

Interviewee: Tom Takashima
Interviewer: Peter Wakayama
Present: Sumie Takashima [Interviewee's wife],
Christine Okawara [Interviewee's niece]
Date: October 21, 2007
Location: Toronto, Ontario
Accession Number: 2010.011



THE JAPANESE CANADIAN LEGACY PROJECT

[Start]

Peter Wakayama: Okay this is an interview with Tom Takashima on October the 21st, 2007.

Tom, could you tell me when and where you were born?

Tom Takashima: Yes, um, December the 12th, 1922 in Vancouver.

PW: And could you tell us about your parents, where they came from and when they came to Canada?

TT: Yeah, well, my father came to Canada in 1908. After he finished high school, him and his cousin went to Singapore first looking for a job and it was so hot and humid [chuckles] he couldn't stand it, so he came back to Japan and then he wanted to go to the United States but the United States was closed well, or, not just closed but like there was a restriction in 1907. Because his older brother was in the United States so that's why he came to Vancouver-

PW: And where did he come from?

TT: Fukuoka.

PW: Oh, he's a Fukuoka person.

Sumi Takashima: [chuckles] That's why we're at the Fukuoka Kenjin-kai, you see.

PW: And where in Fukuoka?

TT: Oh I-

PW: What was his town?

TT: Shida-machi.

PW: You're from Shida-machi? Is your parents too?

ST: That's right [chuckles]-

PW: Really?

ST: My parents are from Shida-machi.

TT: Well, you know, but a lot of them are from that area.

PW: Yeah, yeah.

TT: Because somebody came, eh? And so they-

Christine Okawara: Called or sponsored-

TT: Their friends all followed, see, and when he came, he was still a teenager, you see, my father was- So he was working as a houseboy and he learned- He was doing- making- doing the breakfast and that in the beginning and learned a little bit about cooking. So then he went to Kelowna, somewhere around that area, and he was working for a family as a cook and then from that- Besides he learned how to read and write English, you see, and when he was in Vancouver, so he was able to read the newspapers and he found a job in Regina in

a hotel. So he went to just outside of Regina, somewhere in Regina and he was a chef there and then he was there for- And imagine he got engaged to a non-Japanese woman working at the hotel. [chuckles]

CO: Yeah, Ukranian, he said.

TT: Yeah, and then- But she couldn't understand his jokes and so forth, and so they split up. And he was getting older, he was almost thirty, so he better go to Japan and pick up a wife. So he came back to Vancouver and he went to see Mr. Arikado [?], Mr. Arikado [?] said oh, you don't have to go to Japan, we have a girl for you, because my grandmother had asked Mr. Arikado [?] to look for somebody so he- So that's how they got together and at that time my Dad was- He was 30 years old and he never drank or smoked, you see. And he got married and then the first child was born, this was in Vancouver. And when the child was a baby, he started a butcher shop and his son, elder son, Jimmy got diphtheria and they got quarantined, so they were living behind the store, so they went bankrupt, it was closed up. And then after that, between five years, they had five children. Can you imagine? Five children and-

[5 minutes]

CO: What number are you in the family?

[unknown speaker]: He's number three.

CO: Three?

TT: Yeah, and then after Jimmy, Len was born and that's in '21. In '22 I was born, '23 Joe was born, and '25 Mary was born and '28 Shichan [Shizuye Takashima] was born.

PW: So, she was the youngest of the-

TT: Yeah, yeah. [nods head]

PW: Of the- of your siblings?

TT: And-

[background speech, unclear speaker]: [unclear speech] was already 40.

TT: They had a hard time because of her in Vancouver when mum had her first child, four of us kids all went to hospital because mother was buying a milk from the farmer and it wasn't pasteurized so we all got sick. So, this was in- when we were in New Westminster- Oh, no, because with the fifth child born, they were living in New Westminster. But grandmother had a store in New Westminster, so I guess she was partly helping out, I guess, you know. So, my dad was taking the train to work in Vancouver and he was working in Vancouver all the time in a restaurant, as a cook.

PW: How old was your dad when he first came? You said he was a teenager, do you know how old he was?

TT: 18.

PW: 18.

TT: Well, he just finished high school-

PW: Oh yes, that's right.

TT: And this was just after the Russian War, you see, in Japan, so there was no work, nothing to- The country was deep in debt, you know, so that's why his oldest brother was in the States, you see 'cause his- The parents- father was the mayor of that Shida-machi, yeah so, you know, they're not- they weren't poor, you know.

PW: No, right.

TT: Yeah.

