Japanese Canadians to go into Southeast Asia with the occupational forces. But in the United States, if you were an American, you could serve. And therefore the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the most highly decorated unit in the American military in the Second World War for its size- I mean, that made a huge difference. Because when redress started in the United States, and then the American Legion got up and said, "well, why are we ever going to apologize to the Japs, look what they did to us," then they would put Daniel Inouye with his one arm and his chest of medals, Mike Masaoka with his chest of medals, who would say, "what do you mean? We fought for this country, okay? We fought for this country in so many cases when our families were in concentration camps, okay? And we did it with distinction, and we did it to prove our loyalty and our love for our country." And so that shut down the American Legion, okay? We did not have that in Canada, so we didn't have an answer to the Canadian Legion when they made the same arguments and when they sued the Canadian- The Japanese government for an apology and $21,000 per Hong Kong survivor. We did not have a comeback. And so that made a huge difference. So, again, when you look at why we finally got redress in 1988, it was a combination of all of those factors. It wasn't because of one or two people, you know, who persisted. I mean, clearly, they deserve credit for being persistent, but it wouldn't have happened without these other things. And I think when we look at the history of how this happened, we have to look at those parallel things as well.

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CS: Those righteous, courageous people like John Fraser and Phil Barter, who stood up and made a difference for us; what happened in the United States; all of those things factored into why our Progressive Conservative government probably made a settlement in 1988.
KS: Can you go back and talk about, or expand on what about Joy Kogawa and *Obasan* that made the story kind of- How that that helped with the movement?
CS: I always told Joy I should probably get a commission on her book, 'cause I'm sure I've bought a hundred copies of *Obasan* if I bought one, because it was an easy way to tell the story to somebody who didn't know what happened to us. That was an- It was a beautiful book and an easy way—it's told from a child's perspective, too—to educate somebody on what happened. And the emotional aspects of what happened. Much easier for somebody to digest than, you know, *The Politics of Racism* was really a well-written book, and it was great, but to ask somebody to plow through that is a little bit, that's- If they liked *Obasan*, then they could go on to read that and other books that were published. But *Obasan*, it was a beautiful story, and it was very close to my family, too, because my mother's family was interned in Slocan with the Kogawa family. In fact, my maternal grandfather's watch repairer is actually mentioned in *Obasan*, in Slocan. So, again, it was really a very good way to educate those who didn't know a lot about what happened. And, you know what, it wasn't just- Some of our sansei, too, again, through no fault of their own. I mean, wasn't in the history books, wasn't taught in school when we went to school, nobody wanted- Their parents didn't want to talk about it, grandparents didn't want to talk about it, and so, again, it was like, "no, this really happened. This is fictional, but it really happened." It's set in the context of actual events. And I can tell you that my family was right there with her family. And that had an impact on people. And, you know, they'd read that book and they'd say, "Gee, I never knew this happened." You know, well, it did. So-
VE: Can I ask, who were the other sort of non-lawyers, other than, you know, Joy Kogawa, who helped turn the tide of public opinion, or who were, you know, involved in redress?
CS: Well, in Toronto, which is the group I can speak to- I mean, as I said, there was Roy Miki and Cassandra Kobayashi did really, really good work in Vancouver. I'm not entirely sure who was in- The other players in their group. There was also a group in Hamilton that started having community meetings as well. But in Toronto, there was Roger Obata, who- He called me to find out what this group of sansei were doing, and I said, you know, "come to our next meeting." And you know, he added a real historical perspective to all this, given his experience. And he was on the board of the Redress Foundation with me after 1988. Frank Moritsugu. And Frank was terrific, because with his experience in broadcasting and the media, he understood how to handle somebody like George Imai. I mean, we felt we had to give him a speaking role when we had the first panel discussion, but Frank moderated that session. So, he knew how to handle, you know, detractors, or keep people on course. He was very skilled at that. And in terms of some of the media strategy, he was really good at that. Jesse Nishihata was another member of the group who I think understood media, filmmaking, communications. I mentioned Shin Imai.

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CS: Oh, Ron Shimizu, who worked for the federal government. I can't- You know what, I can't remember if Ron was a lawyer or not. He might be, but he was part of the group, a little bit more on the periphery when I was part of the group. I probably left out people.
KS: That's okay.
CS: But those were the- You know, we met regularly, many of those meetings, as I said, in my living room.
KS: I think we'll start transitioning more to Sedai now, since we've already talked about that. But do you- How's your energy? Do you want to take a little break, and-
CS: Can we take a little, just a little break?
KS: Of course, absolutely.
CS: A bio break.
KS: Yeah, of course. I'm gonna pause this.
VE: Yup.

[1:21]

CS: A relatively young lawyer, and not really all that old. You know, that was like 40+ years ago.
KS: Mm-hm.
CS: So, all of the things you experience and all of the things you learn later in life, you can use that lens to look back on some of these things and realize that there were other forces at play, and- You know, when we did- When we were dispersing the money for redress, there were- I mean, we never did this, but it'd be sort of interesting to see how many of the same people intersected and basically- I don't wanna say made a living, but they sort of did make a living. You know, we funded three books, and projects, and we had the same people sort of coming in and out. Which is okay. And we were cognizant of that, though, when we were looking at the funding. We had a great executive director, Tony Tamayose, who was- He was really- He's wise, and, you know, he would keep us on track.
KS: Would you say with that fund that you tried to prioritize sustainable things and capital costs so that- For the future, instead of just one-offs?
CS: Yeah. Because we could've given it away to all kinds of, you know, important projects, many of which now are being funded through the BC fund, which is great. But how many- You know, we could have put plaques up all over the country. Actually, they didn't let us put up a plaque. We wanted to put up a plaque in Oppenheimer Park, and the City of Vancouver blocked it. Yeah, they didn't- I mean, it's pretty hard to say you're the gateway to Asia when you have done all these awful things. [chuckles] But anyhow, no. So, we were careful. We said, "where are the major centres of population." Obviously, Vancouver, Toronto, to a lesser degree, Winnipeg, although I think we all figured we owe Winnipeg, because it was the only place west of Ontario that would accept the settlement of Japanese Canadians when we were shipped east of the Rockies. And I think that is in part

attributable to the Jewish community in Winnipeg, who welcomed our families. The University of Manitoba- I mean, it's quite amazing to think that when my father had to give up his scholarship to the University of British Columbia after the war because they wouldn't A, let him back to the coast and B, accept him because he was of Japanese ancestry, the University of Manitoba took his two brothers in engineering and my father in medicine. And that was in a veteran's year, right? When veterans got priority. But they got into the university, they got their degrees, and I think they- You know, for my parents, they always felt that Winnipeg was home, not Vancouver. Because Winnipeg welcomed them; that's where my parents met and married. But for the fact that my father hooked up with a group of doctors he really liked in Toronto, he was only here for a year.

