



**D E N S H Ō**

*The Japanese American Legacy Project*

**INTERVIEW INFORMATION**

**Name of interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location of Interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Secondary Interviewer (if any):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Videographer:** \_\_\_\_\_



D E N S H Ō

*The Japanese American Legacy Project*

**NARRATOR INFORMATION**

**First Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Middle Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Last Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Nickname (if any):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Maiden Name (if any):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interview Display Name (How you would like your name to appear with your interview):**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Street Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone:** ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Place of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Country of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name at Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:** M    F

**Generational Identifier (ex. Issei, Nisei, Kibei, etc.):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Ethnicity:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Nationality:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Religion (at time of interview):** \_\_\_\_\_

Densho Digital Archive  
Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre Collection  
Title: Mits Ito Interview  
Narrator: Mits Ito  
Interviewer: Mary Ito  
Location:  
Date: March 23, 2005  
Densho ID: denshovh-imits-01

I: Today is Wednesday, March the 23rd, and I'm doing an interview at the home of Mits Ito on **P Street** in Toronto, and my name is **Mary Ito**. So Mits, what was the full name that you were given when you were born?

MI: My name was **Mitsuyoshi Ito**.

I: And why were you given that name?

MI: 'Cause I was a third son.

I: So what, how do you define that name? What does "third" mean?

MI: *Mitsu* is "three."

I: And what was the year that you were born?

MI: 1924, August the 20th.

I: Do you have any siblings, brothers and sisters?

MI: I have one brother still living, **Tsugio**, and I had another brother and they all passed away. And then we had one daughter, she passed away one month after she was born.

I: This would be your sister?

MI: Yes.

I: And where were you born?

MI: Mission City, B.C.

I: And where is Mission in British Columbia?

MI: Mission is about thirty miles up the Fraser River on Vancouver.

I: And were all your brothers also born in Mission?

MI: Yes, we were all born in Mission.

I: I'm going to ask you a little bit about your family background. Who was the first person in your family -- this is going back now -- to leave Japan and come to Canada?

MI: My father's brother, the first one that came was in 1897, **Yanosuke**.

I: He was the oldest?

MI: And then **Tsukichi**, and then **Denjiro**, and **Toku**. Four brothers came to Vancouver.

I: And you said the oldest brother, **Yanosuke**, came in 1897?

MI: Uh-huh.

I: Was that significant, that year that he came, as far as, was that, was he an early settler from Japan, were there many other Japanese who came before him to Canada? Was that significant, him coming here?

MI: No, I think there was some other Japanese in Vancouver. No, I don't, I don't know.

I: So he wasn't considered one of the first Japanese to come to that area?

MI: No, I don't think so. Maybe from *Shiga-ken*, he might be the first from *Shiga-ken*, oh, the *Iso*, where my parents came from.

I: So they came from what area in Japan?

MI: Iso village, near Hikone, Shiga-ken.

I: And when they came to Canada, where did they actually arrive?

MI: Vancouver. They arrived at Vancouver and worked in the sawmill in Vancouver, I think on **Powell Street**.

I: And then when was it that they settled to Mission?

MI: About 1910 or, around 1910, they bought a farm in Mission.

I: All four of them?

MI: No, I think at first it was **Tsukichi**, and then my father took over afterwards.

I: **Denjiro**?

MI: **Denjiro**.

I: Why did they leave Japan?

MI: I think they came because... I think they came to hire laborers in Vancouver. They needed laborers to work in the sawmill, and they came to Japan. So they thought that they could make some money, and I think they came over. And I think they did all right in those days.

I: So it wasn't too difficult when they came over, to get employment and to make money and to, to live on that?

MI: No, no. It was, there was all kinds of job in those days. And I think **Yanosuke** only stayed about three or four years and then went back, saved enough money to buy more land there in Iso, and never came back to Canada.

I: What were they doing in Japan before they came?

MI: Rice, growing rice, and fishing in Lake Biwa.

I: So they were farmers and fishermen?

MI: Yeah, farmers.

I: About how old would they have been when they came to Canada?

MI: They must have been around twenty-five, around there.

I: And what about on your mother's side? Who came to Canada?

MI: On my mother's side, there was one brother that came, and that's about all.

I: You mean her brother?

MI: **Yamashita**. My mother's sister married **Yamashita**, and one of their children came to Vancouver. And their children now live in Winnipeg.

I: How was it that your mother came over?

MI: I think my father went back and got married, and then brought her over.

I: What was your mother's name?

MI: I forgot now.

I: **Tsugi**?

MI: **Tsugi, Tsugi**, that's right.

I: So was she actually the first to come from Japan?

MI: Yeah --

I: From her family, right? She got married.

MI: Yeah, she was the first one. Yeah, she was the only one from that family, and then the other one that came is the son of the sister.

I: And where was she born?

MI: In Shiga-ken, Nagahama. Matsubara, in Matsubara, near Iso, right next to a town.

I: Do you know how your mother and father met?

MI: I think somebody in Japan introduced her. I think that in those days, had *nakodo*, somebody want to get married, they would find a suitable mate.

I: What were they called, those people?

MI: *Nakodo*.

I: *Nakodo*?

MI: Yes.

I: So does that mean "go-between"?

MI: Go-between, yes.

I: Do you remember your parents at all talking about life in Japan? Did they tell you much about what their previous life was like?

MI: No, they didn't... no, not too much, no. 'Cause they were farmers, so... and I think some people from B.C. came to Japan to offer them a job, they just decided to take a chance.

I: Did they ever say they were homesick for Japan?

MI: No.

