Interviewee: 'Ted' Toshitsugu Nishi
Interviewer: Connie Sugiyama
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SEDAI PROJECT
THE JAPANESE CANADIAN LEGACY PROJECT

[Start part 1]

Connie Sugiyama: I'm here with Ted, who was born in Steveston, British Columbia, in 1919, and now resides in Toronto. I wondered, Ted, could you tell me a little bit about your early years, your childhood, and perhaps a little bit about your family, where they came from?
Ted Nishi: Okay. I was born 1919. I went to United Church-sponsored kindergarten in Steveston. From kindergarten, I went to grade school. During that time, Japanese students were in a segregated school, and during my public-school time, the parents of a white group and Japanese got together and formed a teacher, teacher-parents association, and jointly funded and built a public school where both nationalities could study. At the same time, they made a deal with – by participating and funding – the Japanese people would like to use the same school, after English school, for Japanese language school. So, I attended the Japanese language school, learning reading and writing and so forth. And then I went to high school, Richmond High School, which was located in Lansdowne, where presently the Vancouver Airport is located. We used to travel by inter-urban streetcar from Steveston to Brighouse, and so on and so forth to my high school. Daily trip on a suburban electric car.
CS: How long did that take?
TN: Then I finished the high school. I went to Sprott Shaw Business College in Vancouver for a year, and just when I was graduating, things happened at the Ucluelet fishing company where all my – most of my relatives were working, at the – Mr. So-and-so had to leave. He was a secretary treasurer. Due to his sickness, he had to leave to Japan, and they needed somebody for the fishermen's co-op as a secretary-bookkeeper-treasurer so I was selected, and was – My first paying job was there, at the Ucluelet Japanese Fisherman's Co-op. There was 49 members. Co-op fished salmon, and these salmons were large-size salmon, principally used for the Jewish market. They made lox, or smoked salmon, for the Jewish diet, and the fish were put on a fishing boat, a large fishing boat or [sailors ?], and shipped to Seattle from Ucluelet. It took about 18 to 20 hours, depending on the weather. Arriving in Seattle, these fish were packed in boxcars, ice boxcars, and sent to New York.
CS: Could I stop you there for a moment?
TN: Okay. That's the Ucluelet.
CS: Can I take you back to Steveston for a moment?
TN: Sure. Okay. Okay.
CS: Just tell me a bit about your family, what brought them to Steveston?
TN: My father was born in 196 – 1869, in Wakayama prefecture, Mio-mura, in Japan. He came to North America, to Sacramento – Sacramento – and then from

Sacramento, he moved up to Tacoma, Washington, where my sister – who lives in Japan right now – was born. Also, my deceased brother was born. Then he moved up to Steveston, got engaged in fishing, and at the same time, he made miso for Japanese market. He joined up with Mr. Amano, and had a factory, joint factory in Vancouver, with miso and soy sauce and so forth. My two sisters were sent to Japan for education, and I was the only son with my father and mother in Steveston, and as I aforementioned, my schooling was all at Steveston, until the last year in Vancouver.
CS: Do you remember, from the things your parents told you, what led to the integration of the school in Steveston? Who led that? Was it the Japanese? Who – How did that happen?
TN: I think at that time, I think the – hard to tell, but I think it was common pressure put on by all parties at – they couldn't segregate the Japanese [born ?] Japanese, niseis, and also in order to get funding for English school, they need – they needed X number of students to get the government grants and so forth. So, I think for that the necessity of that time to work together, and have a decent brick building, three stories, gymnasium, and everything. At the same time, I can recall English school, and three something – we had recess of half an hour, 45 minutes, and Japanese teachers and principals would take over, and it was very school-like operation, and I think that way the Japanese Canadian students were able to study much better than makeshift school they were in before.
CS: And what do you remember?

[interruption by cameraman, discussion of lighting]

CS: Do you remember playing with, with children who were not Japanese? Do you remember playing with children who were not Japanese, at school?
TN: Yes, I do. The – one of the teachers I really remember, and very vividly, is Miss Steves. Miss – Steveston's name originated from Steves' Town, and these people had a large dairy, and one of the daughters was a teacher, a kindergarten teacher and so on and so forth, and she was very nice. Every 24th of May, or so, she'll take the whole students to her farm and we were given sandwiches and cakes and so forth, and I still remember she telling us, "Children, cakes afterwards, sandwich first." [chuckles] Sort of telling us from our family. Most of them were fishermen's family, ate Japanese food. Chopsticks, maybe lucky if you had a knife and fork. Totally different from Canadian way of living, so beginning of exposure to a nice Canadian family, Miss Steves' family. My first impression, vividly remember.
CS: Now, were you a good student?
TN: A good student. Another thing I remember – I don't know why, but I inherited [a gene?] from my father, who was a businessperson. I started delivering *Vancouver Daily Province* during my late public school and high school days, for four or five years. And another incident I remember is there was a contest between the delivery boys, and I really canvassed hard and got new subscribers, and I was awarded sort of a incentive prize. Prize was a dinner at the Hotel Vancouver. Luckily, I had a suit, so I wore my suit and went to Vancouver and presented myself at the Hotel Vancouver. [Unintelligible] at the dining room. I was a little forward than ordinary boys, I guess. What do I know. So, we sat down, in the dining room, and the knives

and forks – there were soup spoons in the front, and knives, and silverware, and waiters and waitresses –
CS: How old were you?
TN: 14. So I said, "Gee, I don't know what, what silverware I start with!" So, there was a Canadian boy next to me, also a winner of the incentive, so I asked him – I said, "How do we start?" So, he said, "I was looking for you to start!" [chuckles] That was my exposure to another level of living. I delivered the paper, and another incident I remember is I canvassed one Japanese family, they had two boys. One was in high school, one was university, so I thought it was a very potential customer. So, I approached Mr. So-and-so, and he said, "Okay, I will take your paper, but also I am a Sun Life Insurance agent, so you have to buy me insurance." Which is a very good in saving. So, I got my subscription and I bought his life insurance, saving life insurance. Years, years later when I moved to Toronto, worked in rented housing and so forth, but I needed a house because my mother and sister was coming from British Columbia. So, I contacted Sun Life, and I found out that I had a paid-off life insurance. We used that as a first payment on my house that I bought in Toronto. So that's my experience of that part of experience.

