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Interviewer: Lorene Nagata
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SEDAI PROJECT
THE JAPANESE CANADIAN LEGACY PROJECT

[Start part 1]

Lorene Nagata: Okay, we're ready. Okay, can you tell me what your first name is, please?
Peter Wakayama: My name is Peter.
LKN: And where were you born?
PW: I was born in Port Hammond, B.C.
LKN: And what year was that?
PW: 1936.
LKN: And, can you tell me, Peter, what generation Canadian you are?
PW: I'm a nisei. My mother and father came from Japan in the, uh, the late 1900- no, 1800, from Fukuoka-ken in Japan. That's in Kyushu.
LKN: And when did they move to Canada?
PW: Uh, I think it was in [the] late 1800s. I have the date somewhere, but I don't have it with me.
LKN: And do you know why they moved to Canada?
PW: I don't know specifically, but I would think because he was not the oldest son in the family, and he was living in a fisherman's- the family had a fish market. And so my feeling is they wanted a better life, and my mother's parents also came at the same time, so, my father came to Canada first and my mother lived in Japan with my older sister, and with my mother's two brothers and younger sister. So she was…my sister was eight years old, and my uncles and aunt were my Mom's age, actually, my mother was the oldest of the family.
LKN: So how soon after your father came did your mother also join?
PW: Uh, when they came was…no, I don't remember.
LKN: Can you tell me how many siblings you have?
PW: I have four siblings, and, well, I had a sister, and she was born in Japan, and lived with my mother, but then she was left in Japan when my mother came to Canada with her brothers and sisters. And so, um, she was never here, and when my Mom and Dad came to Canada, my other brother, I was…and there was a sister who died in B.C., and then myself, and I have a younger sister and a younger brother.

LKN: When your family moved to Canada, where did they move to?
PW: Uh, they moved to, first I think they came into Vancouver as a port, and then I think they went into some logging camps, where my mother, I think, was a cook, and my father worked in the logging camp, but then after that, they moved to Port Hammond, which is on the Fraser River.
LKN: What do you remember about your early life?
PW: Well, my early life, I remember the house where we lived, I remember some of the buildings that was (sic) around our house and the property - I don't remember too many of the people there, because I would only be five or six at that time, when the war broke out. But I certainly remember the house, and some of the incidents that happened.
LKN: What kind of incidents?
PW: Well, there's one time when my sister and I went to our neighbour's house for dinner, and we hadn't told my Mom and Dad, and of course they were worried because we didn't come home, and then when we did come home, my Dad was so mad at me, he grabbed me by the ankles and there was a well in our shed; he took the cover off the well, and this is pitch-black in there, he dangled me [chuckles] in the well, says, "You will never go out without telling us where you are." And since that time, we never went out, I was always wary of going out for dinner, so, it was a well [chuckles], well-earned lesson to not go out without telling my parents where you were.
LKN: Were you too young to remember much about the Japanese community at that time?
PW: Um, not too much, because, I'd say I was fairly young, I was only- when we were there, I was born in '36 and the evacuation started in '42, so there was a period from, as a baby until about six, as I say, I remember places, but not too many people or too many events. But I know what my Dad did, my Dad used to make tofu. My Mom and Dad used to actually make tofu and age, and they had, my Dad had a green van, that he used to deliver the tofu and age around the Maple Ridge village, which is now the Maple Ridge area, which includes, uh, Port Hammond, Haney, that area. And my Dad also used to pick up sort of confectionaries and tobacco at a Japanese store in Vancouver, and then he would have that in the back of the truck, so when he went around to the various peoples' homes, they also had a chance to buy the confectionaries or tobacco, as a side sale, as well as the tofu and the age that my Mom and Dad made.
LKN: Were there many Japanese Canadian families living around that area?
PW: Yeah, I think there were quite a few Japanese issei families that lived in that area, in Hammond and Haney and Whonnock, Mission, all that area. There's a fairly large group, and if you look in some of the directories of where the families were located in those areas, there was quite a population of Japanese families in that

particular area. And they grew strawberries, they grew hops, they raised chickens, small crops essentially. And so they had to clear land in that area, as well as to make, you know, farming and arable soil for farming so yeah, I think there was quite a few people in the area where we lived.
LKN: Do you remember your friends during that time?
PW: No, no.
LKN: And you don't remember school, then.
PW: No, I don't, because I think I would've been too young to go to school, maybe I went to kindergarten, but I don't remember if I did.
LKN: What is your next major memory?
PW: Well, of course, the next major memory was, well, my Dad went to Kelowna before the evacuation started, to see where there were things going on, and he went to Kelowna, because he thought he would go there, find a job, and find accommodation, so he would move the family out of the interior of B.C. So, he went out there, but the problem was, when he got there, the movement was getting restricted, they weren't hiring people- Japanese people- anymore, and then he couldn't go back to Hammond so, he was stuck in Hammond [interviewer corrected to Kelowna] while my family had to, my mother had to pack up and get transferred to Hastings Park., where all the Japanese families were assembled, the people in the outlined areas. So, I remember Hastings Park, the assembly areas. So, that I remember doing that, and I think my grandfather and some of the people helped my mother pack, to make the move to Hastings Park.
LKN: When did you next see your father?
PW: My father - After we had moved to Tashme, after the assembly period, they moved different families to different internment camps, ghost towns- some of them went to self-sustaining towns. But we went to Tashme, which was a new internment camp, and all the cabins that were built new, which was already on a farm- yeah, I guess it was a farm area, in a valley-just about twelve miles from outside of Hope, east of Hope. And so that was one of the larger internment camps in the interior of B.C. So, the next move was to Tashme.
LKN: So, then, was your father still in Kelowna during this time?
PW: Yes. And eventually, he came to join us at Tashme.
LKN: Do you know how he found you?
PW: Oh, I think he kept- I think he could correspond, and so I think he would know where we were. Probably my mother might have wrote to him in Kelowna, or something like that, I would think.
LKN: Right. So, eventually he was able to-
PW: He was able to get back to join the family in Tashme.
LKN: Do you remember much about the packing up, getting ready to move?
PW: No.