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CS: I could very easily have been raised in Winnipeg. But, you know, that they have always viewed as home. So, yeah, we did look at the- There was Hamilton had a fairly large population of Japanese Canadians. It's funny when you look at where the population centres were across the country. It's where the camps were, and then after the war ended, I mean, why Hamilton? It's because a lot of Japanese Canadians came to work in the fruit belt around the Niagara region, and then, in some of, to a lesser extent, like Dofasco and Stelco. But it was really the attraction of the soft fruit agricultural industry that drew a lot of Japanese Canadians who had worked in places like the Okanagan. And, so, it's funny because I don't think there's be any other ethnic community in Canada where there would be populations in Thunder Bay, right, because that's where Angler was; in Raymond, Alberta, you know, that's where the sugar beet projects were; and then in all these little tiny towns throughout the interior of British Columbia. You know, so that's what we were looking at. So, as I said, the lion's share of that capital allocation went to the NNHC in Vancouver. And we sort of broke our rule there, about having equal sweat equity, because they didn't have equal sweat equity with that project. They, I think they originally had trouble getting their fundraising off the ground. I remember Arthur Hara actually invited me to go to Vancouver to talk to them about how we raised money at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. And, you know, they eventually did it, but they- We gave them four million dollars. The Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre got a million dollars. That always nagged a little bit at me, because I know, you know, where in the country did fifty families mortgage their homes when they had come to Toronto with nothing to build this place. I mean, you talk about sweat equity, there was no place in Canada, in our community, that had more sweat equity than the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. But anyhow, as my granddaughter would say, [mimicking] it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, because you know, we've been so successful here. And hopefully we'll get to that, because honestly, when I walk around this building, I have such an overwhelming sense of pride and gratitude, actually, for what- Because I remember what it was like trying to raise the money for what was going to be an addition to the old building, and ultimately was the money to move here.

KS: Well, let's stick with that a little bit. So, tell us about your involvement in the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, and-
CS: Well, I- You know, as a kid, I grew up about a mile away from here. My parents had a house that- You know, we used to play in the ravine. I'm gonna date myself, because this was before the parkway went through. And so, as the parkway was being graded, that's about the time the foundations for the Centre were going. So, I remember actually walking with my family down into the valley, and up what was going to be the Don Valley Parkway to see- Bless you. To check on how the building of this, the original Centre was coming along. And then, of course, my parents were there for the opening. I mean, it was just a huge source of pride for them. You know, it was important. And I think they were very happy that they lived in Don Mills, and they were going to be very close to the Centre. And- So that was- And then, when I was young, we used to come to all the events, spring festival and whatever, and we sang in the sansei choir. [laughs] In fact, I think we were half of the sansei choir, the four Sugiyamas. And my younger brother, who was- He was quite young at the time, and a little on the mischievous side, he was asked to leave, because I don't think he had the best voice, but also, he was a little distracted at the time. So, out of protest, the three of us quit.

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CS: So, they lost half the choir. [chuckles] But, you know, as a teenager, I didn't come to the Centre a lot. And the reason for that is that- I try to describe it to people: I mean, when you walked into the Centre, it was like going to your aunt's house. So, there were many nisei, and they all knew my parents, and they wouldn't introduce themselves as, "Hi, I am so-and-so," it would usually be, "Hey, I know your father," or "Hey, I know your grandfather." Now, they would never said, "I knew your grandfather, and he was a great guy," They would just- And they would not introduce themselves, so it was very awkward all the time. It was like, "And who might you be?" As I said, it was- You were a young person, didn't necessarily get the feeling that you were welcome, you know, and volunteering; all of the nisei women who cooked for Bazaar, and Metro Caravan, and all of those things, it was like an army came. It was unbelievable. They all had their place and their routine, and you always felt that you were in the way, and getting in the way, and possible annoying them, right? So, as a teenager, I just, I didn't come out to the Centre. And it wasn't until I had my own child, okay, that I started coming back with my parents, because it was important to me that my daughter have a sense of her Japanese Canadian heritage, which I always distinguish from- You know, there's Japan and Japanese, but Japanese Canadian is a very distinctive thing. It's- You know what defines us as a community? It's the internment, okay? It is not like the old country, it's the internment. That's what you always say, "Where were your parents interned?" And that's the connection. But- And I sort of want there to be more programming around that sort of history, and the discussion of what does it mean to be Japanese Canadian? What does it mean to be sansei, what does it mean to be yonsei? And, you know, the board at the time was very conservative. And when I joined the board in-

After I finished with the Redress Foundation, I think there was Sharon Marubashi and me. I think we were the only two women on the board. And again, they were predominantly nisei men. And again, you know, in fairness to everybody, they had known me since I was that high. So, the fact that I was now a partner of a very big law firm didn't seem to matter. I mean, they knew me as a kid, and I didn't know anything. And so, it was a little bit of an uphill battle to be heard in that group.
KS: So, what were your techniques to become heard? What did you have to do to get your voice or your way? To get any movement on things?
CS: Well, I think that the best example is when I got talked into chairing the first capital campaign for the Centre. Now, if I'd known then what I know now, I would have run screaming out of the room.
VE: [laughs]
CS: Because, basically, there was an addition that had already been designed, and they were planning to build, like, the next year. They had no money. So, I remember asking, like, "How do you think you're gonna raise the money?" Which, at the time, was, I think the estimate was about eight million dollars. "How do you think you're gonna raise that money?" And I was told, "Well we're going to sell noodles, we're going to sell udon. And I just thought, "Oh, I am outta here." But I knew that if I- Because I had been involved in a number of other fundraising campaigns, if I said to the board, "Well, you know, that's foolish, 'cause you sell noodles at the very end to sort of wrap up the campaign, but you are gonna get 95 per cent of your funding from five per cent of your base, so you gotta focus on who is in the five per cent of the base."