I: So, now your family, your father, you said, eventually moved from Vancouver to Mission, right?

MI: Yes.

I: And why was that?

MI: Because as I believe, that they wanted to go into business on their own, so they bought a farm, and grew strawberries and all different kind of berries.

I: And when they moved to Mission, who did they live with?

MI: Sometime, another brother **Tsukichi** was there, and then another brother-in-law, he used to come to work in Mission, too. And that's about all in one family.

I: Okay. So all four brothers, though, were there in Mission.

MI: **Yanosuke** was, I think, back in Japan by that time.

I: Oh.

MI: **Tsukichi** was still here.

I: Right.

MI: **Denjiro** --

I: Your father.

MI: -- and **Toku**, he didn't come to Mission, he stayed in Vancouver and had a tobacco stall.

I: So two brothers in Mission.

MI: Yeah.

I: And were there eventually any other family members in Mission?



MI: In Mission? No.

I: Nearby, even.

MI: No. There were lots of Japanese people farming in Mission, but no, they weren't related. But they were mostly from *Shiga-ken*.

I: What, as a child growing up, what do you remember of Mission, what it was like back then? What kind of town was it?

MI: Well, Mission, a lot of Japanese people living in Mission. I think there were more Japanese than Canadians in Mission. And they were all farmers, growing strawberries, raspberries, currants, I think a lot of vegetables, too.

I: Was there a good market for all those products?

MI: Yes, I think they did very good, that's why people were farming in those days.

I: So was it, would you say it was a prosperous town back then? Was it thriving, was it growing?

MI: It was growing, 'cause a lot of people were coming to buy land there and grow berries. I think they were doing all right.

I: So did your father and his brother, did they own this land?

MI: Yeah, they owned it. They bought it.

I: Now, how did they get the money to buy this land?

MI: I think they must have made it when they were working in the sawmill in Vancouver. And they might have had a mortgage on the farm.

I: Do you remember how much land it was and how much they might have paid for it?

MI: I have a bill of sale, I think it said \$20,000.

I: For how much land?

MI: Thirty-five acres.

I: Was that considered a lot back then?

MI: I think it would be, but I don't know. I really don't know.

I: What about, you say there were a lot of other Japanese people who lived in Mission around you. Did you, did you associate a lot with other Japanese families?

MI: Oh yes, we did, yes. We went to school together, and every Sunday we went to Buddhist Church, but we all went together.

I: The school that you went to, was it a public school for everyone, or did it cater mostly to the Japanese people?

MI: No, it was for everyone. It was Mission Public School, but they were mostly Japanese.

I: And what language did you speak when you were at home with your parents?

MI: At home we spoke Japanese, but outside we spoke English.

I: Did you go to Japanese school?

MI: Yes, we went to Japanese school every Saturday morning, about three, four hours Saturday morning.

I: And what was that like, Japanese school? Who taught these classes?

MI: Mr. and Mrs. **Kudo** taught Japanese. I think we just went there just to have fun, because we were told, the parents told us to go, so we just went. I don't think we learned very much.

I: What did you do when you were there?

MI: Learned Japanese writing and speaking Japanese.

I: Yeah, that's what you were supposed to do, but what did you really do when you went? [Laughs]

MI: [Laughs] Just to have fun.

I: Had a good time? So when, when did you first learn English?

MI: Well, when I went to public school, we just picked up English in school.

I: Was it hard, was it difficult, not knowing English?

MI: No, no. No, it was, I didn't think it was hard.

I: Where did you first go to school?

MI: At Mission.

I: And what was the name of the school?

MI: Mission Public School.

I: And what kind of teachers were at the school?

MI: They're all Canadian. They were very nice.

I: No Japanese teachers?

MI: No, no.

I: And what about the classrooms? Was it each grade had a separate teacher, or were you all put into one class?

MI: No, every, grade one to... had different teachers.

I: How, what you remember about the experience, and what would you say about it? Was it a good experience, was it not a good experience, what did you think about going to school?

MI: I think it was good. We always had to go back home and pick strawberries. Farming was more important than school, I think, in those days.

I: Is that right? So what was your day like?

MI: Oh, we went to school, and then when we come home, we go and pick strawberries 'til dark. And that's about it.

I: What about homework?

MI: Yeah, we did some homework sometimes. [Laughs]

I: And in the morning, did you have to get up really early?

MI: No, we all went to school together. I think the **Inouyes** came along, and then we went to **Kinatsus**, and we all went to school together.

I: So did all the local Japanese children go to Mission Public School?

MI: Yes, we all went to Mission Public School.

I: Did you have any favorite subjects in school?

MI: I think math was the best subject.

I: And how long did you go to school?

MI: I went to grade ten, and then I went to work in a sawmill in **Haney**. **Mr. Kodama** was the supervisor there, and it was owned by a Japanese, **Takemoto, Mr. Takemoto**. He had a sawmill in **Haney**, and a logging camp. And most of the people that was working there were from *Shiga-ken*. And **Mr. Kodama** was there, only his boy wanted to go and work, so he asked me to come, so I went and worked in the sawmill.

I: And what about your other brothers? Did they...

MI: No, they stayed home on the farm.

I: Did they also leave school in grade ten, or when, how long did they stay in school?

MI: I think they went to about grade ten, too, I'm quite sure.

I: Was that typical of the other Japanese children as well, or did they stay in school?

MI: No, no, some of them went on, finished school and they went to high school.

I: And when you were growing up, who were your friends, who did you hang around with, who were you close to?

MI: They were all Japanese, all Japanese, our neighbors.

I: So how would you have met them?