LKN: So, you don't remember what you took?
PW: No.
LKN: Um, do you remember if it was your whole family and grandparents and everything, packing up?
PW: Yes, my whole family had to move, but my Dad had just built a new home…and it was a fairly large home, because it had the, uh, tofu-making machinery, and had the living quarters, so it was a two-storey building, in Hammond- my recollection [is] it was a fairly new building, and it was a fairly large plot of land, because, when I went back- several years, one of my trips back West- we went out there to look at the actual building, our home site. And it was still there, um…several years back, again, made another trip, and went back, and then it was gone, it was…the last time I saw it, it was a big shopping plaza.
LKN: Um, so then, what do you remember about Hastings Park?
PW: Well, Hastings Park- and I was still about six years old so, you know, I kind of remember the bunk beds, and the non-private, you know, area. I don't think we were there that long, 'cause it's kind of, the memory's a bit foggy. But I remember one incident where I went to the washroom, and somebody saw some blood in the washroom, the toilets, and I think somebody rushed out and said, "Oh, somebody's bleeding in the toilet," and of course, it was some lady having her menstrual period [chuckles]. So, that was one incident that seems to [chuckles] get stuck in my mind.
LKN: You were how old at that time?
PW: I would've been about six.
LKN: Was your family able to stay together, at least?
PW: Yes, because normally the men were separated, but the mother and children were together.
LKN: So, your grandfather was with you?
PW: Um…you know, I don't remember that. I don't remember my Grandpa and grandmother.
LKN: Do you remember where you were staying at Hastings?
PW: No, because there were assigned different buildings, and men were assigned to separate buildings, and the women and children were assigned to another building so I think it was segregated to some degree.
LKN: Do you remember from there, moving on to Tashme?
PW: Uh, not too much.
LKN: Do you remember much about Tashme?
PW: Oh, yeah, I remember- yes, I remember quite a bit about Tashme. I certainly remember where we lived - the accommodations we had. We lived in what was originally a barn, on the farmstead, and it was a large two-storey barn, and it was subdivided into two floors, so there'd be rooms on each floor, and there were washrooms, actually, running toilets, in that particular building, there was a

common kitchen beside the barn- it was called the "apartments", actually. And then, outside were the bathhouses. A common bathhouse, where everybody used to take baths after work or during the late afternoon.
LKN: So did your family, were they assigned a room, or an apartment?
PW: Yeah, it was basically a room, it was probably about 10 x 12 [ft], or something like that. Enough to get, you know, two beds, three beds, probably only two beds, and then space to have a little table and chairs. Just enough to kind of…absolute minimal, you know, living accommodations. There's no kitchen, no bathroom inside, just pure sleeping and eating accommodations, so, it was very small.
LKN: Do you remember what else was in that room?
PW: No, other than…I don't remember very much about it, actually [chuckles].
LKN: So, if that was just really where you slept, where did you spend most of your time during the camp?
PW: Well, we went to school during the day. Then we used to play, on weekends, and there'd be times when they used to have either movies or concerts, so, it wasn't…for children my age, it wasn't as hard as for parents, for the older people.
LKN: While you were there, did you ever wonder why you were there?
PW: No.
LKN: Can you tell me a little bit more about what the conditions were like?
PW: Um…not really, because other than that we had, uh, you know - for us, it was a new place, and it was cramped, and we didn't have our own house, or anything like that. Uh, we were fed, and we were clothed, and we were educated, so to me, at that age, it wasn't particularly a hardship, as such.
LKN: Were there stores, where did you get the clothes from?
PW: Yeah, there was actually, for the whole community, there was a store, and people were on rations and coupons. And so, uh, if their fathers were working, they were given - you know, they were earning some wages- not a heck of a lot in the logging; my Dad, when he did come back from his work at the logging camp, several miles outside the living area, and so there was a school, in another building, there was a store, there was a fish market, a meat market…I believe there was some kind of a hospital, there was a baseball diamond, so it was very basic self-sufficient.
LKN: So then, to eat, your mother would go to the store?
PW: Yeah, they took turns in the community kitchen, and they were assigned, you know, the stove- I assume they had some kind of schedule where each family had to take their turn to cook their meals, and take it to their room to eat.
LKN: Where- so they would get the ingredients for the food from the store?
PW: Yeah.
LKN: How about the clothes? Where would they get clothes from?