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CS: If I had said that I don't think anybody would have listened. But what I did was- And again, I'd rather be lucky than smart, and I think I was lucky in this. I put out an RFP asking for fundraising consultants. And I was very honest, I said, "Look, you know what, I need somebody to come up with a capital campaign plan; that's phase one. And phase two would be executing on that capital campaign plan. But I have to tell you: I have no money, so, you know." I think I was offering about five thousand dollars for the capital campaign plan, and I said, "I probably can't afford you for phase two." But much to my amazement, three of the largest fundraising firms in the country responded to that RFP. Not only did they respond to it, when we had interviews, the president of each of those companies came to argue their case. And I was totally surprised by that. And then I realized what was happening, is it was a time when everybody was trying to figure out, how do we raise money in the ethnocultural communities, okay? So, we were definitely an ethnocultural community. But the other connection that was very important to them were the Japanese companies. The big Japanese companies; the Sonys, the Toyotas, and they thought, "this might be sort of an in to them." And so, we picked Ketchum to do the capital campaign plan, which they came on, and basically it said, "You're gonna raise 95 per cent of your funds from five per cent of your base, so you better identify the five per cent of the base." But because they said it,

okay. “Okay.” So, then it was, “How do we land”- In the quiet part of the campaign, “how do we land the first big chunks of money?” And there was a great guy on the board at the time, Dave Sora, and he was a very [motions with hands] big thinker. So, he had identified Jobs Ontario as a potential funder. Okay, now you have to think, “we’re a cultural centre, why would Jobs Ontario fund us?” Well, we put together a proposal that said- Because trade with Japan was still a big thing at the time, that we will have- You know, this is economic development. What we will do at the Centre is, we do teach Japanese language, but we could equally teach Japanese business etiquette, which is- I knew James Heron before he came to the Centre, because he was the consultant, and he advised Japanese- Or, Canadian companies, on Japanese business etiquette. So, we put together a proposal for the Ontario government, and we were greatly assisted by [redacted] a classmate of mine, [redacted]. He was a very good friend of Bob Rae’s, who was premier at the time. And so, I think through those connections, we got an audience with Frances Lankin, who was the minister responsible for Jobs Ontario. And what sealed the deal for us is that the president of Mitsubishi came with us for the presentation, Shinji Teshima. Now, he didn’t have to say anything, but his presence there and the connection with his company and Toyota was well-known to everybody. So, when we put the proposal to Jobs Ontario, they said “okay.” They gave us two million dollars. Which was quite significant, because there were other groups who applied, much larger than our group, who got less funding. So, that was the first major infusion of capital that we had. The next one was the Shokokai. And they were- They were reticent. I mean, I don’t think philanthropy is as well-developed, or it wasn’t at the time, as it is here.
KS: Can you explain what the Shokokai is?
CS: Yup, it was the Japanese Association of Industry and Commerce in Toronto. So, it represented all of the big companies that were here. All the transplants; Toyota, Honda, Sony, Hitachi, the financial institutions who were here at the time; they all belonged to the Shokokai.

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CS: And I remember talking to some of them, and some of them were my clients. And I remember talking to them, you know, I basically said, “do you come to the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre?” Now, we didn’t have things like the film festival back then. And almost without exception, they said, “*Nikkei bunka kaikan*,” they said, which is cultural centre in Japanese. They said, “you know, you’re not really J- You're not real Japanese people. I mean, you have ikebana, you have martial arts, but you guys don’t even know how to tie a kimono properly.” And I said, “So come and teach us, okay? Come and help us.” Because one of the things I felt we needed to do at the Centre was transition a lot of what we did from the traditional things to modern-day Japan, which is where we are now with the film festival and manga and all that. But at the time, I said, “Look, you know something? I mean, we have done our best to try and keep alive the traditions that came on the boat with our ancestors at the turn of the 20th century. And then, of course, we were all interned

and told not to speak Japanese. And, you know, but we persevered." I said. "So that's an important thing for you to remember. The other important thing is, you owe us, okay?" Because, I said, "Because of this place, people are- They understand if you have a face like ours, you're not the enemy, okay? You enjoy playing golf here, you can belong to all the good golf courses. Your tires don't get slashed here as they do in Detroit, right, in the United States. And it's because a whole generation of Japanese Canadians, namely the nisei, and the issei, brought people into the Centre, okay, to learn some of these things from us, and understood, I mean, the whole concept of friendship through culture. I mean, that is a brilliant concept. You know, if you bring people in, in the non-threatening guise of culture, that they will meet us, learn that we are Canadians like we are, and hopefully what happened in 1941, '42, won't happen again." So, I actually wrote an article for the Shokokai newsletter. It was translated into Japanese, but it was *giri*, you know, the concept of obligation. And that through the hard work and efforts and goodwill of the issei and nisei generation in building this centre, we had made this a more welcoming place for the Toyotas, the Sonys, all of the transplants and everything else. And therefore, you know, it was time that- And there was an obligation to pay that back, okay? And so, then they came in with a million-dollar donation, okay? Which sort of, again, got us- And we named the Shokokai Court in honour or their donation.
KS: Can you describe for me how you bridge the gap between being Japanese Canadian and working with Japanese- With the Shokokai? Like, do they recognize you as Japanese? Probably not. Like, how do you relate to that, and how do you deal with that dissonance?
CS: [laughs] It's funny. Well, as I said before, I'd rather be lucky than smart. And so, I actually was introduced to one of the representatives of the very big Japanese securities firms. I was a corporate finance securities M&A lawyer. So, one of the Canadian bankers introduced me to a representative from one of the very big Japanese securities firms. In fact, I think it was the second largest in the world at the time. And- So, for years, a couple of years, anyhow, I was giving them pro bono information about our capital markets. At that time, if you were a foreign securities dealer, you could not be registered to do business in Ontario. That was for historic reasons. And I basically said, "you know, ultimately, you're gonna be able to- I mean, they can't keep that ban up forever. It's a global world."