MI: At school. Well, they, we were neighbors, so we went to school together. Then I used to go to *judo* class, we took *judo*, and then we had some friends there.

I: And what else did you do for fun? What did kids do then, when they were, when you had free time?

MI: We used to, on Sundays we went to the Buddhist Church at Mission, and we used to play baseball on the street. And then at school we played soccer and lacrosse.

I: What about winter sports like skating or toboggan?

MI: No, there was nothing like that, not in Mission, no.

I: What about in the summer? Swimming, fishing?

MI: No, one time I, we went swimming with **Mr. Tsuji**, who is now **Reverend Tsuji**, he took us swimming in a small creek not far from our house. And I nearly drowned, and he jumped in there and got me out.

I: Because you didn't know how to swim, right?

MI: No. [Laughs]

I: Did you have any hobbies?

MI: No, in those days, all we did was play baseball. Oh, we used to play a lot of marbles, we used to have marbles in those days. That's about all. Too busy farming.

I: Did you get a sense that your family was doing well on the farm, or was it difficult?

MI: No, we didn't think about that at all. Our farm had an apple orchard, and we had a lot of fruits. We had cherries, apples, pears, and I think we were about the only Japanese farmer that had an apple orchard.

I: Now, you said earlier that you did have a sister, but she died.

MI: She died right after our mother died. Our mother died leaving four boys, and then had a baby, and she died one, about one month after. It was breast cancer.

I: Oh, your, your mother died of breast cancer?

MI: Uh-huh.

I: And then the daughter...

MI: Died.

I: ...died after that.

MI: Right after that.

I: Yeah. What did she, what did your sister die of?

MI: I don't know, I really don't know. 'Cause I think in those days, they never had no powdered milk or anything like that, so I really don't know.

I: And with your brothers, they didn't all stay in Mission, right? There was one brother, I believe, who left?

MI: Yes. The youngest brother, **Shigemi**, he was only about three years old. After our mother died, our mother's side of the family in Japan wanted someone to take over, because they never had no children, and needed someone to take over the family, so my father sent him back to Japan. I think one of the father's brothers took him back.

I: So he went over when he was three?

MI: Yeah, around three or four.

I: Did you ever maintain any contact with him over the years?

MI: No, I didn't, but maybe my father might have.

I: So you never really knew this brother?

MI: No, not really, no. 'Cause we never met 'til we went back in 1946. That was the first time we ever went back.

I: In 1946? So he would have been... well, he would have been an adult.

MI: He would be... well, I was born in '24. I went back in '46, would be about...

I: You would have been a teenager.

MI: Yeah.

I: Was that a common practice for Japanese families to do that?

MI: Yes, I think, it's a practice in Japan that if you don't have any children, you adopt somebody or someone to take over the family. Yeah, it does happen.

I: So when you met him, what was that like?

MI: Well, when we went back in 1946, one time he asked me why was he picked to come back. And I said, "I don't know," I didn't know, didn't know what to say.

I: Do you think he had a difficult time with that?

MI: I think he had a difficult time because he didn't know anybody, and I think, well, I think he spoke Japanese a little bit, but he wouldn't have any friends, anyway.

I: You said when your mother died, that would have been early on. The three of you boys left would have been quite young still, right?

MI: Yes.

I: When she passed away. How old would you have been?

MI: Well, I would have been about maybe five or six, and the other brother would be seven, and **Tsutao** would be about eight or nine.

I: So your father had to care for all of you by himself.

MI: Yes, 'cause he never married afterwards. So we grew up all by ourselves.

I: Did you, was that very difficult since you didn't have a mother?

MI: No, I didn't think... [Laughs]

I: And what about, as far as, did you go and visit or stay with other families at all for vacation, or did anyone come to stay with you? Was there any of that kind of exchange going on?

MI: Yes, in the wintertime, we used to go there just to visit our friends at... you know, stay for a few hours and come back. Because my father, they used to like, lot of people liked to drink *sake* so they get together and have a drink. And sometimes they used to come to our place and have a drink and talk. 'Cause that was the only thing to do. I mean, they didn't speak English so they couldn't go to downtown and go to a movie or anything like that. They just went from one house to another or to see their friends and just drink *sake*.



I: They didn't play cards or anything like that?

MI: Yes, at New Year's time they used to play Japanese, Japanese card, *gajo*.

I: And how did you feel about being Japanese and growing up in Canada? Did you think about it very much? About being Japanese?

MI: No, no, we didn't, no. 'Cause there were a lot of Japanese people in Mission anyway, so no, we didn't think about it, no.

I: Did you ever encounter any problem being Japanese? Any sort of racism?

MI: No. Only once when a *hakijin* boy called us "Jap," so we had a little fight, but that was about it.

I: Who won? [Laughs]

MI: And in those days, it was only, nobody carried knives or things like that. It was only wrestling or boxing. We knew *judo*, so we were very lucky.

I: Oh, you used your *judo*?

MI: We used to go to *judo*, we used to take *judo*. **Mr. Hajizume** was our teacher, and we used to go to *judo* class twice a week.

I: So that came in handy?

MI: Yes. [Laughs]

I: And what about religion? What religious background were your parents?

MI: Well, most of the people were Buddhist, so they built a church in Mission, a Buddhist Church. Everybody helped them build it, and **Mr. Miyagawa** was the minister. Well, he, he wasn't a real minister, but he took over as the minister in Mission. And we went to Sunday school every Sunday. I think we just went to, because after the Sunday school, we used to play baseball. **Mr. Tsuji** used to take us out and play baseball, and they used to give us a chocolate for coming. [Laughs]

I: Do you practice any religion today?