PW: What about your mother, where was she from?

TT: My mother was from Fukuoka too. But grandmother was already in, at that time I guess she was in Vancouver- New Westminster, I guess.

PW: So then-

TT: Grandmother came to Canada with the eldest son in 19- no 18- 18- 1899 or something, '98.

PW: And in which part of Vancouver did you live?

TT: We lived in eastern part of Vancouver. They called it "Heaps", that section of the town they called "Heaps" that's the Japanese would call it "Heaps" because there must have been a sawmill somewhere close to that, so they called that area "Heaps" so-

PW: Heaps?

TT: Yeah, Heaps.

CO [?]: H-e-a-p-s?

TT: Yeah, something like that.

CO [?]: Of course, it was probably never written out. [background laughter]

TT: Yeah, a lot of young people don't know but older people would know that what area that is.

PW: Right.

TT: Because it's not far east, you know.

PP: Right.

TT: And it's not downtown Powell Street, you see.

PW: Okay, alright.

TT: It's in between, you see, because there was a sawmill there, there was a lot of Japanese used to live there, it was easy to identify.

PW: How was life in- at that time period? How did you find, sort of, growing up in Vancouver?

TT: Well, really- When we were in Vancouver at that time, I don't know what- My dad was sort of- Oh yeah, he worked at the pulp mill, eh? Up the coast for a while too, and he was sort of a millwright.

[10 minutes]

PW: With- So you went to school in Vancouver?

TT: No, see we lived in downtown Vancouver and the cooking wasn't good for my dad. He was getting ulcer because he was always tasting and so forth that he's not eating a regular

meal, so he started to get into gardening, and when I was in kindergarten, we moved to Kitsilano.

ST: When did you go to West Vancouver?

TT: Kitsilano.

CO [?]: Oh, that Kernel something or something in West Vancouver yeah, there's a picture of it.

TT: And then we moved to Kitsilano, my dad had to do gardening and then in '20 [sic; Shizuye Takashima was born in 1928] Shichan was born, eh? And she was only three pounds. Yeah, the doctors said she was not going to survive and without the incubator or anything and things- Luckily, that summer in June was real warm June, so that was a plus, and went to all the neighbours to get hot water bottles [chuckles] and she survived, yeah. Yeah they said she wouldn't survive.

PW: And-

TT: It was in '28, eh.

PW: So, she was small but was there physical disability, was the family aware of it at that time?

TT: No, no, not at that time. This was in '28, okay.

PW: Yes.

TT: And then after- When she was born and then the house was too small, so my dad borrowed some money and we bought a house on First Avenue. 1800 block, First Avenue, 1888 First Avenue. And then my dad was gardening and then- With the gardening he was working for General Aulub [?], a real General, Aulub [?] and he had a big estate in West Vancouver, west of Horseshoe Bay, so they asked the whole family to move there, to you know, to develop the place 'cause it was a fair sized estate and they had a nine hole golf course, something like this and a huge area. They had a big orchard and yard and Holy God! And of course he was a wealthy man because he was in insurance or something.

PW: Oh yeah.

TT: But- And I- Yeah when I got there, I started to go to school. So, I used to travel nine miles. We walked a mile to catch the bus where the bus would stop and nine miles to the city of West Vancouver to go to school. And then 1929, Depression came, bang! Dad lost his job so we moved back to Vancouver and finished my schooling see and went- But when we got back to Vancouver, this was late '29 or '30, early '30, I guess, Shichan started to walk, that's right, and she would waddle away, see she couldn't- So they thought it was just a diaper but then when she got out of diapers, she would still- And then say something's wrong so they got it X-rayed and everything, her hip joints were dislocated, her whole hip joints were dislocated when she was born, she was so tiny.

[15 minutes]

So, she was too young to be operated, so they had to wait until she was a little older, about three and a half. She was in the hospital for six months, first on a stretcher to stretch her leg, one leg because the muscles contract, eh, and she had a big operation and come out for

six months and went back for another six months to do the other side. And so she had a long incision on both sides about six inches long, Jesus.

PW: So, she was in the hospital long time at a very young age.

TT: Yeah, at a young age.

PW: And how was she, 'cause she would have been about two or three years old right?

TT: Yes, she was three-

PW: How was her behaviour?

TT: Yeah, she was three years old-

PW: Three years old?

TT: Three, no when she first went in yeah, and three and a half she comes out and half a year she'll be out and she's back in again for another six months.

PW: Yeah.

TT: Yeah, amazing how she-

PW: Now what was she like, I mean do you remember? I mean did you go visit her and all that?