But, going back – Ucluelet Fishing Company bookkeeping was two years. And then the 1940 – three years, sorry – 1941, December, war started, so the fishing vessels were confiscated, and there was no position available for me. I was in Vancouver, Steveston, and approached by mister – Japanese Canadian businessman, that his logging camp in Fanny Bay was going to be – most likely be appropriated, expropriated, so in the meanwhile, would I go and be a caretaker, office manager, one-man office manager, bookkeeper, and so forth? Look after the 40 families that lived there. So, I did, I went there, and worked the – in order to study logging business, I started at the very beginning and worked with the logging people up in the hills. Tell you, the dormitories where we lived, it would be raining, but we'd go up the mountain, by circling the mountain, we'd [only ?] be up to 8,000 feet high, where the logging took place, it would be snowing, so you can tell you how hazardous those logger – logging people were.

CS: Where was Fanny Bay, was it right on the island? Vancouver Island?
TN: That's right, that's right. Fanny Bay, Vancouver Island. Okay. Then the evacuation of the people took place, and I was asked by the Security Commission to stay there and make sure the people were properly looked after for the evacuation, and their property. So, I asked everybody to put their personal property, name and number, and bring it all to the schoolhouse out there, and we kept it there. Hopefully when the war ends they can come back and repossess their personal things.
CS: Now why did the B.C. Security Commission approach you? This is when you were in –
TN: Because – yeah, through – P. S. Ross & Son was the accounting firm that took over the management of this logging company. And the saddest thing I remember is families with children, children and everybody – I said 40 families living there – they were all told to take a suitcase, one suitcase each, and they were herded on a big bus, and taken down to Comox and loaded on to ship and I was left behind. I was told to

look after the place until the accounting firms sends some qualified person to take over. So, for three weeks I lived all by myself. One time, it was 55 families. Next day, I was all by myself.
CS: No one else there?
TN: No one. Even the cats and dogs were gone. So, when –
CS: And you were supposed to look after their property.
TN: Property, yes, I did.
CS: Until the accounting firm –
TN: Finally, already retired accounting person came over and he and I took the inventory of the logging camp. Very, very involved logging camp. They had a big steam locomotive with snow wheels, mountain-type locomotive so they can chug-chug up the mountain to bring the logs down. Then they have small scooter-like machines to take the people up the logging hill and back and so forth. And the – this is before they changed all these – they cut those big 8-foot diameter, 12-foot diameter trees, big trees with a handsaw. They were 12-feet handsaws. We count number of handsaws and [double-headed?] axes and toughest job was, we had to take a measurement of how many logs, cut logs, were left in the bush. So, he and I, [however early?] figured out how many board feet were left behind and so forth. So, I was there almost a month with this person, and for living I was allowed to – I have a letter from police. Curfew was lifted and I could come and go, and eat my meals down in mainland, down below, as a single male, in restaurants and so forth. So, they didn't like me coming, I guess, but I went down to get my meals anyway.
CS: What happened to the sawmill? Do you know? What happened to the property of the 40 families?
TN: Oh, well, I don't know about what disposition took place. Only thing I know – I did my job with the accounting firm to close up the logging company and make sure the people were out of the place.
CS: And tell me a little about the relocation to Minto, Minto Mines?
TN: Okay, so by same connection, I was asked by the Security Commission to go and scout a place – two, three places that might be appropriate for Japanese, self-supporting. These are the people who didn't depend on government funding at all, they just get out, 100 miles inland, away from the shore. So they gave me escort of one mounted police [per spring?] plus mounted police person and he and I got on the train at Squamish and I guess, come to think of it, it's – now it's very popular ski resort in all – Whistler, all the way up to Lillooet. From Lillooet we went to meet – I used to – name doesn't come. Another town, and took a – there's no transportation, so we hitched a ride on a logging truck, went to Minto, and went to a village there. A deserted village, a gold mine, deserted and there's only one person living there, Mr. Davidson. He had a horse ranch there, so he was caretaker, so we met him and there's a nice big hotel there so we thought the people could come in the hotel and also there was 25 or 30 private homes there, so –
CS: These were abandoned? This was a ghost town?
TN: Yeah, abandoned. Yeah, that's right. So anyway – we came, I came back and made a report and then they thought they liked to take another 10 people or so to make sure my observations were correct. So, I led another group back again to the same place, and they decided it would be the place. Nice for people to relocate.