PW: Uh, they would…I don't think they sold, I don't think there was a clothing store, they used whatever they brought with them, and they could order from the Eaton's catalogue.
LKN: But there wasn't clothes provided?
PW: No, there was no clothing provided.
LKN: Do you remember things like where they would do the laundry?
PW: Uh, probably- I would think there might've been a common laundry area. It would be close by the, uh, living quarters, or, I would think…there would've been a common laundry area in a building whether it was off the common kitchen area or not. I'm not sure. They might be off the kitchen area because that was where the water supply would've been anyways.
LKN: Do you remember where you would do things like bathe or shower?
PW: Yeah, we would- there were no showers, just an ofuro, which is a Japanese hot tub, and so the women and children had first crack at taking a bath, and then after that the men would come later on in the evening, they'd have their bath. And there was a segregated men's side and women's side, in the bathrooms- bathhouses, actually.
LKN: So, were there a whole series of tubs?
PW: No, it was one great big tub.
LKN: Do you remember what sort of things your Mom would do during the day?
PW: No.
LKN: And your Dad was away working?
PW: Yeah, he'd be working during the day.
LKN: And would come home every evening?
PW: Yeah, I'm not sure if he came home every night, or whether he came home on the weekends, that I'm not sure.
LKN: Do you remember anything about your teachers?
PW: Uh, no, but I remember an incident- well, I remember going to school, because there was a separate school building. I remember one winter where they picked me to lead an all-girls' orchestra, so we had a Christmas concert, so, we're all dressed in white, and had to get in front of the all-girls' orchestra, [chuckles], that incident I remember. And at a Tashme reunion several years ago, one of the girls who was my age brought a class picture to the reunion- there were about four or five of us- and we kind of had a reunion. And, at that time, I found out who my teacher was. But I couldn't remember, see I couldn't remember people's names [chuckles]. So, this teacher is still alive, and so I see her quite often now, at church.
LKN: Do you remember other things, like how did they heat your room?
PW: Uh, now I'm not sure in our room whether there was- in the apartment- because, the apartments were a very unique setup. The normal housing was this, 20, 24 x 14 [ft] tarp paper shacks, with two bedrooms and a common area, and in that

living quarters, there was a big stove and a pot-belly stove that was used for heating, and another one for cooking, and the two families would share that common facility in the centre. Now, at the apartments, I don't know if there was a common heating system or if there was an actual stove in the room itself, but, I doubt it, because it was an awfully small room there, so, there might have been a heating system, I'm not sure.
LKN: Do you know why your family was able to go into the room [apartments]?
PW: No.
LKN: Now, during this time, were you and the rest of your family able to keep in touch with people outside, friends outside of the camp?
PW: Outside the camp? That I don't know, because, my Mom or Dad would have been in contact with them, I think they probably would have been, yeah. Because they still had mail, although it probably was censored to some degree. But there was a post office, so, it wasn't as if they were totally isolated. So, I would think that families or people could correspond with other families, whether they were in different camps or even in the East, I would think.
LKN: Do you remember any guards?
PW: No- there was a Mountie [R.C.M.P. officer] there. But it wasn't like the American camps, where they have barbed wires and machine guns and rifles guarding the camps. There was a Mountie, you know, in the camp. But it wasn't as if there were "guards", as such, in the sense that there was a guard on duty.
LKN: What are some of your best memories from the camp?
PW: Well, some of the memories are, you know, going to the concerts, playing around, climbing the hills, playing in the winter time uh, yeah, it's kind of, uh, there's only certain memories that kind of locks in. But, again, because I was fairly young, and some people have better memories than others; I think women, ladies or girls, seem to have better memories than men, 'cause I can't remember too many people's names. I only know, when you meet some of these older people, "Oh, I remember when you were a little kid." etc. etc.
LKN: Do you have any bad memories of the camp?
PW: No, not of Tashme.
LKN: Did your parents, afterwards, ever speak of the camp?
PW: Oh, they would tell funny stories, but, you know, I don't think I ever heard any bitter comments about what we went through. They certainly didn't pass it on to the family, as such. And so, yeah, they kept it pretty quiet, I think. When you think, you know, that they had to start over again, they had to look after raising the family, trying to find work, finding food and accommodation, so, I think in that end, I think they really worked for the family.
LKN: So, then, how old were you when you left the camp?

PW: I think we…there was a period when the war ended, in '45, there was a period when the government said, "Okay, you have to move east, you have to get out of B.C., or you can be repatriated to Japan," and they would pay for your transportation to Japan. My Dad knew a friend in Ontario, so he connected with this friend, who was living on a farm. So, there was a time when people were going back to Japan were located to Tashme, as a collecting place; and people [who] were moving east were then moved out of Tashme, so, there was a switch-off. And, so, we spent a month in a place called Roseberry, on Slocan Lake. And then we moved into New Denver for about a year. And then from there, then we moved out to Ontario.
LKN: Okay, in those two places, where did you live?
PW: In one of the shacks. Because, there were already shacks there, as one of the internment camps, so there was already buildings there; so, all they were doing was moving families from one place to another. And so people who were going to Japan, like my cousin, and my aunt, they stayed in Tashme until it was time for them to then, go to Vancouver and go on a ship - take them to Japan [and then] to wherever they were going, and we were doing this interchange. Because everybody made the change, it was a transition period, a connection period. For us, for our family, we did an interim move, almost two interim moves, before we came to Ontario.
LKN: Were most of your relatives with you in Tashme?
PW: Yes. Yes, my grandparents, my two uncles and their families were there, my aunt and their family were there in Tashme.
LKN: And how many of your relatives decided to go to Japan?
PW: Only the aunt, because she was a widow, and she had a young family, and she was looking after her father-in-law, who was quite old. And so, because she was a widow, because she had a young family, she decided to take the family to Japan. They decided to go to Japan.
LKN: Where did the rest of your relatives decide to go?
PW: Uh…one of my uncles went to Manitoba, to Winnipeg. And then, uh, my other uncle went to Ontario, same area, Chatham, same as our family.
LKN: Do you remember anything about packing up and leaving the camp?
PW: No.
LKN: Um- sorry, how old did you say you were?
PW: I would've been about eight or nine.
LKN: Do you remember the trip from B.C. to Chatham?
PW: Yes.
LKN: Can you tell me about that?
PW: The trip from New Denver to Toronto, we were on these very old, old coaches. There were wood slats, hard as heck, and you were on there day and night, so, you slept, ate, all on these old coaches. And I can't remember how many days it took, but, it was several days to come across, and then, when we came to Chatham, we then