TT: No, no, no 'cause no kids, kids couldn't visit.

PW: Oh no, kids couldn't go in there?

TT: Kids couldn't visit-

PW: Really?

TT: And there was a panic at that time too because to get a blood transfusion you had to place it first to the bank before you get any. That's the way it was in those days. So dad would be phoning all these Issei friends and he had to take them 'cause they couldn't speak English. So to give blood- So he was on the phone all the time trying to get blood and-

PW: So, after her operation, what happened after that? After the second operation?

TT: Well, she came out and she started to walk yeah. She started to walk but she waddled, you know, but that was- You couldn't do anything, you know, because- And so she just limped away and walk but she was late in school, she was a year late in school.

PW: So, she went to school in the public school system in Vancouver?

TT: Yup.

PW: Yeah, and how did she do in school, do you remember?

TT: I don't really remember 'cause I was just a kid too, so-

PW: Yeah, right.

TT: So, it didn't bother me or anything but-

PW: Was she a cheerful girl-

TT: Well, I-

PW: Do you remember?

TT: One time, one time I did ask her what she did while she was in the hospital all day, you know, she was in an equipment room strapped to the bed to a stretcher, because otherwise you can't get the joints to end, so- But she said, "Oh, I used to daydream", she says. Yeah but, you know, in those days no radio or TV [television] [unclear speech] one yeah, four-year-old kid in a hospital like that for six months. It's amazing, but it didn't seem to bother her. She thought that was natural, I guess.

CO [?]: Probably good that she had a big imagination anyway.

PW: Right, okay so, so then she was going to school, you were going to school, you went to school too as well during that period?

TT: Oh yeah.

PW: Yeah.

TT: Oh yeah.

PW: Now then the war comes, and the government says okay you got to be interned-

TT: Yeah.

PW: Right, where did you go, where does the family go after the- When the war was started?

TT: Well, the thing is, before the war came a lot of niseis, a lot of niseis were going to university. So when the war broke out there's about fifty niseis were going to university at that time and I used to wonder why are they going to university? Because most of them, when they come out of university, they didn't have a job. All they're doing is cutting grass and things like this and I couldn't understand how- Why they were going to university. So with my case, I was after high school, I was going to a technical school for one year as a machine shop guy to pay for that, but whole day in the machine shop and with that trade I figured out I was going to come to Ontario, Toronto.

[20 minutes]

There's no way I was going to get a job in Vancouver, so I was going to come to Vancouver- I mean to Toronto, then the evacuation started so I was still going to school so I didn't have to report to the camp-

PW: Oh, okay.

TT: See, so then my dad was sent to the camp, and my older brother Jimmy and Joe- No Jimmy and Len- And Joe wasn't going to school then, he quit school early, so they were all sent to camp, different camps. And end of June came, they wouldn't let me go- to come to Toronto he says, he says you gotta go to- They said they advise me to go to a camp in Ontario and then see what you can do. So I came to a camp in Ontario in- oh what was the camp's name now? Jackfish camp? and I-

PW: So, then your family was split up?

TT: Yeah-

PW: And then it was then-

TT: And then when I left- And after I left, the family was sent to New Denver.

PW: So, then your father and mother-

TT: In New Denver-

PW: And Shichan-

TT: And my Dad, and my dad-

PW: Oh, your Dad had gone to the camp?

TT: Yeah well, he was able to go to New Denver-

PW: Oh okay, okay so he- your father and your mother and Shichan was in New Denver?

TT: Yeah, and Mary too.

PW: Oh Mary, right okay-

[unclear speaker]: My mum will go into New Denver stuff.

PW: Okay right, so then this period when Shichan was in New Denver, your mother Mary will fill in the New Denver period-

[CO ?]: Yeah, she-

PW: 'Cause Tom was in Toronto-

[CO ?]: She talks about it quite often-

PW: Oh okay, all right, so you were in Toronto, what kind- Did you get a job in Toronto?

TT: Oh yeah, I had a letter of recommendation from the principal of the technical school, so when I came into Toronto, Toronto was closed for any more immigrants. A lot of niseis that were in the camps went to the farm in Chatham area-

PW: Yes.

TT: And they decided to come into the cities like Hamilton when the season was over and in December- Well no, before December, from the camp, I got a job in Fort Williams to work on the mink farm with two of my brothers, Jimmy and Joe, no Jimmy and Len was at a camp too, so I got them together and we went to the mink farm. But for me, it was just an excuse to get out of the camp, 'cause when I was in a mink farm and then- This was in September-

PW: Where was the first camp, the Jackfish [sic] camp? Where was that located?