CS: How did they decide who would go there?
TN: Pardon?
CS: How did they decide who would go to Minto Mines?
TN: Mr. Mori, he was a sort of self-appointed Japanese spokesman in Vancouver. Other people had a very adverse opinion of this person, but he was very outgoing person, and he and the B.C. Security people arranged the transportation and so forth to go there. And I, myself, stayed there until I felt I had enough of that cold, cold winter there, minus 40 degrees. So, I move over to Toronto.
CS: And were you allowed to travel? Or was this after the end of the war, or was this during the war?
TN: Once we settled in Minto, and we had to get permission from government. Luckily the security person that the person appointed was a policeman that we knew very, oh very well from Steveston and he was appointed to overseer for Minto area Japanese Canadian evacuees.
CS: And what were the conditions of your travelling to Toronto? Did they put any restrictions on you?
TN: Yes. Luckily, they paid my fare. [laughter] Government gave me a fare and – very basic fare, and I came by train. Most of the people on our train were soldiers, so I was very, very timid. I stayed in one corner, all by myself, but no harm done. I came to Toronto with $50 in my pocket. That's all I had, but there was a very helpful organization called – name doesn't come to –
CS: Was it a Japanese Canadian organization?
TN: YMCA. [Young Men's Christian Association]
CS: YMCA? Oh, they –
TN: That's right, that's right. So, I took a room in the YMCA and they decided that the Japanese entry into Toronto was full. I can't stay there. The only opening was Hamilton, so I moved on to Hamilton, and I got a job working in meat-packing plant. Reason why I was able to get, to get a job in a meat-packing plant – the owner's brother was a missionary in Japan, so they knew Japanese. So, they gave us a job there, so I played with –
CS: Now where was your family at this time?
TN: My family – father – mother and sister I left in Minto.
CS: And how about your dad?
TN: My dad passed away when I went – first year of my high school, my dad passed away.

[noise of object falling down in background]

CS: Before we continue with your journey to the east and Hamilton, do you mind if I go back to Minto for a moment and just ask you – just tell me a little bit about who lived there? It was a self-sustaining community. What did that mean?
TN: We – we had – being self, self-supporting, I guess people who came there were little more affluent than ordinary people – merchants from Vancouver and people who owned or participated in logging or paper mill and so forth. Good, good collection of more professional people, of Japanese. And another, another – Mr. Kagetsu was there, he's the owner of the logging, logging company, okay, and also

the Cumberland person who is – Iwasa family was there, too. They had a sawmill and a logging operation in Cumberland. So, these people found out that, there was a dormant sawmill there.
CS: In Minto.
TN: Minto. So, they propositioned to the government, and the government said, "Okay, we need lumber." So, we can go logging there too, but the logs were all logged out. The easy logs were – these were all Ponderosa pines. Prime pine, not ordinary pitchy pine. They were all good pine but they were all logged out. What's left was on the side of the mountain. [unintelligible] normal machinery so we had to use horse to drag them. So luckily, as I said earlier, the previous caretaker had a horse ranch there so he had these large Percheron dray horses so we had, what, like two pairs or three pairs of those horses to go on the hill and drag the logs out so that the truck can load up the rig to the sawmill. In the sawmill, we worked in the sawmill – I worked in the logging there too, and I learned in the sawmill to cut the length – the timber to the size and shape out. So again, self-supporting but at the same time, we helped the war industry by, by bringing timber that was uncleaned.
CS: Did the government pay for the lumber? And the –
TN: Oh yeah, sure.
CS: So, it wasn't, wasn't –
TN: That's right. Only one –
CS: Part –
TN: Only one tragedy we had was from lumber to the Minto, was a [church ?] with a mountain. One day, truck fell over and three or four Japanese died. But that was the only said thing, but I remember the driver of the truck was former taxi driver in Vancouver.
CS: And what happened to the children of the families who were in Minto? Was there a school?
TN: Okay. They, they arranged their own school, and I think – I forgot the name – some people from B.C. who were involved in education started a school. And as I said, I only stayed a year and a half. I came out west so what happened, I don't know, but it was a nice community there, and grocery stores opened and I could buy groceries there. And another thing I remember – these rich Japanese people in Vancouver, when they evacuated, bought bags and bags of rice. Remember [my friend were helped] unloading the rice from the baggage cart or truck, you know. But anyway, that's one story. But I'd like to go back further if you've permit me. Life in Ucluelet, because it involved your relatives too. The 49 fishermen were removed to Ucluelet because Fraser River Japanese fishing license was cut, reduced because of the pressure from the people that –
CS: Was that discrimination against the Japanese?
TN: Mm-hmm, yeah. I didn't want to say that, but the pressure from – because successful Japanese fishermen with a better net, better boat and so forth, they're more proficient in catching fish than other people with not so good equipment and so forth. So, the government was pushed to cut the license, so the fishermen were dispersed, and the 49 fishermen dispersed to Ucluelet, and 10 or 15 families to Tofino, Vancouver Island. But part, part I'd like to tell you is the life of a fisherman's family. On a 25, 21 feet, 22 feet, or 25-foot boat with a small engine, 10 horsepower,