MI: Yes, I go to Buddhist Church sometimes. Not like we used to. In Mission, we used to go every Sunday.

I: And you were saying that after you left school, you went to work in the sawmills, right?

MI: Yes, I was, 1938 I went to **Haney** and worked in a sawmill, sawmill owned by **Mr. Takemoto**. I worked one year, and then came back to Mission. And then in 1939, there was an Englishman that built a new sawmill near **Hope**, in a small town called **Spasom**. And he came to Mission and wanted people to work in the sawmill. So **Mr. Tsuji** and **Mr. Inouye** wanted to go, and they came and asked me because I spoke English, and they never spoke English, so they needed someone that spoke English to go with them. So I says, "Okay, I'll go." So three of us went to **Spasom** and worked in the sawmill.

I: Was your father okay with that?

MI: Yes, he was okay.

I: What were the conditions like working in a sawmill?

MI: Very good. Yeah...

I: What kind of hours did you work?

MI: Eight hours. It was eight hours a day, and you only could work in the wintertime, 'cause when the summer comes, you can't get up the mountain because it would be so muddy and the ground would be so soft, the trucks wouldn't go up at all. So we worked there one year, and then in the spring we couldn't work, so they closed the sawmill for the summer.

I: Were you treated well?

MI: Yes, we were treated very good. We had to cook our own meals, and yes, we were treated very good.

I: So where did you live when you were working there? Did you live with other people?

MI: No, the sawmill had cabins for some of the employees, and we had our own cabin where we slept and cooked our own meals, three of us. Most of the people that worked there were all *hakujin* people, and they had a kitchen, too, and there were Chinese people working there in the kitchen, but we cooked our own meal.

I: Were you paid well? Do you remember what you were paid?

MI: No, I really don't know how much we were paid, but I guess it was all right.

I: Now, I want to talk a little bit about the war, when the war came. What happened to the family then?

MI: Well, in 1940 when, that's when the war started, and in the spring, the mill, the sawmill closed for the summer, so I couldn't go back to my home in Mission because they were all evacuated to **Picshabilt**, Alberta, because of the war started, and they were all sent one hundred miles outside of Vancouver.

I: So you mean your father and the two other brothers?

MI: They went first.

I: They went first?

MI: So I couldn't go to Mission, so I decided, I had to go to Alberta. So I went to Alberta in 1941, and it was a sugar-beets farm in Alberta, and you have to work on the sugar beets, doing sugar beets.

I: Who ran this farm?

MI: It was owned by *hakujin* people, and in the wintertime, we went up to Rocky Mountain, I was, worked in the logging camp in the wintertime, and then come back in the spring and then work on the sugar beets farm all summer. Then in the wintertime, we go to the, up the mountain for logging.

I: And what was it like working on this farm?

MI: It's just, it's hard labor. It's pretty... it's not easy.

I: How many hours a day?

MI: From sunup to sundown.

I: Did you get any breaks?

MI: Yeah, for lunch, well, you worked. There were a lot of sugar beets, two hundred acres there. And in the spring, you have to do, get rid of the weeds and then get ready to get to the fall, when it gets time to dig it up, the machine would dig it up and then you cut the head off and throw that in a pile.

I: How many other people like yourselves were on this farm? Other Japanese people?

MI: On this farm we were the only family, and there were other Japanese families, but they were working for other people. Every farmer had one Japanese family working for them.

I: How were you treated by them?

MI: Very good, we were treated very good. And they built a Buddhist church there, so every Sunday we went to Buddhist Church, or on days you don't work, we went to church just to talk to other people. **Reverend Kawamura** was the minister then. He was our friend, so we used to go there all the time.

I: How did you feel when you were told you had to go there?

MI: We didn't think anything of it.

I: What about with your property in Mission? What happened to that?

MI: The property in Mission was sold to a man that used to work for us when we were running the farm. He was an ex-veteran, and he bought it. 'Cause most of the farms were sold to ex-servicemen who were, they had the first priority, I think.

I: Do you know how much it was sold for?

MI: No, I don't know. No.

I: Do you know what's happened to that land today?

MI: We went back there when Mission had a reunion. It's all built up, it's all townhouses; there's no more farming. 'Cause after the Japanese left Mission, nobody grew any strawberries at all.

I: How much do you think it'd be worth today?

MI: Should be, we had thirty-five acres, so it should be worth over a million, anyway.

I: What about your dad? Did he ever say anything about losing the farm and having to go work on the sugar beet farm?

MI: No, they didn't say anything, really.

I: So how long were you there?

MI: You mean...

I: On the sugar beet farm.

MI: Five years. And the war ended, and the Canadian government said, "You can't go back to Mission or B.C. You'll either go to, east to Ontario, or we'll give you a free boat ride back to Japan. So my father wanted to go back to Japan to see the son that was living in Japan, 'cause he hadn't been back for a long time. So he took the offer of going back to Japan. And there were quite a few other people that took the offer to go back to Japan.

I: And did you go, too?

MI: And we all went.

I: You all went?

MI: Yeah. That way we could all stick together, so we all went back. That was in 1946.

I: So that was right after the war.

MI: Yes.

I: What was it like? What was Japan like at that time?

MI: Well, when we went to Shiga-ken where my parents came from, when we got off the boat, we got on the train. The train was just packed with people returning from overseas and prisoner of war coming back, and we got off at Maibara, and my father's brother came to meet us. And as we were walking back to his farm, he said, "Why did you come back to this place? Because it's awful; there's nothing to eat."