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CS: And their first representative was just a wonderful man. So, he invited me to go to Japan, because what they knew and I didn't know at the time, was that the yen was about to go like this [motions upwards with finger], and therefore all the Japanese companies would want to open subsidiary operations in North America, okay? Now, I didn't know that, but he knew that. So- And at the same time, our Foreign Investment Review Act that was strict was being liberalized a little bit. And the Investment Canada Act was coming into force. So, they thought, "okay, this would be a good time for you to go over to Japan and talk about these changes," okay? So, anyhow, I invited some of my partners to go, and over we went. And then I was sort of trotted around and introduced to Japanese banks, other companies,

and when they wanted to set up, they called me. Now, the interesting thing is, I don't speak Japanese. Now, my client said, "you know what? It's probably better that you don't speak Japanese. A, you're a woman; B, you know, if you spoke Japanese, they would just think that you were the translator. But the fact that you don't speak Japanese and that you're over here, that people assume that maybe you know what you're talking about as a professional, okay?" And I think they're right. And I was always treated with tremendous respect, I think because I had the right introductions from this big company. And actually, I had- I was invited to have dinner at the home of the chairman of the company, because I think I was a bit of a novelty. You know, I was a curiosity. I'm a third-generation Japanese Canadian lady lawyer, as they used to, lady lawyer. And so that- So, coming back to the Shokokai in Toronto, I knew many of the companies, and therefore they knew of me. And when I wrote this article, I think many of them actually took that to heart, okay? Because the concept of *giri* is one of those things that's deeply ingrained in all of us, okay? I mean, it's not a term that translates easily, and it is much more than an obligation to pay back. I mean, it's a deeply rooted obligation that, you know, if one doesn't discharge that obligation, it's sort of one of those things where you probably have to go out and commit *seppuku*, right? I mean- And your family inherits it. So, it's a very- It is one of those deeply ingrained sentiments. So, I think that made a big difference. But that was my relationship to the Japanese business community. And then there were people like Sid, who- Sid Ikeda, who was the perfect ambassador for the Cultural Centre. So, he was there, you know, he'd go to their events, and he helped build that relationship, too. And subsequent presidents, you know, Steve Oikawa, and Marty, and then Gary, really built on those relationships. And the other thing that was important, I think, was, there was a gap, okay? Because, what defined us, as Japanese Canadians? The internment. What did the post-war immigrants not wanna talk about? They didn't wanna talk about the war, and they particularly didn't wanna talk about the fact that they bombed Pearl Harbor, and it was the bombing of Pearl Harbor that caused us all to be interned. So, there was this huge gap, right? And so, trying to bring those two groups together- Again, Sid was great, at that, but you know- So when we had the question came up, "Should we have a Redress Day every year to celebrate in September the anniversary of the redress settlement?" My thought was, "No, I mean, we should celebrate it, but we don't have to call it Redress Day, okay? Because that has no resonance with the post-war Japanese immigrants." So, we called it Heritage Day.

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CS: And the first one we had; we honoured all of those members of our community who at that time had the Order of Canada. And it was a disproportionately large number, you know; I mean, we're talking, say, I think it was 15, but you know. Joy Kogawa, Irene Uchida, who was the geneticist, you know, Raymond Moriyama. And so that's what we did, but it was on the day of the redress settlement had been passed. So, that's sort of how we bridged that gap. And then Sid really was very good at getting the post-war Japanese immigrants involved in the Cultural Centre. You know, they- There was someone on the board, there

were consultations, and so those things came together very nicely. The other group that was- Sort of didn't like the Centre a whole lot was the arts group, because for years and years and years, they wanted a gallery at the old Centre. Then when the new Centre was designed, the addition, there was no place for them. There was no gallery space, there was no place that they could have an exhibit other than in the big auditorium. So, they weren't very happy with the Centre, but it's an important constituency. If you look at any other, like, major cultural centre, whether it's Jewish, Italian, there is a gallery space. And so, we had extensive consultations with the arts group, which was really- It was led by Aiko Suzuki at the time. And there was a facilitator, and so in the plans for this new building, we had the gallery as an important part. And the other important part was the art installation in the Shokokai Court, because we had a juried art competition for that, and we were awarding, I can't remember how much it was, but I think around four hundred thousand dollars to do it. So, rather than asking them to do it for free, we were saying, "This is a serious, juried competition for an art installation that will be a centerpiece of the Centre, and we're prepared to pay meaningful money for it." So, that was the other part of it. But it was a major challenge, moving from the old building to this building. You know, but it was necessary, and it was very clear that we would not be able to do what we needed to do in the old building with the addition. And so, after much consultation and hand wringing, and- We abandoned that project and moved here. And really, this has become everything we ever dreamt it would be and more.
KS: That's amazing. So, let's move forward to Sedai- And thank you for all this amazing background, and there's so much history; we could do probably another full day of this. But can you tell me why it was important to you to start the Sedai Oral History Collection?
CS: Well, I had had the privilege of meeting the people who set up Densho. And again, that was just the flukiest thing. I had- The origin of that was, I was perusing the magazine rack in my local bookstore, and literally stopped dead of the cover of, I think it's *Town and Country Magazine*, very horsey sort of East Coast elite magazine. And on the cover, rather than—you know, usually there's a nice-looking blonde woman and a horse—this cover was an obviously Asian guy with a woman who was not Asian, and a little kid who was *hapa*, right? So, I picked it up and it was the philanthropy of the future.