two-cylinder gasoline engine, one small propeller, and there weren't allowed two people. One person only, and they would go right into the Pacific Ocean. Banks of the salmon would be about 25 miles offshore from the mainland and they go 4:30 in the morning, chug-chug out of the harbour and then they won't come home until 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon. And you know what? The Pacific Ocean with continual rolling waves and so forth, and they'd be fishing out in the ocean.
CS: Very dangerous work.
TN: Very dangerous, and – but luckily they worked in a [both boys cut?] type of buddy system so not too many people died or you know, so forth, but my job at Ucluelet Fishing Company, I had a staff of foreman and four or five people and a lady were cooking for us. And we had to wait the 49 boats to come in every night. We can't close the operation until everybody's home. People don't come in all together. There's 49 that went out, and 49 come back, one at a time, and they bring you a load of salmon. And salmon – once they caught the salmon, they don't throw it in the boat. Four or five fishes caught, they gut the salmon and take all the blood and everything out and bring it back and we – our foreman would hold the salmon like this and the salmon bends like this, the backbone's broken so that doesn't qualify as a number one, so each individual fish is inspected, loaded into our large boat, which is 120 feet long wooden boat. We iced and packed and the boat would sail right into the Pacific Ocean for 18 hours to the Strait of Juan de Fuca and to east Seattle. And I made 2, 3 trips of that myself too, and stormy weather, Vancouver Island here, you go here, the boat will be going like this, so we have to go right in the Pacific Ocean and then back – tack back to south, 24 hours.
CS: Now you said that the salmon from Seattle was, was used for lox?
TN: Lox, yeah.
CS: So, it was smoked and sent to the east.
TN: That's right. That's why – wasn't smoked in Seattle. It was sent to New York.
CS: And were there – I'm interested to know why the fish wasn't sold to a local cannery. Was there a better price in Seattle, or –
TN: Well –
CS: It's dangerous. It was a dangerous trip.
TN: Well, spring – big tide salmon doesn't lend to be canned salmon or something, you know. Sockeye salmon and so forth, smallest fish, coho or sockeye lends to be canned, but the big salmon always meant to be filleted. You can buy Atlantic salmon in fish stores filleted and so forth. That's a little higher-grade salmon. So anyway, I worry – I always with myself, and the wives and children's father out fishing, all lonely in the ocean and coming back, a daily thing. But you know, it's a feeling. You know, you go out in deep sea, on a boat which is very basic boat. The engine is one or ten or 15 horsepower engine boat, and you know, one propeller – that's all there is, and all the navigational instrument is one small compass like this, about teacup size compass, that's the only navigation at all. Red, red and green light on the side.
CS: Did the government restrict the size of the engine?
TN: No, it just – manner of, you know – Later on, the young boys who inherited – You see, you couldn't have any more licenses. You've – either you inherit your father's license, or somebody who's finished fishing, you – just like a taxi license here. You don't get new licenses, so the – when the young second-generation niseis took over

from father, naturally they want a higher-speed, faster boat, so they came to Steveston and had the boats built, larger engine like Cummings or Caterpillar. Larger engines, which is nice because it takes you shorter time to go to the fishing ground, and if the weather gets bad, you come home faster. So there's – just when the war started, the transition was taking place. My uncle was there, he built a nice boat and then another uncle bought another boat, and all my few friends who were there, they all came home and just like people – neighbour buys a new car, somebody buys a new car, type of a deal. You know? So things were changing there when the war started. That's why the government said well, they got good boats so maybe they could use for conspiracy or something like that, so they impounded the boat and told the people to could take the boat, those small boats to Victoria and then to Victoria to New Westminster where they locked the boats up.
CS: So they were all impounded and confiscated after Pearl Harbour.
TN: That's right. That's right, yeah.
CS: So, what happened to the community in Ucluelet and Tofino? Where were they moved?
TN: They – the Maquina was a big steamship you could see, the things they came to the Ucluelet and picked up all the people up.
CS: And took them to Vancouver, and then to –
TN: Vancouver, yeah. That's right.
CS: And then to, to Hastings Park.
TN: That's right. Just like your uncle bought a house and he didn't live in it. The war started, so he left the house and evacuated, so.
CS: Was anyone left? Everyone went.
TN: Everyone left there.
CS: All the fishermen went. And so, the move to Ucluelet and Tofino was really to – simply economic necessity, to get the licenses that had been confiscated or cut in Steveston and the South Fraser.
TN: Yeah, from Steveston, yeah. And also, not only Steveston – so many licenses were – Namu, which is north of Skeena River. Skeena River – there's a lot of canneries like Sunnyside and all those canneries alongside the Skeena River, and then – and all the way down to Namu and Bella Bella, and all those places. And then also Naden Harbour and Queen Charlotte and – Queen Charlotte said all those Japanese fishermen were limited to fishing. Worst condition was when I, when I worked on – started working on the – I'm coming into it – I was 16 when I got a job as a deckhand on a fish collector boat. This – this boat happened to be about 75 to 100 feet long boat with a 90-horsepower diesel, diesel engine. There's a captain, engineer, and myself, the deckhand. A deckhand and a cook. I started cooking when I was 16. But anyway, when I went to Skeena River, our first job was – Sunday night, we used to – Fishermen weren't allowed motor-powered boat at that time on Skeena River, so –
CS: All fishermen, or just Japanese fishermen?
TN: 18-foot plain skiff with a canvas. That's only the accommodation they had. There, with a net and little Coleman stove, to heat your tea.
CS: Was this just Japanese fishermen restricted?
TN: Yeah, yeah. No engine.

CS: Or everybody was restricted?
TN: Yeah, not too many people fished in Skeena River, and we used to tow 18 or 20 boat – this was big boat of ours. We used to tow the fishermen out to the mouth of the Skeena River, and one boy one day unhooked the thing and they stayed there for the whole week, out there, and then on the Friday night, we go and collect the guys and pull them back. But they're in their fish – what fish they caught, the smaller collector boat will visit these boats and pick up the fish and bring to cannery. That's how primitive thing was. This is when I started. Years before they were doing that, but when I went there – when I was 16 and I was just a deckhand on a boat, we used to pull these people back. And I asked them, what do you eat during the time? Oh, they says, we eat very seldom. We cook rice on a burner or – they ate – I know they ate lot of condensed milk and so forth. Food, very basic food to keep them going out in the ocean there. Mouth of the Skeena River opens up like this, you see, and the few islands there, there's fish there.
CS: So they're floating in these little boats –
TN: Yeah.
CS: With no engines.
TN: No engine.
CS: For, for –
TN: That's how they started.
CS: Living on rice and condensed milk.
TN: That's right. That's right.
CS: Amazing.
TN: So, the fisherman's life was very, very tough.
CS: And so their families were back in the little villages.
TN: That's right.
CS: And they wouldn't see their men for weeks.
TN: That's right. That's right, that's right. That's right. Another thing I was involved in – my father's brother, Uncle Nishi, had a business making *suzuko*, salmon roe. So he'd have a arrangement with fish canneries up the coast that whatever salmon roe comes off the – First of all, I tell you – Chinese people would gut the fish and they shoot the innards of a fish down the chute, so end of the chute we used to pick up the salmon roe and he – we used to put the salt and everything, and salt the thing and send it to Japan for making suzuko. So we had a Queen Charlotte's, the Naden Harbour, and Namu – all these places along the coast I know that I used to follow the salmon and work with these, making salmon roe. Final trip was Vancouver, Vancouver – we had a place in Vancouver too, so I used to stay on top of a [Nimi ?] drug store. There was a boarding house there. I stayed there and go to the cannery and pick up the roe and bring it to our shed and make it a salmon roe.