I: Did you find that the case? Was there, was it difficult to, to find food?

MI: Well, the farmers were all right, because they grew their own rice and vegetables. But people that lived in the city, I think they really had a hard time.

I: What were the stores like in the city?

MI: Well, they, there wasn't too much food, because we used to see people going on the train to buy vines and things that, potato vines, and they were eating anything they could find. And there was a man near the railway station, he came back from Vancouver and opened up a sawmill, and he gave me a job working in the sawmill. So I worked there for about one month.

I: For a month, and then what else did you do?

MI: Then one day, I was at the railway station in Maibara, and the train came by, and there were soldiers on the train. And went up to speak to him, and they said, "Oh, you speak English?" I says, "Yeah, came back from Canada, and I'm looking for a job." "Oh," he says, "come down to Hiroshima." He says, "They're looking for people who speak Japanese and English." So I went home and got my suitcase, and got on the train going towards Hiroshima, 'cause in Japan, the railway ran from north-south, so even if I didn't know where Hiroshima was, I knew it was south of Maibara, so I got on the train with a suitcase and stood by the door all the way down to Hiroshima. Took about twenty-four hours.

I: You stood by the door for twenty-four hours?

MI: Because the train was packed with soldiers with knapsacks and if you get in, you couldn't get out. People were jumping out of windows when they come to the next station, they would, people in the middle of the train would go out from the window because it was so packed. So I stood all the way. And in Japan, the conductor

always says, "Next station is," this and that, so when he said, "Next station is Hiroshima," I was ready to jump out.

I: But you used the door?

MI: Yeah.

I: And then what happened when you got to Hiroshima?

MI: When I got to Hiroshima... in Japan, there's a police station right beside the railway station. There's always a police station and a policeman there. So I went to the police box and asked him, "Where do I find the British Army?" He says, "You get on that train, and go to Kure, Kaitaichi. Kaitaichi, and then there's a camp there. You might get a job there." So I got on the train going to Kure, and when it came to Kaitaichi, I just got off and went to the police box right by the station and asked him, "Where is the camp?" And he says, "It's over there," so I went over there, and there was a security guard, a soldier at the gate, and he says, "What can I do for you?" Says, "I want to, I'm looking for a job." So he called the man who was in charge of labor, and he came out to see me, and he says, "You speak English?" Says, "Yeah." "Where'd you come from?" I said, "Canada." "Where?" "Mission." And he looked at me and he says, "Mission, that's where I come from." And I told him, "My name is Ito," and he knew who we were. And he gave me a job.

I: What kind of job was it?

MI: Interpreter. We'd translate Japanese into English. But I don't know, I spoke some Japanese so I was able to translate Japanese into English.

I: It wasn't too difficult for you to do that?

MI: No. I couldn't write or anything or read, but speaking was all right. But there was a Japanese man there that graduated from Tokyo University. He was very good translating from Japanese to English, English to Japanese, but his speaking was, wasn't very good at all. So I had him do the translation, I'd do the speaking.

I: That sounds like a good job. Was that a good job?

MI: It was really good. It was really good. It was the military police, and we went out every day with two soldiers, and went into Hiroshima looked around to see if there's any trouble or anything like that. We just went from Hiroshima up to Okayama, Fukuyama, just to make sure that there's no trouble. Police work.

I: Yeah. So, were you the only one who did this? What happened to your other brothers? They didn't join you?

MI: They came afterwards and they got a job with the British Army, but it was in another small town next to Kaitaichi. They all worked for the British.

I: So you traveled around a bit in this job?

MI: I did, yes.

I: So what, what sense did you get with postwar Japan and the occupation and the U.S. there? What was it like to have the U.S. there now?

MI: Well, in those days, Hiroshima was really flat, there was nothing there. You could smell the burnt-out houses, there was nothing standing at all. Now it's really, you'd never know that it was bombed.

I: What about as far as military presence? Was that obvious all the time everywhere you went, or what sense did you get about the military?

MI: They were there ten years, and well, when the Korean War started, the Canadian army came, and they, Kure was used as a base for the Korean War. So they used to go to Korea and then come back to Kure for a holiday, and then go back. And when the Korean War ended, they were there for a little while and they closed the camp. After ten years there they closed the camp and they all went home. But the Americans are still there, and not far from Hiroshima, Iwakuni, the air force is still there. And they offered me a job there, but I decided I'd go back to Canada. I thought it might be better if I went back to Canada.

I: Why did you think Canada would be better?

MI: I guess I just wanted to... well, Japan is all right, but I think if you're gonna work for somebody, I think Canada is better.

I: How long did you end up working for the military, translating?



MI: I was there ten years.

I: Ten years?

MI: Ten years.

I: Was it during that time, then, that you met your wife?

MI: Yes. About two years, be about 19-, I went to Japan in '46, so it would be about 1950.

I: How did you meet your wife?

MI: I was introduced by an American *Nisei* that lived next door.

I: Was he considered the go-between?

MI: Yes -- [laughs] -- I would say that, yeah.

I: And what is her name?

MI: **Yoshimi.**

I: And how long was it that you knew her before you got married?

MI: About two years, I think, and then decided to get married.

I: What kind of wedding ceremony did you have?

MI: It was a Buddhist/Shinto wedding. My wife would dress up in Japanese-style kimono, and I'd wear a suit. It was a small wedding.

I: Is there a dinner or anything?

MI: What's that?

I: Is there a dinner, or...?

MI: Yeah, it's afterwards we had dinner, yes.

I: Is there a honeymoon?

MI: No, I don't think we went on a honeymoon, no. No, went back to work.