TT: It was near Schreiber.

PW: Oh Schreiber. Okay. [camera sounds] So after the- So then you went to the mink farm in Fort William?

TT: No, no, and- that's not Jackfish. It's- Put down Empress Camp.

PW: Empress Camp, okay.

TT: And see there was a series of camps that was during the Depression they had a work force to build the highway. That was part of the highways so-

[unclear speaker]: So sorry, this Empress camp was the first camp?

TT: No, it was from Schreiber, there was- What was the first camp I said?

PW: Jackfisher [sic].

TT: Jackfish.

PW: Yeah, Jackfish yeah.

TT: No, no, Jackfish was the other end. There was Schreiber and there was another camp- Can't remember, and then Empress camp and then Jackfish camp yeah. [there's four ?]-

PW: Okay and these were road camps-

TT: They were road camps-

PW: To build the highway way up north?

TT: Yeah, because buildings were there, woodsheds, they were all built like, , all along those three places and that's where they were working.

[25 minutes]

TT: And this was part of the highway they were building and so the buildings were right there, so they said I need a place to go-

PW: Right so you came to those camps, to do the road work.

TT: Yeah, yeah.

PW: So then after the mink farm, how long were you there at this mink farm?

TT: I was there from September to early December, and I sneaked out of there 'cause you had to report to the Mounties because you could not just travel-

PW: Right.

TT: But I sneaked out of there and came into Toronto and they gave me hell and all this problem, but I told them, I told them, why am I wasting my time with my trade when there is a war going on-

PW: Yeah.

[CO ?]: Oh, good one. [chuckles]

TT: Yeah, with the war going on, I'm wasting my trade, this is ridiculous, so Trueman, [BC Securities Commission placement officer in Toronto, Ernest Trueman] I convinced Truman. Yeah and he saw my letter of recommendation too. So it's a good recommendation, so he phoned this company. So from there I found a streetcar and got up there. I had to get directions how to get up there, but finally I got up there and I showed them my letter of recommendation and everything. Bingo, I got the job right there.

PW: So, then you were working in a machine-

TT: Machine shop, yeah.

PW: Machine shop.

PW: When did Shichan and your mum and dad and Mary come to Toronto?

[CO?]: Hamilton, actually.

PW: They're Hamilton?

[CO?]: Yeah.

TT: Yeah, Mary and Shichan was in Hamilton.

PW: Okay.

TT: They came to Hamilton and working at a golf course.

[CO?]: Ancaster golf course.

TT: Huh?

[CO?]: Ancaster golf course.

TT: Yeah, Ancaster golf course. Just cleaning up and all this-

PW: Yep.

TT: And Shichan was going to school.

PW: And what about your mum and dad?

TT: They were still in New Denver there.

PW: Oh, so the two girls came as-

TT: Oh no, wait a minute no-

[ST ?]: No, no, they went to Oakville.

PW: Oh.

TT: They went to Oakville to a farm.

PW: Okay, okay.

TT: Not a farm the family- 'Cause my dad was a cook and a gardener-

PW: Oh yeah right.

TT: So, they went to that Oakville- what the heck was that?

PW: So, did you sponsor them or were- Did they come on their own sort of thing, how did that work? Sometimes they have somebody who was here first who would help-

TT: No, no, no, no I didn't-

PW: You didn't do anything in that way-

TT: No.

PW: Okay.

TT: But then I was sending money for Shichan to go to school.

PW: Right, okay. So, did you see your sister very often? While they were in Ancaster?

TT: No, once while we went to Christmas we went to- My parents were working at the golf course, and then maybe a couple of times I did go to Hamilton 'cause they were just in a rooming house, eh? And from there my sister was going to work and then Shichan was going to school.

PW: Right. So then, so you're in Toronto and Mary and Shichan is in Ancaster, so then what- They must have moved to Toronto at a certain time period-

TT: Oh yeah and then-

PW: As a family?

TT: And then I bought a house, I bought a house in Toronto. So they moved into Toronto.

PW: Oh, so you bought a house and the family got together and the whole family? Your brothers too, your brothers and-?

TT: Yeah, then because it was a big house, it was a three-story house, so my brother Joe and, Joe and Jimmy- I think they rented on the fourth, the boys, moved back in because it was a big house and we had a third floor, the third floor had two bedrooms and then two double beds [and we were up?] and the second floor was rented out, so the money was coming in, so that's how we managed.