So that was a [ninth ?] interesting thing but – Present memories – Going to these multiple places that – Indian villages, you know, I'm really fond of totem poles and so forth because all these Indian villages up from way up – where Alaska and Canada – there's the Grenville canal that separates the – imaginary line that separates US and Canada, and there's salmon fishing then there too. From that area all the way to Vancouver and Vanc West, I travelled on these small fishing boats, larger – smaller –

larger than fishing boat but the fish carriers, you know? So I enjoy going up and down the coast. I did that for about four years.
CS: What do you remember about the First Nations, the Aboriginal villages?
TN: Yes. That's another story. Ucluelet and all those places – I grew up with First Nations people, but they were taken to residential schools, you know? Boys like me, fathers were fishermen and so forth, and they liked to go – to follow their father's footsteps and so forth. They were forcefully taken to residential schools and –
CS: It's a terrible situation.
TN: The parents hide the children, they get penalized. They treated, treated the Indian people very harshly. I still remember that because one of the boys I knew, and a girl I knew, their father's boat was even pictured on a $5 bill in Canada.
CS: I remember that.
TN: You remember that? But their children were taken away to residential school.
CS: Did they live on Quadra Island?
TN: Pardon?
CS: Quadra Island? Was there where the – this where that particular man lived?
TN: Yeah, that's right. Yeah. [nods]
CS: He was a chief.
TN: [nods]
CS: And his children were still sent to the residential schools. And I understand that – that for some of the Japanese Canadian fishing boats, the Japanese would hire some of the First Nations to work as crews because no one else would hire them.
TN: That's true, yeah. But the – when I was small, in Steveston, the women folks, fisherman's women folks had to earn – subsidize husband's earnings, work in the fish cannery. And I still remember seeing Japanese ladies carrying baby on their shoulder. Nursing baby on their shoulder, working on the salmon. This is before the automatic canning machine. All the salmons were canned by hand. And they were paid by so much per tray. I don't know – I don't know how many cans in a tray but they were paid by per tray. Imperial Cannery, Calfer, Georgia, Finnish Cans – there's about five or six canneries along the Fraser River on the Steveston side. When the whistle blows – there's this particular call, and was it two whistles on the shore, two along the shore? Is the cannery's call for the women to come to work, okay? And they go to work and they wear cotton gloves and – salmon and they get paid that way. But I still remember salmon women with the babies on their back.
CS: Now what – how long did your mother and your sister stay in Minto? Were they there for the – for the whole period of the war?
TN: My – two sisters, that I said earlier, were sent to Japan and they went to school in Osaka until they were – My older sister, who just happened to, as I told you, turn 16 tomorrow – on the 16th day of March, she'll turn 97, and her sister's five years younger – in Osaka. So, I only met them when I was 14 or something like that. I was only boy when the two sisters came from Japan. And they were – all grown up sister. So anyway, they went to school in Steveston and area and then war started, my older sisters' husband had a family in Japan and he liked to go and join the family, so with the reparation boat, my sister and her husband went to Japan. My sister – next sister and I stayed behind and evacuated to Minto and so forth. That's why I go to Japan once in a while, to see my sisters in Japan.

[cut]
TN: Okay?
CS: Mm-hmm.
TN: While I was working in Hamilton, I was one grade short of – needed –
[cut]
TN: Five years of high school in Ontario. I had only four, so I went to Westdale High School in Hamilton. And while in there, I was – the government had a short of mechanics, tool-making, so they had a course of two-room – tool room improver's course that teaches not machine shop – I had machine shop courses in B.C. high school – so one grade up was teaching you how to run milling machines and shapers, and all those refined tool-making. So, I took a course at the high school. When this course was finished, the peoples who sponsored the course got me a job at a United Car Fasteners in Hamilton, which is a big zipper company. Makes industrial zippers for your arms and so forth, but at the same time they made small munitions shells and I was put in that department making tools to extrude, you know – sheets of aluminum goes on – step by step you make a shell for put powder in and so forth. So I was running that kind of machine there. One day my friend from – ex-friend from Toronto – Steveston – called on me and he said he's got a factory, small manufacturing factory in Toronto making phonographs and so forth. Would I come and join him? Because I knew him from British Columbia when he went through Radio College of Canada and opened a service station in Steveston. So, he called me so I went – I quit the – I resigned from the job and joined him in Toronto, at 298 College Street, and we were making small attachments to radio. To take you back, Toronto area, from Niagara to Oshawa, whole area, was 25 cycle. Not 60 cycle like this. [gestures to ceiling] 25 cycle. Blinks like this [opens and closes hands] and we're only isolated area that generate electricity in Niagara Falls, and whole area was 25 cycle. So all the other places have phonographs, records that you play through the radio or phone by itself on the 60 cycle. But this isolated area, people couldn't play records at all. So my friend had a brilliant idea. Make a 25 cycle motor, small motor, and put it in a box, put a turntable on, and put a plug on the radio, and you can play the record players. Because of the cycle [gestures to ceiling] difference, there was a humming, but you turned the volume up on the radio, now you could drown out the hum. Okay so. We made – that's how we started the Phono Motors Limited. This party – and we did very well. 298 College. We moved to 88 Jarvis Street, then we went to River Street, then we went to [Jethland?] in Etobicoke. Once, for a while, we had about – close to 100 people working, making phonographs and so forth. But due to insufficient financing and so forth, we went bankrupt. 1958.
CS: What was the name of the company?
TN: Seabre – Phono Motors. Audiophone Engineering. Later, Seabreeze Manufacturing. And I was the factory manager and purchasing agent and supervising bookkeeper and so forth, so I wasn't top – but due to poor financing, we lost everything and the Royal Bank appointed a auditing company and we auctioned everything off and so forth. During the auction and so forth, I got to know the bank people and auditing company. So when everything was finished, they said, would I work for them, as a trustee? So it was like – large number of accounts receivable on