got off at Union Station, and then we were transferred to the regular passenger coaches, between Chatham and it's like going from pretty primitive coaches with hard wooden seats to this luxury living room [chuckles] seating, so, it was a real change in terms of the travel, transportation-wise, between the two places.
LKN: Do you know where your family got the money to take the train, and travel?
PW: No, I don't know if they, if the government, you know, gave you some allowance or something, gave you a free ticket to come out east, I don't know.
LKN: Okay. That old train you referred to, was that just for Japanese Canadians?
PW: Primarily for Japanese, yeah. Whether there was a special train or not, that I don't know, it was all part of the trans-Canada railway system, or whether it was primarily for the Japanese people, to take them from B.C. out to Ontario, uh… good question, I don't know.
LKN: Can you remember your arrival into Chatham?
PW: Uh, there was somebody who met us there, in Chatham, and then we went from Chatham, and then, I think the friend who lived on the farm- 'cause we went to a small town about twelve miles outside of Chatham, to the farm, and we probably brought a truck or something, to take us from the station there to the farmhouse. And we stayed there for a summer, and my Mom and Dad worked on the farm, and then my brother worked on the farm.
LKN: What kind of work?
PW: Picking strawberries, picking peaches, you know, small crop farming. Because, southwestern Ontario, especially the Chatham area, the Kent and Essex area, it's really a rich farming country. So, therefore, they worked on the farm, whatever crops needed tending, or weeding, or picking. So then, my Dad…I think we moved in the fall, we found a very tiny, tiny bungalow in Chatham, in the east end. And, he must have saved money, because he bought a tiny little bungalow for $1,000. I think we were one of the first families that actually was able to find, uh, bought a house, because, in those days, many of the families were either living in storage shacks, or- I know of a family who was living in chicken coops, or you know, storage houses, buildings on a farm. So, some of it was pretty primitive for some of the people, depending on what they could find in Chatham. But, Chatham was a fairly, was a transitionary terminal place, because it was in the centre of farming country, so therefore, they'll be opportunities for jobs on the farms. And so, I think [a] lot of them, talking to various people who came out east, and when you tell them you're from Chatham, they'll say "Oh, yeah, I spent, you know, a summer out there before I moved to Toronto," or something. So, a lot of them came through Chatham, and so they know where Chatham is, and so there was a fairly- not a large, but a fairly good-Japanese Canadian community in Chatham. Like, I would say Toronto, London, Hamilton, Chatham, and then maybe Fort Williams up [by] Thunder Bay, up in the northern area were fairly large Japanese Canadian communities in Ontario.

LKN: Most of the people who worked alongside your family on the farm, were they also Japanese Canadians?
PW: Yes. I mean, there were some other *hakujin* people, there were some other ethnic immigrants from Europe, or something like that. But, I think there were a lot of Japanese, at least, what I remember when I used to work on farms, the workers were, you know people my age or our parents or the mothers who work with us on some of the [farm] during the summertime, when we went to work on the farm.
LKN: Do you remember much about that farm?
PW: No, it was a fairly large farm, they had a house- they didn't own the property, they were tenants, they were workers for a large farm company, they had a large orchard and strawberry farm in Cedar Springs. And so, because my Dad knew this family that were living in this fairly large house, there was enough room for us to go there, as our move to Ontario, so, because of that, we had a contact in Ontario to go to. Because one of the things that was difficult is, uh, for families to go to a place, you needed somebody to sponsor you. Or, that you could go and say, "Well, I can go there, cause I know somebody there" or "somebody's got a place for me". So, I guess each family was different circumstances. But I just know about our family, that we knew somebody who lived on that farm, and worked on that farm, so we shared their home with them.
LKN: Did you interact with non-Japanese Canadians in Chatham?
PW: In Chatham? Well because, especially during the school year, I would. But I would say after school, pretty non-existent. I can't say we interacted that strongly with them, because there was enough of a core group of niseis, people my age, that we would be able to stay together. And, when you think, you know…we were discriminated against, and so we kind of stuck together to some degree, we didn't integrate too much with the white population. Uh, in the east end was the poor section of Chatham, that's where all the black people lived. And so, we were in the poor section of Chatham, so, you know, we had black friends and uh…but, you know, I went to public school, I went to high school there. So, you know, I had friends during the high school period, during the school hours. But there aren't too many times that I would say that we interacted that much with them, didn't go to dances, didn't go to their homes or anything. In fact, I [don't] remember if I went to one home, I don't even recall. Now, as the generations changed- like for my brother, who's five years younger- well, they were interacting with the hakujin people a lot more than we were. So- and the other thing is, there was a fairly large group of us nisei, people my age anyways, at that point in time, that we kind of did things together, either as boys, or we went to dances together, we had dances, and things like that. So, there was interaction amongst our nisei people, but I wouldn't say there was a heck of social interaction between the hakujin [and the Japanese Canadian] people.