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CS: And the guy on the cover was Scott Oki, who had been, I think head of marketing at Microsoft and became a major philanthropist in Seattle. Among other things, he had started Densho, which was the Japanese American Legacy Project. And he asked a guy named Tom Ikeda, Tom was at Microsoft as well, and Microsoft gave them the servers, and donated- So- And Scott put in initial seed capital for Densho, about five million dollars. And Tom basically ran Densho as his philanthropic endeavour. And so, they had built this amazing website of stories, of, you know, oral histories of the Japanese American community. And, you know, Steve Oikawa was president of the Centre at the time, and the two of us thought, "well, you know, we should write to him, and we should ask him if he'll come to Toronto

and speak to our gala." Well, we did, and we didn't get any answer, okay? Never heard from the guy. So, fast-forward, I'm in Nova Scotia visiting a friend who was a former cabinet minister, and we went to a lobster party in Chester, Nova Scotia. Well, who's there but a lawyer from Seattle. And they happened to be in the process of opening a Toronto office, and we got talking. He was not Japanese American, but he said, "You know what, you need to meet my neighbour." He said, "our kids go to school together, and they're doing amazing things," and his neighbour was Tom Ikeda. So, I said, "Okay, fine. Could we-" Of all things, right? A lobster party in Chester, Nova Scotia. And so, through him, I met Tom. And I said, you know, like, "I will fly to Seattle on my own dime just to see, you know, what you've done with Densho, how you built it out, talk to you about what we're about in Toronto, what our community is about, give you some history on our experiences during the Second World War." So, I spent two or three days out there, saw Densho. Now, they- Their website was so powerful that Steven Spielberg, when he saw it, said that he wished that he had done his project on the Holocaust as a digital online version. Because what they had done was they had built the website, so it was accessible by anybody, and particularly by educators. So, there's a whole package on how do you use our oral histories for teaching. It's quite amazing. Anyhow, I thought, "Well, if only we had a Scott Oki in our city who could just give us five million for starters, but the very least, you know, could you come to Toronto and talk to us about your project?" So, both Tom and Scott said they'd come for the gala on their own dime, which was very generous. But it happened to be exactly the time when SARS hit Toronto. Like, they were building- They were coming with their families, like they were quite excited about bringing their families here to see- Anyhow, I was pretty sure they were going to cancel altogether, but they didn't. Their families stayed in Seattle, but they came. And they both spoke to us at the Centre, and then Tom stayed and did a workshop on how you do oral histories, and how they started, and what were the priorities were. And they were fabulous, in terms of not only encouraging and inspiring us, but they also- Like, our connection to Discover Nikkei was through Tom. We were the only Canadian organization that was invited to be part of Discover Nikkei. That was another trip I took to Los Angeles this time to meet with them on my own dime, but just to talk to them about what we were doing in Toronto, and how our community was different and the same as the Japanese American community.

[2:00]

CS: So, that was sort of the beginning of Sedai, but we didn't- We were on a shoestring. So, I asked a group of quite wonderful people if they might at least meet, and we could talk about how we might do something similar and talk people into giving their services for free. My cousin, Andrew Kirby, is a big digital marketing guy, okay? So, he knew somebody who did a website for Sedai at like, for nothing, basically. And Andrew was very good at helping us. Like, how do you- You sort of have to reverse engineer a lot of this stuff. And Lorene Nagata was fabulous; she took over for me as head of Sedai. But we decided that since we didn't have the money, that what we should do is focus on getting the stories

recorded. As many stories as we could, because, you know, every- Literally, like every week somebody we knew in the nisei community was passing away, or was, you know, diagnosed with Alzheimer's, or it was- It was very clearly these stories will be lost. So, we decided that we would just concentrate on getting those stories videotaped.
KS: And why did you think it was important to get these stories, besides the fact that the time was ticking? What was it about these stories that-
CS: Well, you know, a lot of books had been written using money from redress, but when we looked at Densho, the power of a person telling their own story- And not just telling their own story, but in the case of particularly the American Japanese, these are articulate Americans speaking, okay? I mean, they're clearly American. And when they talked about the experiences of being herded into camps, right? And- It's extremely powerful, because a lot of the people they interviewed- And let's face it, I mean, when your hair goes white, you blend in even more with the general population. So, to hear their first-person stories is quite amazing. And then they got stories from some of the non-Japanese Americans, like the- did you read the book, *Snow Falling on Cedars*? Well, that was based on an editor of a newspaper on, I think Bainbridge Island. They interviewed the real guy, okay, about why he had been so supportive of the Japanese American community, and why he had written in his newspaper that the internment was wrong. And, so, there was incredible power in those stories. And, well the other thing we did- I think this was even before I went out to have that meeting with them. Scott Oki owns a few very high-end golf courses in the Seattle area, and he has this amazing golf tournament. I don't know if he still does it, but back then he did, and he'd raise a huge amount of money for his various charities, including Densho. So, I thought I had talked a foursome into going; two of them dropped out. So, it was Mark—now my partner, Mark—came out, and I went out to play in this golf tournament. So, we paid a fairly high price to get in to play, but it was just to sort of have a chance to talk to Scott and see what they were doing. Well, I mean honestly, it- This was on a scale that- I think we're sort of there now in Toronto, but we certainly weren't at the time. I mean, this golf tournament had sponsorship like you would not believe, and the price to play was very high. And then they had a live auction to raise money, and the auction items were things like, spend a week in one of the sumo stables in Tokyo. I bid on a- And it's hard to say you won, right? Because you're paying a significant amount of money.