the books, but once the company went bankrupt, people won't pay – they'll only pay so much cents on the dollar.

So we established – at the same time, Seabreeze had a service depot across Canada, Vancouver to Halifax, service – servicing own products so I inherited that. So with that, we pushed the debtors and collected all the money and so forth. So that's sort of a feather in my hat. They gave me the franchise and something – things that Seabreeze had, to me. So, I started my own company, Nationwide Electronics, servicing what Seabreeze had and also out of the warranty business, Seabreeze Manufacturing. Then I got little ambitious and sold my Seabreeze company out to my servicemen and started Nationwide Manufacturing, making record players myself for biggest customer, Sears and Eaton and so forth.

So during that place, I saw a advertisement in Home Goods Retail saying that the Matsushita company in Japan has severed relationship with Imperial International Silverware people on their contracted electronic sales. So I said, "Well gee, Matsushita's big company and they severed relationships, so I don't know what they're going to do. I better write to them." Only address I knew was Matsushita Company, USA, Pan Am Building. So I just wrote Pan Am Building, USA, and sent the letter out. They got my letter. They called me, and said, "Interested." So, they sent somebody down and see my operation. I had about 50 people working, making record players, on a 5000 square foot building in 220 North [unintelligible] Street. And they sounded interesting. So, what they were interested in was the servicing part of it because when they took something off another company, the servicing of the end product would be in limbo. Okay, so I took it. That progressively increased to getting finished merchandise to sell.

Originally idea was, I'm going to sell out of my company, but found out that – I did that for two years – I had a sales manager and so working, but there again, one person can't finance a big operation. So, we eventually agreed that they will set up Matsushita Company Canada and I'll be a part of it. We, we'll be the commission salesmen. So, we got commission on everything we sold, but the company was in charge, which is good because I didn't have to set up a letter of credit for everything I purchased. Now companies bring the merchandise in, so then I got all the things coming into Canada certified for prod – electrically certified – CSA standard label on every merchandise. And we were doing it here but quick – cumbersome to making it here and getting it approved and disapproved and so forth. So, I said, "Why don't I get it done in Japan?" So, I took CSA engineer to Japan. They said it's costly, so I said, "It's not going to be costly if I get it done." So, I took them and put them in a hotel and with my limited Japanese, I took them down to all the Japanese factories that manufacture things and we showed them that having things approved, CSA standard, isn't that hard. Insulation terminals and insulation materials and heat rises [point to ceiling] and so forth. They can cut through it. So, they did. And then so now all the systems coming into Canada, already made in Japan to the Canadian standard.

So that's how I got Panasonic going from $160,000 first year sales. You know, you can guess as good as mine. It's big, big sales. But when you first start it, please don't sell too much because we haven't got enough merchandise to back you up. But that's what my arrangement so – one funny thing. We – one year, I took 12 or 13 representatives from distributors to Japan to meet with [unintelligible] Matsushita and so forth. So Japanese way of things, we say we should take a gift to them. So, we went to Eaton and really searched ourselves what to do. There was a nice painting, oil painting, with a farmer behind the plow and a horse. You know, good picture. So we took that picture to Mr. K. Matsushita, give it to him. And he said, "You know, I was born in the year of the horse." [laughter] And he said, "You know, you guys are starting out in Canada just like that farmer. I'll go behind the plow and I'll really work hard to give you guys the products I need – you guys need." So, you know, it's not – what I did, it's the – these happen, lucky. I was just plain lucky that I got the notice in the newspaper, get another notice by Matsushita personally, and so forth so. Unfortunately, all the top people has passed away.

[End of part 1]
[Start part 2]

TN: Open up a factory in the 53 prefecture in Japan, so he said, "Yes I got 50, 50% done. I'm gonna put every factory in the prefecture." That's what he told me.
CS: Do you know the Kagetsu family?
TN: Mm-hmm.
CS: They're – Bret Kagetsu.
TN: Pardon?
CS: The Kagetsu family.
TN: Mm-hmm.
CS: Their grandson is my partner in Vancouver.
Unknown male: Is he?
CS: Yeah, Bret. Bret Kagetsu. He's –
TN: [indistinct]
CS: Now, we've talked a little bit about your successful business career. I'd just would like to go back for a moment, if you don't mind, and ask you why you chose Toronto as a destination? When you left Minto, and then you got on a train, why did you choose Toronto? What was the attraction?
TN: I thought Toronto was the centre of Canada. [smiles] Good reason?
CS: Did you know people?
TN: Yeah. And the government had a – evacuation government had an office here, and were distributing people in numbers that wouldn't be too –
CS: Conspicuous?
TN: [nods] Conspicuous, yeah.
CS: Who decided that? You said that when you came to Toronto –
TN: Yes, there was a –
CS: Somebody decided that there were too many [Japanese Canadians] in Toronto.
TN: Yes, there was a – there was a office there. I forgot the person's name. I think, you know, something like Dr. Black or something like that. Ex-minister, church