LKN: After the war, when you were in Chatham, did you ever feel discriminated against?
PW: Uh, there were probably some incidents, but it wasn't a searing memory, that I was really discriminated against. There might've been some incidents of somebody maybe calling me a "Jap" or something, but, for me, personally, I didn't feel that bad about it, I mean I [didn't] felt totally discriminated against. And, I think it depending, again, it depended on how old you were, and what circumstances you were at. Personally, I didn't feel discriminated against.
LKN: Did your parents ever mention that they had any incidents?
PW: No.
LKN: So then, how long did your parents work on the farm?
PW: Well, my parents, when they came to Chatham, he found another job with a rendering plant. It was a large rendering plant in Chatham, which processed dead animals, rotten meat from the market, and what they did was they would take either old horses or cows, they would then be killed at the rendering plant, they would skin the animal for their hides, salt it down for seasoning before it gets shipped out to the hide companies, and they would take the remainder of the carcass, they would grind it up and then cook it, and then run it out to be used as fertilizer. It was a really dirty, smelly place to work in. But, they paid good wages, and so a lot of the fathers used to work at this place. And some guys my age also worked at this place called Darlings [chuckles]- lovely name. And, uh, so, they worked there, because a) they paid good money- I mean, comparatively, it was very good money, for us at that point in time. Yeah, so, that's where my Dad worked at, and many of the fathers worked at. My mother, for a time period, worked at the hospital, so some of the ladies actually, the mothers, worked at the hospital. Now, some of them also did, I think, housework, for some of the families…and, I think it, anything to earn some money, is I guess what it came down to. So, in the summertime, when I was really young, before we could work at this place called Darlings, we used to go in the summertime to work on the farm.
LKN: Do you remember the wages?
PW: Yeah, it was pretty cheap, because it was, I think, after working all summer, I might've made $200 to $300, it was cheap [chuckles]. And, it was hard work, it was really hard work. But, it was something, you know, like I was able to save my money so that I could go to university. Some of the people, you know, gave it to their parents, to add to the family coffer. My parents allowed me to keep my money, and I saved it for my education.
LKN: What age did you start working?
PW: Oh, I would say…when I got to Chatham, we were on the farm working summer times, probably around [age] ten or twelve. Fairly young.
LKN: Do you remember your siblings working on the farm as well?

PW: Uh, my brother did, and my younger sister, not as much, and certainly my younger brother wouldn't have worked on the farm.
LKN: Where did you finish high school?
PW: In Chatham.
LKN: And what did you do following high school?
PW: Then I went to U of T [University of Toronto], to take architecture.
LKN: And can you tell me about that decision?
PW: Well, I thought I had some artistic talents [chuckles], so that's why I chose architecture, I guess…yeah.
LKN: And you'd saved up the money that whole time?
PW: Yes. And then I got a bursary the first few years. And of course, in those days, in 1955, tuition fees was like , $300-400, so it's not like what it is now. And then I lived in residence while I was there, so- I mean, I lived a fairly frugal life [chuckles] as a student.
LKN: So, can you tell me a little bit about your time at university?
PW: Yeah, it was a lot of hard work. Architecture was a lot of hard work, because it had these assignments, plus you had to go to classes, so, yeah, for me it was difficult period of studying. I mean, projects together, so it wasn't easy. [unintelligible] so, for me, it was more difficult.
LKN: Did you go back and visit Chatham quite a bit?
PW: Yeah, certainly during the holidays, I would go back. In the summer time, I went back, and then I worked in Chatham. Yeah, so I did go back, during holiday periods, Thanksgiving or Christmas time, I went back, Easter. Yeah so, I did what I could, but not a lot, because it cost money to do that, so [chuckles] I didn't go home too often.
LKN: Was it pretty common for Japanese Canadians of your age to be going to university?
PW: No, I would say…no, I don't think it was. At least, in my time. Well, I think our class, people my age, I think there were of the four that was in grade thirteen, because we had grade thirteen in those days, I think we all went to university, surprisingly.
LKN: There were only four?
PW: Yeah, there were four in our grade thirteen class, and all went to university, which was unusual, even to have four in our class, you know, niseis, in the graduating class at the Chatham Collegiate Institute.
LKN: Was it your parents who were pushing education?
PW: I can't remember my parents pushing me, I don't know whether it was [unintelligible], I don't know, because I don't remember- I know you hear of some parents really pushing that you should get an education, and kind of hammer it home that you should do that. My parents didn't especially hammer, I don't

remember them saying, “Oh, you got to have an education” I just [figured] that's what we’re supposed to do [chuckles], so I did it.
LKN: Did you enjoy coming to Toronto?
PW: No, because it was really weird, because my brother was already here, and he had gone to Ryerson, actually, and he was here, I think he was already working by that time. And so, then he sent me- I wanted to get into residence, originally but it was full. So, he had found me a rooming house, right on Dundas and McCaul. And so here’s this young guy who’d never been to the big city, and, you know, you’re right on the main street of Dundas, with the streetcar going by, because my bedroom was right out facing Dundas, you know, it’s bright and it’s noisy; and so, here I’m a country bumpkin coming to Toronto [chuckles], and facing this big metropolitan city, so, for me, it was kind of strange, actually. Then, after about a month or two, I finally got into residence, so that made it easier, that transition was easier, because residence is nicer, but the first month or two was pretty lonely [chuckles].
LKN: What was your social life like, in university?
PW: At university, they used to have what was called the Nisei Student Club. And that was a social gathering of niseis, that’s why it’s called the Nisei Student Club. And that also had students from U of T and Ryerson, so it was called the Nisei Student Club. So, it became a social interaction club for people who were going to university, and it covered from freshmen up to the older years. And so, you had a variety of people, and various departments - you had people in music, people in engineering, doctors, architecture - so you had a variety of people, it became also a place where people found their spouses, as well. So, at university, again, you know, you concentrate on your studies so I didn’t have much of a social life, per se, other than the Nisei Student Club.
LKN: So you weren’t, um, interacting with non-nisei, socially, that much?
PW: No. Once in a while I might have, but it wasn’t that frequent. Too busy with my studies and projects.
LKN: So, how long was the course, the degree?
PW: It was a five-year course.
LKN: And then, following that, can you tell me about the following years?
PW: Well, I had a few supplementals, near the end, so, I took some time off, I worked, and I took a year off, and I went to Japan, and I went across Canada. A friend of mine, a Jewish guy, he and I got one of these driveway cars from Detroit, that they would, you know, give you a car and pay for your gas, to drive the car from Detroit to Seattle. And so, we did that, and so we went to Seattle, and drove to Seattle, and stayed in Seattle to see the World’s Fair that was there, then we took a bus up to Vancouver. And what I wanted to do was take a Japanese freighter out of Vancouver, to Japan. The ultimate goal was I wanted to go see Japan, he wanted to go to kibbutz, in Israel. So, we both made this journey, and uh, - somebody gave me a contact in