[2:05]

CS: But one of the live auction prizes was a week at Deer Valley, at the ski resort, and dinner with one of the gold medalists from the US ski team, plus a couple of like, duffel bags that were logoed with the US ski team. It was all Scott's connections. So, anyhow, I bid on that, won, took my brother and my daughter and a friend, and we had a fabulous time and met this gold medal freestyle skier. Anyhow, what was really impressive at that golf tournament, is they showed Densho, the opening of Densho, and it was just at the time where the anti-Muslim sentiment was really strong. And so, what you saw in the Densho website was not a Japanese American face, it was a young Muslim woman, who said they

knocked down- Kicked down the door of their house and dragged her father out. And they had no idea where he was for at least a week, you know. No real charges, nothing. But the message was, like, "It's happening again." And so, these stories told by our community about what it was like, you know, to be given short notice, that you were gonna be rounded up and sent God knows where, and many families were separated, you know, had real resonance. So, that's why I thought Sedai was important to capture our stories. The other reason I thought it was important was by contrast to the American experience, okay? Because some of the things that happened to us were not things that happened to them. And as a Canadian, it's not to say, "Oh, we're terrible people," but we do have this mythology that somehow, we were free from these things, when in fact, we were much worse when it came to the experience after Pearl Harbor. And it's important for us to understand that, I think, as Canadians, because we have to understand that our freedoms are fragile. And they're as fragile here as they are south of the border. And they have to be protected. We have to be vigilant. We have to stand up when any other Canadian is persecuted based on our experience. So, that's why it was important to get these stories video taped. And there are different perspectives. You know, there are- The issei have a different perspective. We have some stories of those who went back to Japan. We have stories of some who were stuck in Japan, couldn't come back, were conscripted into the Japanese military. You know, there's a real diversity of stories, and I think it's- I hope that when people listen to these stories and they think, "Okay, no, that person speaks perfect American English just like I do," okay, that's the first thing that occurs to them. Secondly, "I don't think they were necessarily the enemy, and they certainly weren't any more the enemy than my German neighbour, or my Italian neighbour, okay?" And none of whom were rounded up en masse as we were, right? And, so, there are various lessons that are quite apart the historical perspective, and now when I look at the stories that we captured, so many of these people are gone now, right? And I asked somebody at the last big event here, I said, "you know, I really miss the nisei. I mean, I come to the Centre, and I expect to see Sid, right?" I said, "where are the elders now?" And somebody said, "You." [laughs] Right? Because our generation, we're now in our seventies, and I have to remind myself of that every once in a while. But, you know, our perspective on things is very different. I think our parents, out of a sense of loyalty as good Canadians, did what they were ordered to do, and they came east of the Rockies.

[2:10]

CS: They settled in Toronto, they endeavoured to be good Canadian citizens, and in a way, they sheltered us from a lot of the ugliness that was there, and understandably so. I mean, when I was a young child in Toronto, it was less than ten years from the end of the war. And, you know, I remember people coming up to us in the park and calling us "dirty Japs," And you know, our parents would just say, "You know, look, you have to feel sorry for somebody like that. They must have had a bad experience. I mean, they could have had family members who were in the war and fought the Japanese horrible Pacific War. So, you

have to sort of have some empathy with them. On the other hand, you know, it's unfortunate that they can't distinguish between that experience and us." And so- And they said, "If you wanna look for this, you'll find it around every corner, and it's better just to carry on. And if you experience that, turn the other cheek. But. But, whatever you do, you have to be better, okay?" We all learned that, we were all told that. You know, it doesn't matter what you do, but you have to be better than the *hakujin*, right? You have to prove yourself, and that may not be fair, but that's what you have to do.
KS: Can you tell me why you and your Sedai committee chose the word 'sedai' to name the oral history?
CS: Well, 'cause 'densho' was already taken. [chuckles] No, we had a big debate over that, you know. What do we use, a Japanese word rather than an English? What is the symbolism? But we chose Sedai, because- It's like naming the capital campaign. You know, I chose 'building together,' because that's what we were doing. That's what it was about. When I was out there trying to raise money in the community and people said, "Well, why would I give money to the Cultural Centre, my kids don't go." You know? "They're not gonna go, nobody is going to go, the sansei don't volunteer. Who's gonna run the Centre?" But all you have to do is look in the kitchen now to see the sanseis, the yonseis, you know, getting ready for the event this weekend, all volunteering. But- So, that concept of 'building together' was important, and the concept of 'sedai,' like the generations, was very important, because we owe a huge debt of gratitude to our parents' and our grandparents' generation for persevering through experiences that, you know, are horrible and unjust. But they sort of picked themselves up and carried on. And I think it's really important do remember that, and I think a lot of sansei didn't quite understand, because their parents hadn't talked to them about what they had gone through. They didn't understand what it took for their parents to raise them the way they had been raised, right? To insist that there was a better world for them here. And so that intergenerational conversation, and listening to the stories of the issei and the nisei who are now recorded on Sedai, I think that has a much greater or different impact that reading an account in a book, right? It brings it alive, it brings it- It brings those- It humanizes our community, you know, in a way that is more difficult to do in a book. It's more accessible.

[2:15]

KS: So, what is your hope for the future of Sedai? What's next, where do you want to see Sedai go from here?
VE: Where should we take it?
CS: Well, I'm looking at you and saying how lucky we are. I'd like to see us raise more money. What I would really like to do- So, I'm very happy about the grant we got from BC. One of the things I'd like to do is take all those names that are on the Crane Tribute and weave them into Sedai. I mean, who are these people? What is their connection? Like, I would like- I mean, the reason we did that and the reason we had the tributes was a fundraising thing, but the concept of those tributes is that many of us have no idea where