minister from Japan, who headed the office with nisei employees. And the office, they said, "You can go to Chatham or you can go to Hamilton, or you know." They – I didn't go to either, but they said, "You've got a bookkeeping experience. There's an opening in Hamilton called Lyndon's Ladies' Wear Store, I'm going to send you there." So, I went there, and I worked for a day and a half, and I quit. [chuckles] It wasn't a place where – [laughs] You want me to wash the windows and help dress the mannequins and the this and the so forth. [chuckles] So I quit, and went to the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], and there was a Mr. Miki from Nash River, which I knew him from old days, so he was working already in this meat-packing plant, so he got me the job, right there.
CS: And at some point, you were married in Toronto?
TN: [Nods] Mm.
CS: How did – How did you meet your wife? [Yukari "Lolly" Nishi]
TN: Okay, Mr. Tatishi brother whom I met in a logging camp in Fanny Bay – was in Toronto, working in a garage. At the part-time, he was helping his brother, Art Tateishi, in a factory. So, when I joined Art – this is at 298 College Street – we rented a place from a Jewish paint company. And the basement, we had punch presses and assembly machines. Main floor was the assembly line. Third floor is our office, sleeping quarters, and a kitchen. So, I slept with Art and his brother upstairs in the factory. Very convenient, you know? Out my office, I walk front, and the factory's right there. [laughs] So we worked there for a number of years, and at the same time, Art's brother Kay went to B.C. and brought a wife home, brought a wife to Toronto. And that's my wife's sister. So, they rented a place just a few doors – east or west, I've forgotten – from our little factory, above a shoe store – Flatten Shoe Store. So they're living there, so we used to go and spend some time there, and Lolly was there from British Columbia, and she was a – I don't know what – not a housekeeper, not a cook or not a – she was working for a Mr. Clark, who had a business in a very rich part of Toronto. And she was visiting sister, too. So that's the way I met my wife.
CS: And what year were you married?
TN: 1928 – 1926.
CS: Now tell me a little bit about the mushroom farm. What was –
TN: Okay, the mushroom farm's interesting. While I was working at the Seabreeze Company, I was fortunate enough to have a company car. And very mobile, you know, so Mr. Noda – who is my distant, distant relative – called me and said that he wants me to help him – help him in this mushroom project. And this mushroom project started by Milner Liaison Association, and there were already five Japanese Canadians working at Ontario Mushrooms in Scarborough. Nothing to do with us, sending people anything other – But Lloyd Leaver of Leaver's Mushrooms, in Mississauga, heard about these Japanese people, and found out that they're very nimble in handling mushrooms, and doesn't bruise the mushroom whereas Leaver's Mushroom had Portuguese young men working, and they're very rough with mushrooms, and they're producing bruised mushrooms. When it comes to store, they're not presentable.

So Lever also was very – sort of a competitor – I saw, they wanted to best the Ontario Mushroom, I guess, so they approached – or they already had one Japanese

young man working in Leaver's, so he told Lloyd Leaver that maybe Mr. Noda and the company association could help him. So, he approached us, and that's the beginning of mushroom project, and we supplied a lot of people. In the meanwhile, another company called Ontario Mushroom, in Bolton area, wanted 10 or 20 people too, so we helped them get people, too – but the main thing was Leaver's Mushrooms.

One of the guys that you'll know is three brothers that came to Japan Camera is one of – a few of the people that we brought over. What we did, as I said on that, was go for in-between, and I went to – I took Mr. Noda, but he doesn't speak a word of English so I did all the talking and negotiating for him, and we – Mr. Leaver originally was very reluctant in funding advance money. So, with my present friend Raymond Hansberger, Mr. Hansberger, I approached him and set up a document saying that Mr. Noda and Ted Nishi would be responsible for the funding of the – of the money. We'd be responsible.
CS: And this was – what did you need the money for? To bring the employees in?
TN: That's right. We needed $365 per person, to bring one person from Japan. American President Line – so much, and so much from Los Angeles. San Francisco to Toronto – train fare, and $50 spending money en route. $365 per person, and we arranged to have employees paid $5 a month, and work three years. Some, some skipped earlier, but generally worked three years.
CS: How many people do you figure were brought for this mushroom farm?
TN: Leaver's had about 200.
CS: And how about Ontario Mushroom?
TN: Ontario Mushroom, about 40 or so. So we, we had – of course the total was under 200, you know, and did well, very well. I think – I didn't even bother Mr. Noda. I think two, two guys skipped on me, that's about all. The rest all paid up, or when they left, they paid up whatever they owed. Originally it was very easy. Portuguese food and the cook there with Leavers was a Portuguese cook, and that didn't agree with the Japanese guys, so then we had to go in several times and – [chuckles] You know, not too many greasy food and so forth, but anyway it worked out fine. The Japanese people worked hard and diligent.

You know, a mushroom farm – those days grew –I don't know presently, but grew in horse manure. And they had a contract with Exhibition Grounds and racetracks, and so forth. A truck would go out and bring horse manure, and sterilize the manure, and mix with soil, and sterilize again, and put it in a bin, seed thing, and you know, and let it go here, and go come back and a mushroom will be growing like this [gestures with hand] in front of you, you know? So anyway, that's how mushroom products ended very well.