Vancouver, so I could get on a Japanese freighter, and there's a time lag between booking and when the freighter comes in, so, I think I spent about a month and a half in Vancouver, and I went to an architect's office and said, " I don't care what you pay me, but I've got some free time, can you hire me?" So, they were looking for people, so, I worked for minimum wages, I worked for about a month, and -I think my friend went to work on some farm, berry-picking or something.

So, we finally got a Japanese freighter, took us a week from Vancouver to Yokohama, to get across the ocean, but it was great, we got a big state room and we ate with the, had dinner and lunch with the ship's officers, so we got the best food, and we had a very large state room and lots of room, and they used to draw the bath for us in the mornings, they used to bring breakfast in the mornings, it was wonderful! And you could go and talk to the ship's officers anytime- it was very quiet, because there was only my friend and I, and there was another Japanese family who was going back, but they kept to themselves, we never saw them, because they just ate [on their own]- they had a baby, so - in those days you could still get these very economical bookings on a Japanese freighter, I don't think they do that now, but, in those days, you could do that, this would be the early '60s, I guess. So, that was a good way to get there. It's not like, you know, you hop on the plane now, in Vancouver, and twelve hours later, seven hours later, you're in Japan. So, it took a week, and that transition period was quite good. I was able to talk to the Japanese officers and captain, so, I learned a bit of history and culture from them. But then, when we got there, it was in the middle of summer, and Japan- I don't know if you've ever been to Japan- it is hot and humid! And, plus, I wanted to see my sister, because she had never been here [Canada], none of the family had gone to see her since Mom and Dad left, and so she never met us of course, so, I was the first of her blood family to actually see her, she had already married and was living in Osaka. So, we went to her place, and then from there, cause it was so hot, we moved, we went and took a train up to Hokkaido, which we thought was a little cooler, and then we had to get one of the Japan rail passes, so we did that, [unintelligible]- and then, he [the friend] went on through the Far East and Southeast Asia, so he could essentially end up in Israel in kibbutz. So, then I stayed on for- we got there in July, and I stayed on until December, so I had quite a long time in Japan.
LKN: Before you went to Japan, could you speak Japanese?
PW: Enough to get along with, yeah. I didn't have any formal training- because I had to speak to my parents in Japanese, they didn't speak English-so, it was sort of very simple Japanese. But enough – at least, I thought I could get along, that I could speak quite [well]. My sister, you know, I could ask directions, if I had to.
LKN: Was it only because of your sister that you went to Japan?
PW: Well, I just wanted to- I just wanted to see Japan, as well.

LKN: Why is that?
PW: Oh, because I wanted to see the gardens and the architecture there.
LKN: What was your reaction when you got to Japan?
PW: "Christ, it's hot!" [laughs] It's a totally different situation, cause, a) they're all Japanese, there's nothing but Japanese there, and they all speak the same language- but not really, because going to different regions, they've got their local dialects, and so, if they spoke their local dialect, it was hard to understand them. But, there's what's called the more standard Japanese, which is like Tokyo way of talking. And I guess that's what we kind of generally spoke, although there must have been some local dialect, words or phrases, that we picked up from our parents. Or, even the languages does change, so we might have used words that were thirty, forty years old, right? But, you know, what I did always, right at the beginning of any conversation was [to] say, "Look, I'm a foreigner, I was born in Canada, I'm from Canada," and they'd say "Canada? What ken is that?" And [I'd say], "Well, you know, North America, Niagara Falls," "Oh, yeah! Merica [chuckle] Canada." And then they'll say, "Yeah, [we] understand where you're from." [Chuckles]
LKN: So, did you stay in Hokkaido?
PW: No, we just went around. We just toured on the train. So, we didn't stay there. We just came back down.
LKN: So, after December, you returned to-
PW: [Unintelligible] I returned. But then I also went down to Kyushu, which is the southernmost island, to visit my uncles and aunts who were living there. And my cousins were living there, too, so, I went to visit them, after my friend left, I went on a trip down there. So, I met my relatives, and all the brothers were still alive, when I was there in the mid-'60s, so, I met them all. So, you know, it was nice, it was really nice to meet them.
LKN: Did you see your aunt who was in the camps with you?
PW: Yes, I had dinner with her- [chuckles] funny thing, she lived out in the country, and my uncles, my brothers [then corrected himself], my Dad's brothers were living, because that's where I stayed, my father's oldest brother, where they had the fish market. I stayed with him. And then, I went to meet my aunt, and then we went to her house, which was kind of out in the country, and then we went to her daughter's place, who had just had a baby, who'd be my cousin, she'd just had a baby, so we went and had dinner with them. And I met her husband, and then she stayed on. So, I had ridden a bike, then I came back to the little fishing village, and this is only about eight or nine o'clock, it's pitch black, the house where I was staying is pitch black- I guess they get up really early in the morning right, so, I couldn't go pounding on the door, so I went back in the pitch dark, back to my aunt's house, in the middle of the country. And it's a wonder I got there, because I got there somehow, then I got out some stones and lay down on the *tatami*, went to sleep [chuckles]. So, the next