our grandparents are buried, right? They died in the camp, cremated, I don't know what happened to their ashes, did they get buried somewhere, wherever they settled? Don't know. So, you know, if our granddaughters wanna come back to Toronto, where can they go where they can remember their families? Well, they can go to the Shokokai Hall, and they can say, "Oh, there's mummy's name, there's, you know, great-grandma's name. There's grandma's family." You know, all across, but other people won't know who those people are. So, there's a name, and it would great if we could even have just a little paragraph on each of those people that says, "this is who made that tribute, and this this is who that person was, and this is why that person was important to the person who paid tribute to them. And, you know, if we could have a little digital terminal there, so that people could check that out, that'd be great. So, that would be the one thing that I would like to do. And then it'd be great to just get all our- Which I know is what you're focusing on, is try to get all those- You know, 'cause we did a lot of them, there isn't the continuity that you would see, for example, in Densho's videos. Because they have their own little sound studio, and they had a methodology, and they had permanent staff that could add the consistency. That we- We had volunteers, and we were going to people's homes, and the sound wasn't always good. So, I think, you know, if we could take that, all of those things, and properly digitize them, and segment it so, for example, you were looking at- Because you can do this with Densho's website, if you wanted to know challenges that women had in the camps, right? That it would then take you to all of the interviews that we had women in the camps. You know, if you had children in the camps. Like, I know so many younger nisei feel a little guilty, because they say, "I actually had fun in the camp." Okay? "Because for the first time in my life, I'm surrounded by people who look like me, that- Everybody was cooking Japanese Canadian food; it would be like bologna *sukiyaki*, and things like that, you know? And we didn't have to go to school, and we were in the middle of a beautiful setting, and we could play all day." And they felt guilty about that. So, there are very different experiences, all of which are important, right? Because it wasn't all, "Pfft, this is terrible," you know? There was a really good film that the Japanese American community did a long time ago, it's called *Farewell to Manzanar*. Did you see it?
VE: I've heard of it, but I've never seen it.
CS: I may have a digital copy that I'll lend to you, because it was written and produced by the Japanese American community, you know. It was based on the book *Farewell to Manzanar*. And it really had resonance with me because, very familiar, you know; it opens with sort of a Sunday dinner, and it is all the things that our mothers and grandmothers would have made, okay?

[2:20]

CS: *Inarizushi, futomaki*, and salmon, because this guy was a fisherman. And that is all pre-Pearl Harbor, and then it takes into the camp. But there's a scene in the movie where- Because you weren't allowed to take your cameras to the camp, but one man managed to smuggle his in. And the camp commandant basically said, okay. He discovers the camera,

but he says, “you know, take pictures, but make sure you also take pictures of happy things going on here.” Because not everything was horrible. You know, the kids playing, the baseball teams. He said, “Show both sides of it.” And so, I think it’s important with Sedai that we capture all those different experiences. And you then have to put it in context, okay? No, I mean, it wasn’t a good happy thing that happened, but for some members of the community, you know- First of all, if they weren’t separated, if they managed to be there with both parents and siblings, it was a pretty beautiful place, the Slocan Valley. And again, as my mother said, her parents sheltered them. So, they didn’t say, “God, it’s just like they took all our property and God knows how long we’ll be here, and it’s miserable,” you know? They basically said, “Look, Yasuko,” my mother’s Japanese name, “We can have picnics every day. You know, you don’t have to go to school, we’re here in this beautiful place, we can just go for hikes and have picnics every day,” you know? So, that story- Those stories, too, of how you persevere in the worst of circumstances for your children’s sake, that’s very much part of our, I would say, Japanese Canadian culture. The Japanese American culture, too. You know, to have come from that and not to have been embittered for the rest of your life, and fighting the government. You know, the ability to say, you know, it wasn’t right, it wasn’t fair, but we gotta move on, okay? We have to move on for the sake of our children, and we’ll deal with all that other stuff. And so it was, you know, that’s why it was the sansei who had to say, “I don’t- This wasn’t right, okay? As a Canadian, I say this isn’t right. No Canadian should be treated that way.” And that’s why redress was important, okay? Really had very little to do with the war. The war was just an excuse. But this should not happen to any Canadian, and we need to make sure that it doesn’t. So.
KS: Okay. Well, I don’t have many more questions. I guess, I do wanna ask, ‘cause you sort of brought things full circle from Sedai back to redress; it’s all seeing and hearing so many great connections, I’m so grateful. What do you think activism- What role does activism play in the Japanese Canadian community in, your opinion, from your experience?
CS: Well, it will be interesting to see- You know, when the conference was held with Susan Tabata and the group. But I mean, those things are important because I think the sansei and the yonsei generation are likely to be more- I'm not sure activist is the right way, but, you know, the nisei just wanted to get on with things, and they were worried that if they were too vocal about some things, like during redress, that there might be a backlash. So, everything they worked so hard to do to be accepted would be overturned. I think the sansei and the yonsei- And it’s different, because the sansei are generally very visibly Japanese, because we’ve gone from 90+ intramarriage in our parents’ generation to 90 per cent intermarriage in my generation. So, the yonsei don’t necessarily look Japanese, okay?

[2:25]

CS: Your children, my children, yes. And therefore, you know, their level of acceptance as Canadian society has evolved maybe different. So, they have the liberty, maybe, to feel that they can be activists without it coming back on a whole community. I mean, psychologically this might be the case, but I also think that distance is important, and the history. I mean,

let's face it. We grew up- Unless our parents talked to us about it, there was nothing, really; there weren't books, there weren't- And the more I- I wish that my parents were alive today, because what we have discovered about our family and the history in Vancouver before the war is not something that we knew about when they were alive. The connections- I was just in Vancouver a couple of weeks ago and spent time with some amazing group of Canadian Chinese entrepreneurs and businesspeople, and we met in the Chinatown Storytelling Centre. And I hadn't been to Chinatown since I was a little girl, because most people tell you, "You don't wanna go there, 'cause, you know, you walk one street over and that's where all the drug addicts are, and it's not safe." But Chinatown, it's the original Chinatown, has been- There have been active efforts led by a woman named Carol Lee, to preserve some of the aspects of the original Chinatown. So, the Chinatown Storytelling Centre is one, there's the Canadian Chinese Museum across the street, that's another, and I could feel- It's the first time I really felt comfortable in Vancouver, because I could feel the presence of my families who would have been one street over on Hastings, right? All the connections to these, they would've known some of the original stories, some of the original restaurants. You know, there's a reproduction of a photography studio in the Storytelling Centre, and as it turns out, one of my Japanese Canadian former law partners who's out in Vancouver, I never knew that he was half Chinese, and that that was his great-grandfather's photographic studio that is mocked up in the Storytelling Centre. And then it occurred that, you know, Mark's dad, who had the Columbia photography studio in J-Town, probably knew this guy too, you know? So, there were all these connections. Anyhow, back to your question, which was, pardon me?

VE: The role activism in the community?