[30 minutes]

PW: During this period was there, I mean probably Mary had more contact with Shichan in terms of the growing up period and then we are going to hear some more from your mom [likely referring to Christine Okawara's mother] about her life but when did you see some of the artistic abilities of Shichan come out?

TT: Oh no, that's when she was in high school.

PW: Okay.

TT: That's when she was still drawing-

PW: Drawing.

CO: So, you didn't see it before then? That she was-

TT: No, no, because I didn't see-

CO: Okay.

TT: -what she was doing in school and that.

CO: So that's what made her decide to go to Central Tech-

TT: Yeah. [nods head]

CO: -and specialize in art.

TT: Yeah.

PW: Okay, so then, because of her interest in art in high school, she went to Central Tech to, because it was a more technical school so you could take art classes and stuff.

TT: And another thing is, our oldest brother Jimmy was a real good artist, and it was a shame that he didn't follow that up.

[ST ?]: He liked the cartoon field.

TT: No, no, not just the cartoon, he could draw like horses and that-

[ST ?]: [speakers speaking over each other, unclear speech]- oh, he was marvelous.

TT: He was a photogenic, he was a real photogenic because he sees a locomotive, and he'd come home and draw the whole thing, can you imagine? And a locomotive is not a streamlined[?] thing, it's got all those contraptions. And he would draw that all up because he had a photographic mind, but he didn't have that push in him. It was a shame, you know. He could've done a lot in advertising and that, but he didn't have that push, it was too bad.

PW: So, in Toronto, Shichan was going to Central Tech-

TT: Yeah.

PW: And you were working-

TT: Yeah.

PW: You weren't married yet. So when did you meet and get married?

ST: We got married in '53, '53-

[unclear speaker]: '54.

ST: '54? Oh, okay.

TT: Yeah.

CO: I was the flower girl. [chuckles]

[unclear speaker]: Yeah. [chuckles]

TT: Well, it so happened that Johnny was going- My friend, buddy John Miura-

PW: Oh yeah.

TT: Was going along with Sumie's older sister. And Toshie had a sister Sumie, see, so what the heck. And that's when we start to go out. It was quite convenient because he had a car, he's useful. And eventually I got something that- Well I found out that the good part in her- I never told you that [looks over to Sumie] but you had that thing for the badminton get-together at your house?

ST: Ah, I don't know-

TT: Yeah, yeah, that badminton tournament. After the tournament, you had a whole badminton group at your place, and I thought holy Jesus was that- She's something, to organize a thing like this, and a whole crowd was at the house. And I was going around, so I was invited, and one guy said, "What are you here for?" he said [chuckles]. So I told him I was in- 'cause I didn't play badminton. [laughter from the room]

[CO ?]: It's like skier's [?]- [laughs]

PW: Crash the party.

ST: Oh, that was because we had the tournament. You see the badminton tournament, I was on the committee.

PW: Oh yeah.

TT: Yeah, and then you had the whole thing all organized and I thought, "Oh Jesus that's-" So I figured she could organize things, so I was very impressed.

[unclear speech from the background]

CO: This is in between him taking me all over the place. I was a much-indulged niece. Uncle Tom and Uncle Jim took me everywhere.

PW: Oh okay.

TT: Oh yeah, we went to a lot of company birthday parties and Christmas parties yeah.

[smiles]

CO: And the circus, and the Ex [Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto], and on and on and on.

TT: I like children, I really like children yeah.

PW: Yeah, so then Shichan went on to- After she graduated from Central Tech, she went on to Ontario Art College-

TT: Yeah.

PW: And then how much did contact did you have with her during those- that period, because you were all living in the same house right? Did you have much contact-

[35 minutes]

TT: Well, no, because-

PW: A lot of contact, were you very close to your sister?

TT: Well, she was so much younger-

PW: So, she was the little kid sister? [chuckles]

TT: Yeah.

CO: When did you actually move out of Rose Avenue? Were you living there when I was there?

ST: He moved out when he got married. [chuckles]

CO: Oh okay, I don't remember- I didn't remember you living there.

TT: Oh yeah.

CO: I remember Uncle Jim living there and Uncle Steve and Aunt Betty Bye [?] but I do not remember you actually living there. I was wondering about that. Oh okay, you were just never there.

TT: Yeah.

ST: He held two jobs. [chuckles]

TT: Yeah, I was always working.

PW: Oh right, so you were very busy actually, so I mean especially if you are busy and older [ni-sa ?] then you aren't paying too much attention to your little kid sister. [chuckles]

TT: No, the thing was I wanted to pay off the house.