morning, this neighbour, this old lady who was her neighbour, came out and says, "Who the hell are you?" [chuckles] Eventually my aunt came back, and then we had breakfast together, I went back to the house and yeah, it was really weird, it was really really weird, but, you know, these are funny incidents, it happens.
LKN: As a Japanese Canadian, how did you feel about being in Japan?
PW: Well, actually, it was interesting because A) you kind of get a feel for the country, cause you don't do that when you're here, you kind of get to see the people, you get to see the buildings, different arts and crafts, and different cultural things, so I found that interesting. I found it interesting – and it's good that I met my sister- and although we had [images], this was the first time we met, there's a certain bond that somehow we seem to have established. And like, you know how western men treat women, right? Like open doors [for them], and stuff. Well, I took my sister out to an outing one day, and I'm opening the door for her, letting her go first, and she doesn't get treated like that in Japan, right? [Chuckles] Because her husband goes barreling ahead, and so she thought, "Oh, this is wonderful to be treated like that so it was a nice relationship so I got to know my sister."
LKN: What did you think of the Japanese people, generally?
PW: Generally, once you told them who you were, where you came from, I think they opened up a lot more. But, you know, you look like them, so [chuckles], "Why can't you read [or] understand this?" "No, I'm from Canada." [chuckle] And once you say that, then they, you know, take you for what you are, "Alright, so you don't know everything", because I say, I don't understand the language very well, I can speak a little bit but I really can't carry on a deep conversation with you, or, I may not understand some of the words that you use. So, once you kind of explain that to them, it was a lot easier to get along.

[End of part 1]
[Start part 2]

LKN: How did you support yourself the whole time you were in Japan?
PW: You know, from the time I left to the time I came back, I spent $1,000. That's about five months. I [chuckles] tried to find the cheapest place there was, ate the cheapest food, of course I stayed with my sister for a little bit, but, not long, then I befriended some guy I met at a Japanese temple there, and he took me to his house, let me stay there for a week or so. It was the one time I found in the different kens or the counties- they have a little residential area where people come in from the country can stay there for really cheap price and they have some business with the county, government stuff, they can stay there. So, I found a place like that, so, you know, there's several places - like I didn't have an itinerary, I just kept roaming

basically [chuckles]. So, you know, I survived very frugally, and of course, in those days, a dollar was worth 360 yen. So, the dollar went pretty far.

But even, you know, travelling all the way there, taking the freighter back and forth- somebody told me that if you buy certain things, like Johnny Walker whiskey, or a set of golf clubs, you can take it there to Japan and sell it for double the price. So, this guy set me up with a bag of golf clubs, and some whiskey, Johnny Walker, red or black, and I took it with me- now, the whiskey I got a bit of money for, but the golf clubs didn't sell for a darn, and so, here I am [chuckles] getting desperate to get rid of them. I didn't want to take it back [laughs] [unintelligible]. And then there's a friend I met, a guy I met, in Japan, he's been there for several years. Now, he had these big wood crates that he had put in all the stuff that he had gathered while he was there like pottery and dishes and Japanese artifacts. And he said, "I hear you're going back on a Japanese freighter, could you take these three or four boxes back to Canada with you?" [laughs] So, you know, cause it was a freighter, it wasn't so bad, so yeah. So then I bought some gifts for my family, you know [since] I was there. Doing all that, I think I spent $1,000. And I was gone almost six months.
LKN: So, how did you get back?
PW: Well, then I took the Japanese freighter across the Pacific, in the winter time, December, and it was like up and down, but I didn't get seasick so, that was good. And then I got into Vancouver, and I took a cross-Canada train back, then I stopped off in Winnipeg to visit with my aunt and uncle, who were in Winnipeg, so I spent an afternoon with them, then took a train again, to get back to Toronto. And then to Chatham.
LKN: Why did you decide to come back?
PW: Oh, because I was going to start school again in January, so, I had to get back by January.
LKN: So, following your degree, what did you do?
PW: Oh, then I went to work for Zeidler's [Partnership Architects].
LKN: And how long did that last?
PW: Thirty-five, thirty-six years.
LKN: Wow, that's amazing. And, you stayed in Toronto?
PW: I stayed in Toronto, got married in Toronto. Yeah, essentially, after I graduated, after I left Chatham high school, essentially, I've lived in Toronto [unintelligible].
LKN: So, can you tell me a little bit about coming up to the present day?
PW: Oh, yeah. Working at Ziedler's, I started from you know, down here [hand movement showing a lower position], and then I became a senior partner, worked on some really [with emphasis] interesting jobs, because Ziedler's, Robert became one of the largest architectural firms at one time- not necessarily now, but, at one time when they were at the height of their business, we had almost 200 people