CS: Yeah, so, I think, you know, all of this- What they're doing in the old Chinatown, sort of as an inspiration for what are we doing with the Vancouver Japanese Language Hall. You know, it's more than a language school, it was a community centre. You know, can we- I don't have a particular affinity to Vancouver, it's just something that we grew up with, right? 'Cause our parents were very ambivalent about Vancouver. But when you look at Toronto, this is why the Centre- This is our legacy, here. And I think when you look at some of the kids who are involved, who came out to these conferences, they are going to be more active, I mean they are the ones who are going to connect the dots if another group of Canadians starts to get persecuted. In the middle of the FLQ crisis, David Suzuki came to the centre and berated the Japanese Canadian community for not speaking out, okay? I thought he was gonna be run outta town, because, you know, the nisei said, "But we never murdered a cabinet minister." You know, my answer to that, as a lawyer, would be to say, "Yeah, but it was war, okay? We have the War Measures Act, it was war. You don't invoke the War Measures Act when a faction of Quebec residents protests. You don't bring the army in, right?" And, so, he was right. You know, we should have spoken out. I'm not quite sure why the Japanese American community- I think they've been vocal, but they haven't been as vocal as I thought they would be over what ICE is doing.

[2:30]

CS: And I don't want to be too critical about that, but, you know, it's interesting because what is happening in the United States is based on the laws that allowed the American government to round us up, okay? As citizens of America, strip citizens of their rights, put them concentration camps in the worst possible parts of the American West, right? And so, you think, "okay, should we be more activist in that?" But if we don't know the stories, if we don't know- You know, if we don't see a face that looks like our grandmother's face talking about how it was in the middle of the night when they came, and you know, took her father or her husband away- Those things have resonance. We- You have to say, like, "think about that, okay? This happened, it could happen again, you need to, again, be vigilant, and you need to at the very least, speak out. And you need to, you need to stand up." I know for my dad, you know, he was 14, my mother was ten. So, my mother was too young to understand what was going on. My dad was old enough to understand that this was terribly wrong, but he couldn't, didn't understand the politics of it. But what he said, when he was honoured by the University of British Columbia- He almost didn't go, okay, because he's still angry. Still angry, and he was not an angry man, but he was angry at UBC that he lost his scholarship. No, he can be philosophical about it, and he'll say, "It's a good thing I didn't get accepted, 'cause they didn't have a medical school in those days, and therefore I would have been an engineer, I wouldn't have become a doctor." But more than anything he just- After his parents died, he said, "I'm never going back to Vancouver, okay? I'm not. Too many unhappy memories there." But what hurt him the most, and when he was honoured by UBC, we went down around the Pan Pacific and down into Gastown, and actually we were looking for the Japadog stand, if the truth be known. But he stopped dead in front of what is now the sea terminal in Gastown, and he said, "This is where they shipped us out." Now, when you think about it, there were two railway lines, so there were two train stations in Vancouver. And I hadn't realized that this sea terminal was once one of the train stations. And he said, and this I think has stayed with him until the day he died, he said, "It is the loneliest time I have ever had." He said, "Not one of my friends, not one of my neighbours, not one of my teachers came to say goodbye. Nobody." And when you talk about activism, I mean, it starts with those little things, is to stand up, you know, and to say- Like, to go to the train station, to go to the airport, as many lawyers did in the United States when Trump in his first administration had his Muslim ban. You know, hundreds of lawyers, many from very big white shoe firms on Wall Street, showed up at the airport to help people through the immigration process. So, you know, it's those small acts of kindness and activism can be as simple as saying, "Well, you can't sell the Vancouver Japanese Language School, because the owners are in internment camps and you'll have to get their consent." You know, it's things like that that are important. And those are the stories that I think come out in the oral histories of individuals as much as anything. Just, well, as I said, John Fraser, Phil Barter, you know, their fathers say to them, you know, "This is wrong. This is wrong and someday you have to do something to make this right." And they both did.

KS: I'm struck with the connection there, the fact that those two men did what they did because their fathers, you know, and the empathy that that required from their fathers, and the story that actually seeing that, and the fact that you see the importance of these oral histories to create this empathy, to create those connections, and those acts of- Small acts of justice or kindness, that has made changes for our community.

[2:35]

CS: Yeah, and it doesn't take- I mean, it takes courage, but as I said, these are small acts of kindness. And if you don't have the empathy- I remember during redress, we sent out groups of nisei; my mother was one of them of course. [chuckles] And they went into the schools to talk about why this was important, and one school my mother visited, a little blond-haired boy stood up and said, "Yeah, but we were at war with the Japs, so why should we apologize?" And my mother said, "Well, think of it this way. What if we were at war with a country of blonde-haired people, and we decided that all blonde-haired people in Canada should be rounded up and sent to camps, okay? Whether or not you had any sympathy with the blonde-haired country you were at war with. How would you feel about that?" And he said, "Well, I don't think that would be right." And my mother said, "Well, that's what happened to us." Okay? So, you have to have these stories so that people can connect on an emotional and personal level, I think, more than necessarily a legal or political level.
KS: Well, that's all the questions I have. Is there anything else you wanna- That we haven't covered that you wanna make sure goes on the record?
CS: No. I mean, this has been a privilege and a pleasure. I appreciate being interviewed, and I'm sure there are things that I've forgotten to talk about. If there are, we'll do part two. [chuckles] If you can stand it.
KS: I'm sure we can.
CS: No, because I think all of these things are- They are connected, and you know, when you go back to something like redress- I mean, it was not popular on Bay Street, but that is part of what is me, and that is part of, you know, I would say my partner as well. "You know what, this happened here. As lawyers, you should be as interested in this as I am. But I feel the need to do something, because I think it's very important that it be known if the government doesn't say I'm sorry, then it's somehow going to be justified forever. And you," my partners, "should be proud of the fact that I am doing something like this. It's not in the name of the firm, but you should be proud that somebody is at least standing up and asking questions, because that's what you trained me to do." Right?
KS: Mm-hm. Amazing.
VE: I guess we'll cut the cameras.
KS: Well, yeah. I mean, yeah, that was great. Thank you so much. You feel okay and comfortable with everything you said?
CS: Well, I don't know, I'll have to listen to it.

[2:38] **[END OF PART 1]**