PW: Oh yeah right, right-

TT: So, I-

PW: How did your parents respond to Shichan's condition and her- Because she was small, she was physically disabled, how did they respond? Do you recall anything?

TT: No, I don't really remember if they were concerned or anything 'cause those days you're only a teenager you don't talk to your parents about serious things-

CO: [chuckles] And people tended to accept what was going on-

TT: Yeah.

CO: -too right?

TT: Yeah.

CO: -rather than agonize.

PW: So, they just accepted her condition-

TT: Yeah.

PW: And just lived her life and continued her life in Ontario-

TT: Yeah.

PW: Is that what happened, yeah?

TT: Yeah, because well, we figured she was born so tiny, that this is what happened. I guess it must have happened during the delivery or what, you know, what I mean got dislocated. And she was too young to be operated on right away, this was another thing, they had to wait.

CO: I would have said that she was a much-indulged younger daughter.

ST: Yeah, she was.

CO: She wrapped grandpa around her finger and none of the others of you did.

PW: Well, that's also probably because she was the baby of the family- [everyone says "Yeah."]

PW: And also-

CO: I think it's both.

PW: Both, a combination of when you're the baby-

CO: Yup and the disability as well-

PW: -as well as being the youngest that-

CO: Especially grandma and grandpa.

PW: Oh, is that right, yeah.

CO: 'Cause I know grandpa and grandma really indulged in her.

PW: Okay.

CO: She could say things to him that nobody else could.

PW: Which sometimes happens if you're the youngest and you're being indulged, and you don't get-

TT: Yeah.

PW: You know get- [chuckles] yeah. So she was, she went through the art school, Shichan went through the art school, and then she got a job at OCA [Ontario College of Art, now known as OCAD University]. Is that right? She was teaching?

CO: No, she got a job at Bell.

TT: Yeah.

PW: Oh okay, first.

TT: Yeah, she-

CO: She was doing all the geographic mapping.

TT: Yeah, she was doing the Bell, the downtown office, in Bell.

PW: Now, and then she travelled a lot, and she taught, and then there was a time period I guess she was in Mexico, I think when-

CO: She was in Europe before that.

PW: Before that, so she travelled on her own a lot, from what I understand.

CO: Yup, she was in England as well and then went to Europe-

PW: Yeah.

[unclear speaker]: Her Europe part, she spent the longest amount of time in France.

PW: So, I mean she was really quite independent as a person as a- 'cause she, she-

TT: Yeah, it's amazing that she didn't bother because she was in India too, she was in India-

CO: She was in Afghanistan-

TT: Yeah.

PW: Amazing.

CO: -which I only found out towards the end of her life.

TT: Yeah, and nothing bothered her. One night when she was in New York, she was visiting and she was taking a short cut, she was going through Central Park and late at night and one man said "What are you doing out here!" "Well, I'm going home." He answered, "Don't go out there late at night!" But there was a short cut to go out through the park and then go around the back-

[unclear speaker]: So, the man says, "I'll escort you out of here!"

TT: Yeah.

[unclear speaker]: 'Cause it's taking chances.

CO: Oh, so that's when she was on Columbus. That was in the 70s, the awful 70s.

PW: Oh yeah.

ST: Yeah, that's when she got robbed too.

CO: She was in Columbus then.

PW: Yeah, yeah.

TT: But nothing seemed to bother her-

PW: So, when she was doing all this travelling and that how much contact did she have with her family? Like yourselves or your parents and her parents?

[40 minutes]

TT: No, I didn't write to her-

PW: You didn't write to her.

TT: She didn't write-

ST: She would drop us a line a lot-

CO: She wrote a lot-

PW: She wrote you, okay.

TT: She wrote to Mary, Mary.

PW: Okay, right. So presumably, she was quite close to your mum?

CO: Yes and no.

PW: Yes and no, okay. Sibling rivalry. [chuckles]

CO: But she wrote me a lot and I am so sorry to say that I have hunted high and low, and I didn't- I can't find any-

PW: You can't find the letters?

CO: No but I've kept some postcards-

PW: Oh dear that's too bad. So there wasn't that much contact- You personally didn't have that much contact with her during that period. Then her art career took off and she became well known and she wrote the book, when wrote she was going- Writing the book, did she contact you or the family as she was going and writing this book-

TT: No. [shakes head]

PW: Or did she basically did it on her own.

TT: No, no she did it on her own-

PW: Did it on her own.

TT: I didn't know.

PW: You didn't know that. Did you know she was writing a book?

TT: No, when she was writing I didn't know.