working as an architect, and that's all we did, architectural work, we didn't have any engineers, we just were an architectural firm. So we were able to do some really outstanding projects, like the McMaster Health Science Centre, SickKids, Sunnybrook Hospital, Princess Margaret [Hospital], Ontario Place, the Exhibition Place on the CNE [Canadian National Exhibition], Confederation Life, which is now Rogers building. And so, also, I was able to work on some projects on the far east, like in Indonesia, and so I was making trips out to the far east at one time, and that was great, because in those days, they'd pay for all the fares and first-class airfares [chuckles]. So, I got to see the far east quite a bit, primarily, a little bit into Japan, because we had a Japanese client, and then to Hong Kong, and to Taiwan, Jakarta, where we actually designed a building, and then to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. And then I was involved in the Canadian Embassy in Korea. So, I got to see quite a bit of the far east. But since I retired, about eight and a half years ago, I've been doing a lot of volunteer work at the Centre [Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre], and I also volunteer for Community Living Toronto, which is the association for mentally handicapped citizens, because of our son. And I like to travel, I still ski and golf, so, it keeps me quite busy, seems to be busier than when I was working [chuckles].
LKN: How did you get involved in the Cultural Centre [Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre]?
PW: Well, when I was working, I guess I was busy with my career, so I hadn't spent too much time at the Centre. I attended certain things, and the only thing that I was really involved with was the artisan show, which was a craft show, and so, I helped out on that one, but other than that, I wasn't on the committee, but I used to come and volunteer for the Caravan[1]. But I wasn't involved in committees or [the] Board or anything. But after I retired, I thought, "Well, because I didn't do too much with the Centre, I thought well, I'd like to get involved," so I said I would volunteer, so I started doing some projects, and I guess that the first one that really got me involved was - they were celebrating their 100th anniversary - anyways, there was a gala and they wanted to have a gala, so they wanted to see what we could put together as a photographic display for that gala. And I believe that's when I really got involved with the photographs, and all that. The first exhibit we put on was the "Order of Canada Recipients" and then we were trying to look for photographs, and that's where I found all those boxes of photographs that came from Brantford over to here when they made the move, and they were not in great shape so I got involved trying to sort that. That's how I got more involved with the Heritage Committee and Sedai[2].
LKN: Were you at all involved in the Redress?
PW: No.

[1] A festival initiated by the City of Toronto.
[2] Oral History Project

LKN: What were your thoughts on the Redress?
PW: I didn't have very much [thoughts], I mean, I went to those rallies but I didn't have any strong feelings one way or another. I supported it but I wasn't involved in the redress movement per se.
LKN: Looking back on your life so far, how do you think your war experience affected your life and career?
PW: Um, interesting, cause I've always wondered, if the war didn't happen, what would be my life in B.C. be like? Would I be making tofu? Would I have gone on to university? You know, who knows? So, in one way, I guess the internment, the displacement to Ontario, opened up another venue, and whether that would have happened in B.C., I don't know but in reading the history of what happened in B.C., it would have been more difficult, I think. But, you don't know, because now it's not a problem but at that time, when I was growing up, whether that would have happened, I just [don't know].
LKN: When you look back on your parents, how do you feel about how the war experience affected their lives?
PW: Well, I mean I totally respect and honour them, because they came as immigrants, totally different language, totally different culture, didn't have very much money, and they started from scratch and built up a life. They had a good business, they owned property, owned a house. War comes, they're interned, treated as, you know, real aliens, and so now they're locked into, they've lost everything, they're locked into a certain time frame of – [they]can't do anything. Now, they have a choice of going to Japan or going out of B.C., so they take a chance at starting once again, a second time, to start a new life literally. Now, they've become accustomed to Canadian living to some degree, but they literally had nothing, they literally had nothing after being here, you know, [after] many, many years. And some people had really thriving businesses or fishermen with boats and all that, and so, they lost it all. And so, they start[ed] all over again, and whether they were older isseis or younger niseis, they literally had to start over again. So, you know, [I] totally, totally respect them, what they went through. And so, for people my age or people [who] follow, you think "God, if it wasn't for them, we wouldn't be where we are now. We won't be here."
LKN: Is there anything else you would like to share with us?
PW: Well, I think it's important that we maintain and keep the histories and the stories of the Japanese experience, because in a very short time, I think that it's a really important part of Canadian history that we should record and document as much as we can. We're losing a lot of people now. And some we've captured, some [are] already gone. And they're now into their eighties and nineties now, the niseis. I just met a lady who's a issei and she's over 100 and she's bright as heck, but she's in Castleview. But there are very few of those around. There's still some, but they are

very few and far between now. I mean, look at Issei Day. How many people who's still there over eighty [chuckle]. I was so shocked. It's amazing. And the people who are still fairly active and still bright is - I mean some have gone and some are in not so good [health], but there's still a large group that's still very bright and energetic, you know, just going like gangbusters. You know, it is great. I hope I can be like that. I have two aunts that [are] ninety-one. There's one lady, my aunt in Chatham, she lives by herself and she has a son who lost a wife and so, she cooks for him and they eat dinner together. I have another aunt in Winnipeg. She's ninety-one, and although she has to do kidney dialysis, she does it at home by herself. Other than that, she's going on with life. So, you know, those are the kind of the people you look up [to]. Oh boy, if I could be like that at that age, I would be so happy, but you will never know what's going to happen today. I mean tomorrow I could walk out the door, you could walk out the door[gestures to interviewer and blows a raspberry to suggest death], you know [chuckle]. So, you know, I enjoy everyday as much as I can but it's, ah, you know, I have to take the most of everyday. Do as much as you can. [shrugs shoulders slightly].
LKN: Thank you, thank you for sharing your story with us.

[End of interview]