I: You went back to work? [Laughs] So, so what happened then after that? You got married, you continued to work for the military.

MI: Yes, and then **Dick** was born.

I: Your first son.

MI: First son, was 1951, I think. And then we, I worked for the army 'til 1956, and I decided to come back to Canada. So I got my citizenship and booked on a boat to come back to Canada.

I: Just you?

MI: Just myself first, 'cause I had a cousin in Toronto, **Mr. Chuzaburo Ito**, so I came to Toronto.

I: How long did the boat trip take?

MI: The boat took about three weeks. We went to Hawaii, stayed a day there, and we got off and looked around the city, then we went to Seattle and to Vancouver. Then a friend in Vancouver met us, and then I got on the train and came to Toronto. I landed at Union Station, and in those days, you were only allowed to take one hundred dollar Canadian money out of Japan, and it was three-hundred sixty *yen* to one dollar. But they wouldn't let you take any more than one hundred dollar. So when I landed at Union Station, I told my cousin I was coming from Vancouver, that I was coming, so he met me and took me to his eldest son, Dufferin and St. Clair, so I stayed with my cousin.

I: But you could bring Japanese money over, right?

MI: No, you couldn't bring any money over.

I: Oh, you could only just, what equaled one hundred Canadian dollars? That's it?

MI: Yeah, that's it.

I: So all the money that you had made stayed in Japan?

MI: Stayed in Japan. 'Cause I tried to change some Japanese *yen* into Canadian money. There was a man in Hikone that I was told might have Canadian money. I went to see him but he wouldn't change it for me.

I: So what did you do after that? You were in Toronto.

MI: I came to Toronto and stayed, went to see my cousin, and then I, I needed a job because I have to bring my wife and boy over. So I went to Toronto Buddhist Church, because I knew **Reverend Tsuji** was the minister there, and when I went there, he was surprised to see me. He says, "When did you come here?" And I says, "I just arrived yesterday." And he was glad to see me, I said, "I'm looking for a job." So he got on the phone and phoned **Mr. Takahashi**, and he said, "Yeah, we'll give you a job. Come on over." So it was near, it was a place called Caledonia, not far from Dufferin and St. Clair. So I went there and he gave me a job delivering things from, it was a chrome plating company. It was a small van and I was going down Dufferin Street delivering things, and I got caught by police, there was a policeman at the bottom of the hill there, and he pulled me over and asked me for my driver's license. Well, I never had a driver's license because in Japan when I was working for the army, I didn't need a driver's license at all, but I was able to drive.

I: Yeah. Were you speeding, is that why he stopped you?

MI: No, he just wanted to know if, well, it was a downhill, so maybe I was going a little too fast, and he pulled me over. I says, "No, I haven't got no license, not yet." I said, "I'm going for one." "Well, you better walk home." So I walked home from there, and I told **Mr. Takahashi** that I got caught. "Oh, don't worry," he says, "we're friends of the chief." So he went and got the...

I: The car?

MI: ...car and brought it home.

[Interruption]

I: So when you came to Toronto and you were looking for a job, what did you think of Toronto at that time, of the city?

MI: Yeah, it's, it was very... it was quiet there in those days, very nice. So I didn't worry too much about anything.

I: Did you think, like, oh, "This could be my home. This is a nice place, I could live here"?

MI: Yeah, uh-huh. I thought it was all right. People were very friendly.

I: Did you feel you were treated well by other people?

MI: Well, it was only one month yet, so I didn't meet too many people, only my cousin and **Reverend Tsuji**, so I really didn't come in contact with too many Canadians yet.

I: What about in the months that followed, this being after the war now. Did you experience any kind of bad feelings or animosity from other Canadians?

MI: Worked for this company for one month, and then they went on a summer holiday. It was July. They said they're gonna take one month's holiday. So I only worked one month and I said I couldn't wait for another month because I had a wife and child in Japan. So I looked in the newspaper and there was a job for a chauffeur's job near Avenue Road and St. Clair. So I asked **Reverend Tsuji** what he thought about it and he said, well, it was worth trying. So I answered the ad and I went to see Mr. Hyland at Avenue Road and St. Clair. And he said he had another Japanese man at, would want the job, too, but, "If you want the job," I told him what I was doing, working for the army, he says, "You could have it." I never had a driver's license yet, so I went for driver's test. I failed one time, but I passed the second time. And then he gave me the job as a chauffeur. And he said he has a house on Heath Street, that was near Heath and, St. Clair and Yonge. So he brought, he took me over to the house and he said, "You could live here and be my chauffeur." I thought that was good because then I could bring my wife over.

I: What did your wife think about your coming to Canada and then she would have to come with her son, what did she think about that?

MI: Well, my wife's brothers and sisters told her, "Why don't you open up a store in Osaka?" A small store selling baked Japanese cakes, and she thought about it, but I decided to come back to Canada. I think I wanted to come back because I was thinking about the best way of getting back to Canada might be by joining the Canadian army, because some of the *Niseis* that was Canadian *Niseis* that were living in Japan joined the Canadian army and then came back to Canada. Well, I was thinking about that, but I came back on my own.

I: Was she okay with coming here?

MI: Yeah, she didn't mind.

I: So you started working as a chauffeur then?

MI: Right, started working for Mr. Hyland as a chauffeur, and I got my driver's license.

I: Good thing.

MI: And I had a house to live in. And one day I was taking Mr., Ms. Hyland to **Archibald**, and up by **Hog's Hollow** I went through a red light and I hit a car. Got, Ms. Hyland said, "Oh, don't worry." She got out and talked to the driver of the other car and told her that the insurance would look after it and she said it was okay and everything was all right. We never had to call the police or anything. We just took off to **Archibald**.