PW: You didn't know that, okay. When she was in Toronto do you-

TT: And how that happened was: when she was in Mexico, she met May Cutler and she's a publisher. And this German girl brought a book about what happened in Germany when she was a child, and they asked Shichan to do the book jacket and the painting for the book and then she asked her, "What did you do now?" and she said, oh she was in a camp and all this, that's why they said, "Okay, write a few paragraphs of this." And she did write and she found out that she could write, so she was commissioned to write the book.

PW: So, when she did publish it how did you feel? What was your feeling about- She wrote about experience and-

TT: Oh, it didn't bother me, she wrote a book you know I didn't think too much of it until it got popular that it got printed all over the place. Then, oh holy Jesus.

[CO?]: Your sister could write. [chuckles]

TT: Yeah, and they even had the thing on the TV in Vancouver. Yeah, gee, some of them they phoned back, like some of them are so nasty, holy God Jesus, you would not- She couldn't believe some people were like that, they couldn't change.

[CO?]: Even the letters to the editor in the scrapbook mum kept, some of them are so horrible-

PW: [unclear speech]

[CO?]: "They just sat around during the war being taken care of". Things like that. "They deserved it". The Vancouver Sun editorials were just, they're breath taking.

TT: It's amazing how people look at these things yeah-

PW: So, there was still that racial-

TT: Oh yeah.

PW: Feeling quite deep in Vancouver BC-

TT: Yeah, they justified it for doing what they did-

PW: Yeah, well this is BC that's why I guess-

CO: Yeah, she was on a radio talk show out in BC as well, out in Vancouver as well, and apparently it was pretty ugly.

PW: Oh, right, yeah, they were phoning.

CO: And I think, I'm reading between the lines, but I think the Vancouver Sun actually pulled the printing of their excerpts because they were getting so much reaction. If they didn't pull it, they certainly thought about it, you know, you have to read between the lines on the thing-

PW: Yep-

TT: You know-

CO: 1970.

TT: You wouldn't believe the people in the Vancouver area. They thought, they would believe that the Government was justified in getting rid of them. That's what they're trying to do all the time anyways, See. And then a lot of the rejects back there was in Vancouver, they were lazy people. A lot of them come to Canada they work in the farms, but they didn't want to work in the farms. That's why they gradually came to Vancouver, and they're just a lazy bunch of guys that wanted to make money doing nothing, That's the way they were, that's why the labor union was strong too.

PW: Yeah, right.

TT: Yeah.

[45 minutes]

PW: When she- Later on, when she was going through her artistic period did she give you paintings or sketches to the family? Did you receive quite a bit or-?

TT: No, we got one, a wedding gift-

PW: Oh, one wedding gift when you got married, she made-

TT: Yeah.

PW: She gave you one of her paintings.

TT: Mhm.

PW: Did she give you more as the years went on? Did she give very much to the family?

[ST ?]: Not really. Paintings, just sketches that she would use for Christmas cards-

PW: Oh yes.

[ST ?]: And postcards and stuff like that.

PW: So, then she went to- moved to Vancouver. how much contact did you have with her during the later part of her life?

TT: Not much, not much.

[ST ?]: Once or twice a year, at break-

PW: Right.

[ST ?]: Especially at Christmas time. And if we go, then we would make sure that we went to see her-

PW: You went to see her, right. Now as an overall comment about your sister, what did you think of her as a person, as a person?

TT: I never looked at it that way, it's just that I was always concerned whether she had enough money, so I was always sending her money, sending her money continuously for- 'Cause she didn't really have a real income, eh.

PW: Yes. And what did you think about her as an artist?

TT: Oh, I thought she was a good artist. And some of the shows that she did have, you know.

PW: And did you go to her showings in the art galleries and that-

TT: Yeah, yeah.

PW: When you were- whenever she had it in Toronto?

TT: Yeah.

[ST ?]: Whenever she had a show in Toronto, we made sure that we went too, we always attended-

PW: You all went too. And then, what's your feelings of her as a sister?

TT: Oh, just a sister. I didn't have any depth in it. I was always concerned whether she had enough money to carry on because she didn't have a very good income.

PW: But I think that when I used to talk to you about Shichan, you, I think you said that you kinda really admired her that she as an Asian, single, handicapped artist survived through all these difficulties and that she could survive through all the hardships and all that.

TT: Yeah, but those kinds of things didn't bother her, those kind of things- I never thought about those kinds of things. Yeah, she just kept on holding on and-

PW: Because she did face a lot of discrimination in her life.

TT: Oh yeah, but because even though she was in Europe too, she's travelling all over the place, by herself, and it never bothered her.