And Leaver's were bought out by Campbell Soup Company, and in the meanwhile, they got into turkey business. Portion, portion-cut turkey business. They imported and got into that by helping import [clears throat] eggs from California, big turkey eggs, and then hatched them and grew the turkey for Christmas turkey and also for

portion. Japanese boys, when the mushrooms used to grow down, they used to go and work there too, so I used to go and talk to them in both places.
CS: Now was there a community – was there a community of these Japanese workers?
TN: Yeah, we had nice dormitories, a kitchen and everything.
CS: So they lived and they ate there? And then –
TN: [Nods] Yeah. That's right, yeah. And the the – another thing I did, I was doing all these paperwork for them, sending money to Miyako Hoto in Los Angeles and then American President Line, and so forth. And so, I got there and they said, "Geez, you know, you're doing this for a great nothing. We'd like you to – make you a, a sort of a salvation. So, we'll give you small honorarium for doing it." So, I didn't know what they [instinct] doing for volunteer work. I don't want to get paid, but they insisted, so they have me 1 1/2 or 2 1/2 percent on the cut, so I gave it all to Mr. Noda, who was, you know – because he was very – he and wife were very nice. Every time the train load of the boys come from the States, we used to go and meet them at the Union Station. We'd take them to Mr. Noda's place and they fed them, and so forth, and then, eventually, I drove them to the mushroom farm. So that's the mushroom story. Worked out very nicely. Only two died – no, only one die, and one got into a sanatorium in Hamilton. I think his brother or something had something to do with the [Japanese Canadian] culture centre, Noma. Name familiar?
CS: Mm-hmm.
TN: [Nods] Yeah. Was his father or brother, I've forgot. He was in a sanatorium. I used to go and visit him in the sanatorium in Hamilton. One was the Wakayama boy that died so I went down to the funeral right by the Maple Leaf Garden, and I asked – first time, I asked the guy at the funeral, "What's the cheapest funeral I can get?" [laughs] And I had a funeral for him and then his father came from Japan, so.
CS: In your own business, in the electronics business, there were many – you had many Japanese employees.
TN: Yes, another thing that were very favorable for my participation was – We hired a lot of people at Seabreeze Company. Once they finished the mushrooms, I brought them round to Seabreeze Company and from Seabreeze Company, they went to work for Canadian companies, so it's sort of a dispersal place, you know?
CS: So, you gave them job training and then they moved up?
TN: [Nods] Yeah, I got the people – DeHavilland, Sunbeam. A lot of contacts I had, I placed the guys, you know?
CS: Now, you have three children, one of whom has taken over the – running the business.
TN: [Nods] Mm-hmm. So, I'm very happy, he's doing a fine job, and let me retire. [smiles and chuckles]
CS: Now is there anything else that you'd like to tell us about? Either from the pre-war days, in Steveston and Ucluelet, through to now. Is there anything that we've left out that is important to you?
TN: Well – not very much. I think I've told you most of – I highlighted. My life was – I think life when you're young, 14, 16, 18 – I was able to travel the coast of British Columbia from Alaska border to Seattle, how's that? I think that's – not too many kids my age did that, you know? And I cooked on a boat. The captain was easygoing,

engineers was easygoing, so they ate anything I threw on the table. Before I went, my mother told me, "Put your hand on top of the wash-wise and put the water somewhere up here," and my sister said, "To make a pancake, take a broom and put a thing in there, and if it sticks up." [chuckles] You know, the usual thing. That's how I started. [chuckles] But even a slow boat like ours, we out for the whole week or two weeks. I had to buy enough provisions so that we won't run out, you know?
CS: You mentioned in Steveston, the segregated schools, and that was changed, and then you moved to Ucluelet because the fishing licences were revoked in the South Fraser, and then the relocation to Minto. Throughout all – all of these, you know, there was a lot of discrimination at the time, but you remained very positive and you've been very successful. What kept you positive and what allowed you to overcome some of these hardships?
TN: Oh, I thought I mingled nicely with anybody. For instance, the other day – well, five years ago – I went to Steveston to visit Steveston, just myself. I had time off from Panasonic meetings, so I had a rental car, went there, and I went to Steveston Museum. Fisherman's Museum. So I was walking there and a white guy came over, "Toshinami, Toshinami! How are you?" Found out that he's [Vince Kucha?]. He recognized me, and he's a part-time worker at the museum there. So, I said, "Where's your sister?" So he says, "Oh, Diane. Oh, she's okay. She's in Seattle, but you know," he said, "She studied Japanese in Japanese school and so when the war started, the government gave money to study Japanese more, and then she was proficient. So, when the Japanese Canadian boys volunteered for British army – Canadian army wouldn't take them so they went British Army – they needed Japanese, so my sister was a teacher." [laughs] What he – that's a story, part of the story.
CS: And – and do you have any comment on the redress movement in the '80s, and the redress settlement in 1988, were you a part of that at all? Or did you have a view on the government's apology and the redress package?
TN: [Nods] That was very appreciated, yeah. The money – I put up a veranda and extension to my cottage. [chuckles]
CS: And what would you tell your grandchildren about – about the experience? What lessons would you give to your grandchildren? On your experiences?
TN: Well, it's funny, I have three sets of grandchildren. Two aren't too interested at all. One is very interested. Every time he come, he sits with my wife and writes [I U A - instinct] or something like that and asks Japanese and then the other day, I had a call from one of the grandchildren, he said "Dad, what's Homa?" So I said, "Why'd you ask Homa?" He said, "My school friend at the high school, her name is Homa, and she said she knows Steveston." [chuckles] So that much he's interested in, yeah? But the other two families, too involved in hockeys and all those things, so they don't even – you know? Only family that I pre-pay subscription – this family gets the Nikkei Voice, and they read the Nikkei Voice and follow through.

[End of Interview]