I: How did they, how did they treat you when you worked for them?

MI: Mr. Hyland and Ms. Hyland were brother and sister. They were Irish people, Irish Protestant, and they treated me very good. Very good, got, Forest Hill around 1950, they still wouldn't allow Orientals to live in Forest Hill, and it was, I was the only Oriental on Heath Street. There was no Chinese or Japanese, nobody. They were all Anglo-Saxons. One time, one night when I was going home, about nine o'clock from Mr. Hyland's going down Avenue Road, a man and a daughter were walking in opposite direction, and when she passed me, she spit on me. It made me mad but there were two of them and I was by myself, so I thought I better not do anything because two against one, I would lose anyway, even if I'm in the right. But it made me mad, but I kept going. It never happened any more after that.

I: You never had any, any problems or issues living here, on this street?

MI: No, the neighbors, never spoke to any neighbors at all, because they were, they all had their own, there were mostly lawyers living on this street, anyway, and they had their own summer cottage and they would go away on the weekends. So we didn't associate with the neighbors at all. There were a few that had children, and my boys used to play with them, but that was about all.

I: Now, you ended up having another son when you came to Toronto.

MI: And then my wife and **Dick** came over, and then **Arthur** was born here. 51 Heath Street, he was born here. So I have two boys.

I: And once you were settled in Toronto, did you associate much with other Japanese Canadians, or did you go to any centers?

MI: No, living on Heath Street, there were no Japanese families at all, so my boys played with a few Canadian boys that lived in the area, but I didn't associate with anybody. I only went to Buddhist Church once in a while. I was too busy working; I worked, about seven days a week I was working, 'til nine, ten o'clock at night. So I really had no time to go anywhere. Sometimes I used to go to church.

I: What about for the boys? Did you push them at all to learn Japanese, go to Japanese school or do cultural activities? Were they...

MI: No, I really didn't push them to do anything. They made friends and they played tennis and badminton. **Dick** and **Arthur**, they both went to Brown School, and they were the only Orientals there. Then high school they went to Jarvis. When they went to Jarvis, lot of the people, students there were Chinese, so they made some, Chinese friends were their friends, Chinese friends. And there was one Japanese boy that they made friends with, but I didn't... in the summertime, we used to go to the Cultural Centre picnic or Buddhist Church picnic, but that was about all. We were too busy working.

I: You're very involved now in the Japanese community.

MI: Yes, I go to Buddhist Church, I go to the Cultural Centre and other things that goes on.

I: What's changed for you over time? Why have you become more involved now?

MI: Because I think I have more time. More time, and being, living in Japan for ten years, I guess I like to keep up the Japanese customs and things like that, so I go to the Cultural Centre a lot and all the bazaars and anything that goes on at the Cultural Centre. Movies, we used to go all the time.

[Interruption]

I: What about other jobs? What kind of, what other jobs have you had?

MI: Well, after working as a chauffeur for fifteen years, Mr. Hyland passed away and his sister passed away, so I had no job. And the Royal Bank built a new building at **Bay and Front**, and they had an ad in the newspaper looking for employees to work down there, so I applied for a job as a security guard. And when I went down to see the man in charge of employment, he was an ex-serviceman. When I told him that I was ten years with the British army, he gave me the job right away as a security officer at the Royal Bank South Tower desk. And the bank at that time, they just finished building the new tower, and they needed tenants to rent the floors. So they had me sitting at the desk. Japanese firms were just starting to come into Toronto, and Bank of Tokyo, a man from Bank of Tokyo came in, he took an office there, Mitsui, Fuji Bank, Long-Term Credit Bank of Japan, Sanyo Securities, there was about seven or eight Japanese coming, they all moved into the Royal Bank. Bank thought if I was there, it would be good for the bank, so I worked there for, 'til I retired at sixty-five.

I: Did you like that job?

MI: It was very good. Met a lot of important people; I met the former prime minister John Turner, and Mr. **Steve Roman**, chairman of **Dennison Mines**. I became friends with a lot of people there at the Royal Bank. It was really good.

I: Which job would you say, over all the jobs you had in your life, did you like the best?

MI: I think the, the chauffeuring job was really good because Mr. Hyland, we used to go to the racetrack every day in the summertime, 'cause we knew **Mr. E.P. Taylor** and everybody, we used to get a free pass to the races. And we had a good time, and Mr. Hyland, well, he played the stock market, and we used to drive downtown and visit all the stockbrokers, went around. It was very interesting. Met a lot of important people.

I: What kind of Rolls Royce did he have?

MI: I was driving a Rolls Royce.

I: Yeah.

MI: It was very nice, it was built for the queen when the queen came to Canada and they didn't use it, so the dealer wanted to get rid of it, so Mr. Hyland said, "I'll buy it," and he bought it. And it was nice.

I: He let you use it as well.

MI: Yes, on Sundays we used to take it to church or we used to take it to the church picnic, and when he wasn't using it, I was able to. Because my wife was using, doing sewing, and I used to go down to Spadina and pick up clothes to bring home, and then sew at home, and take it back. And the Jewish man that ran the **New Mode**, every time I'd come with the Rolls Royce, he was surprised to see me. [Laughs]

I: Didn't your neighbors find it odd that you would have this Rolls Royce and you're driving all the time in it? [Laughs]

MI: Yeah, lot of people, they were really surprised.

I: And what, what about your children? What happened to them as they grew up? What occupations did they choose?

MI: What's that?

I: What kind of jobs did they end up doing, your two sons, **Dick** and **Arthur**?

MI: Well, **Arthur** went to, **Arthur** and **Dick**, they both went to University of Toronto, and **Dick** went into dentistry, and **Arthur**, he tried but he got into pharmacy. And **Dick** had his own practice for a while, and **Arthur** joined, I think it was called **Boots**. No, first it was **Tamlin's Drug Store**, and there was a man named **Takahashi** there, and he was offered a job as a druggist. And then it came **Boots**, and then after that, it was **Farmer Plus**. And **Arthur**, he did very good.

I: And **Arthur** was born when?

MI: **Arthur** was born in, on Heath Street, so it would be about... came here in '57. Be about 1961.



I: '59. 1959, I think.

MI: '59.

I: Yeah, I think it was 1959. And would you say, because your sons grew up in a pretty much... well, it's a "white" area, they didn't really associate with too many Japanese.

MI: No, because --

I: Are they interested in the Japanese culture?

MI: No, they didn't go to Japanese Cultural Centre at all. No, living on Heath Street, never came in contact with any Japanese at all. Just some Canadians, there weren't too many children on Heath Street, and I was too busy working, so I never, only time we went was either picnic or we used to go to Japanese movies sometimes, that was about it.

I: And your wife, she eventually passed away?

MI: Yes, she passed away about seventeen years ago, now. She was fifty-nine, I think, when she passed away. Well, my wife says the two boys should have an education, and I thought they should because I never had a chance to go to school anyway, so, because in those days, when we grew up, we weren't allowed to go to university in B.C. anyway. If you wanted to go to the university they went back to Japan or they came east, or they went to United States. You weren't allowed to go to university in B.C.

I: Are you happy with the way things have turned out for your boys?

MI: Yes, I think I've been very lucky through my life. I think, yes, I think it turned out very good.

I: Do you ever regret that you didn't stay in Japan?

MI: No, I think I made a good decision when I came back here, yes. 'Cause Japan is nice to go for a visit, to go for a holiday or see things, but if you're gonna work, I think you'll be better in Canada. And I think our living condition -- things are much easier to live, the food, the rent is much more reasonable than in Japan.

I: How did you feel about the whole redress movement, the fact that your family lost that property in Mission?

MI: Well, I didn't think too much about it. I didn't worry about it because if we'd stayed on the farm, I guess we'd be, still been strawberry farmers. So I've been pretty lucky, that's right.

I: What did you think about the compensation that you received for that?

MI: It wasn't very much, for the property we had. But if that's all they want to give us, well, you can't do anything about it.

I: How much did you get?

MI: Twenty-thousand dollars. Twenty-thousand dollars.

I: And what about today? What kind of activities are you doing today?

MI: Today I'm still working, I still work for the Nelson Arthur Hyland Foundation, and I go to work every day. We go to movies and go to the Cultural Centre, the Buddhist Church.

I: Now you're, now, you're on the board of directors, right, of the Nelson Hyland Foundation?

MI: Yes, I'm the secretary of the Nelson Arthur Hyland Foundation.

I: And what do they do?

MI: They give, well, when Mr. Hyland died, because he was a bachelor, he never had no children, so he was advised to form a foundation because he made a lot of money on the stock market, so if he died, the government would have taken everything, having no children. So he formed a foundation he called the Nelson Arthur Hyland Foundation and with that, we give money to charity.

I: How do you feel about the work that you do there?

MI: It's very nice, 'cause I'm the only one in the office right now, because **Mr. Hayden**, the president, is not feeling very good, and I look after the office and I'm on the board of the **Sowden Foundation**, director of the **Sowden Foundation**, and also with the **T. Donald Miller Foundation**. The **Sowden Foundation** is **Mr. Hayden's** father. When he passed away he had a foundation to give to charity, and **T. Donald Miller**

**Foundation** is a man that was in the paving business and he paved all the 401 Highway, did all the paving and made his money paving roads, and he left a foundation. So I'm on the board of those, too, with **Mr. Hayden**, two of us. And we give to charity. We give to the Buddhist Church, Japanese Cultural Centre, Japanese Family Service, **Momiji**, and various other organizations.

I: What do you think -- looking back -- what would you say has been your most important accomplishment? What would you say you're most proud of?

MI: Hmm... I guess working on the foundation and giving charitable donation to different organization. I mean, looking after handicapped people, sick people, we give donation to various organizations.

I: You're eighty now, right?

MI: I'll be eighty-one come August, and I still go to work.

I: What would you still like to do?

MI: What's that?

I: What would you still like to do?

MI: Well, I think I'd still like to carry on what I'm doing, help other people. We go to various charitable function that's on in Toronto. Carry on as long as I can. I'm partially blind, but I still can get around.

[Interruption]

I: Just, and one last question, what are your feelings about being Japanese Canadian after everything you've been through now in Canada and in Japan? How do you feel about being a Japanese Canadian today?

MI: Well, I think Japanese Canadian is good for Japanese companies that want to come into Canada to sell their goods. They're lucky to have Japanese Canadians as a go-between, that would introduce them to different Canadian companies: government, big business people. I think if they work together, I think, it would help both Japan and Canada.

I: What do you think that the Japanese population in Canada, what have they added to this country? What difference have Japanese people made here in Canada?

MI: Well, I think Japanese, they're well-educated, and I think they do a lot of good things for Japan, or introduce Japanese customs and things like that, and then the Canadians would learn about Japan. I think it's really good for Japanese Canadians. I think that's about it.