PW: Did she talk about herself or being of Japa- Well how much maybe Japanese culture may or may not have influenced her?

TT: No, we never had a real serious talk like that, no. No was just-

PW: Okay, was she- In some of the comments by some other people, they talk about the Buddhism in Shichan, was she a religious person? Was she a Buddhist or-?

TT: No, she wasn't a Buddhist, but she really accepted the, some of the philosophy of a Buddhist.

PW: Right.

TT: Yeah, she was not a that much strong Christian.

PW: Because I think in one of the commentary that I read, was that she was going to Korean Zen Temple on Vaughan Road while she was in Toronto, so I just had wondered how much sort of religion or Buddhism had played in her life or how much because your family- Were you Buddhist or Christian?

TT: We were Christian, but my dad was a Buddhist.

PW: Okay, right.

TT: But somehow, she sort of disappointed in the Christianity, I think. 'Cause what they say or what they do is altogether different-

PW: Right.

[50 minutes]

TT: So she was, became very closer more to the Buddhist area or philosophy. And this is the sad part: that's why I got no use for Christianity too, see. Yeah, I went to church and everything but as you go on, they're a bunch of control people that's all it is. And they have no real pure philosophy like the Buddhism, Buddhism got a pure philosophy.

PW: Did you feel that she was quite a happy person?

TT: Oh yeah, she was happy, she was never, she wasn't sad, or anything didn't- Most things didn't bother her she just kept going and yeah.

PW: We've talked about Shichan so this is more of a Shichan kind of thing, but I'd just like to get for my other part of the interview about yourself. So I'm going to talk about your life a bit more now 'cause I want to use this for the Sedai portion of the- [chuckles]
[phone rings]

[CO ?]: Excuse me, I'll go get the phone.

PW: Okay, Tom after your- You came to Toronto and you got your job at the machine shop, how long were you there at the machine shop? Did you work there all your life or all your working period or?

TT: Yeah no, well the thing is with me, I believe in education, so I kept going to night school all the time. I didn't like this wasting time, so you know, people take the night school taking up this and that and lectures and so forth, you know, and so the machine shop- And I would change jobs to further my what you call- And eventually I became foreman of the tool shop and the manufacturing form. And then, when you become a foreman, then you're in charge of the whole thing. So they gave me an opportunity to go into business. So when did I go into business? [looks over to someone in the background]

ST: Mhm?

TT: When did I go into business?

ST: It was a year after Donna was born, that was 1961?

TT: Yeah, yeah that's right, 1961, I went into my own business.

CO: I didn't realize it was that late. Oh isn't that interesting.

TT: And then I-

CO: So, you had four children and you took that much of a risk? [chuckles]

TT: Yeah, it was a risk, it was a risk. But I had enough confidence in myself because while I was a foreman, I had all the connections, I made all the connections. And actually, you become an engineer for these companies to make a tool that's inexpensive and yet it's good and that it will produce that they can make money on, you know. This is the thing that you have to calculate. So and with my- Bunch of customers that I was working for, that became all my customers after I went into business, so I had no problem working for the customers because they were depending on me so it was just a title change, that's all, and it was very successful and then- What year was it that I quit? [looks over to someone in the background]

ST: Well, that's when you turned 65.

TT: Yeah, when I turned 65.

ST: You were going to work longer but you can't.

PW: So did you sell your business?

TT: Yeah.

PW: Yeah, sold your business. And you retired?

TT: Yeah, and I had enough money invested and so forth that I wouldn't have to worry, and so I sold the business to two people that was working for me.

PW: Oh right, so they took over your business and yeah, so then they had a thing going for that.

CO: Didn't you start out- You started out with a couple of partners and then bought them out?

TT: Yeah, there was three partners but then eventually I found out that they're not business people so gradually I weeded them out.

ST: They were costing him money. [chuckles]

TT: Yeah, they were costing me money to keeping the guys.

[55 minutes]

PW: And how many people would you have had in your shop?

TT: Well one time we had about 16 people working, but eventually, it was cut down to about half because when I broke up with my partners, [face changes?] but still, it was a lot of work because you don't just work five days a week-

PW: Especially if you have your own business.

TT: Long hours and Saturdays and Sundays, at one time we were working on Sundays too.

PW: Yeah. And what kind of stuff did you make? What was your products when you- from your shop?

TT: It varied, it varied. We worked for CCM [CCM Hockey]. So, there's some modifications for bicycles or so forth and skates. And we worked for a tube plant, big tube plant, making tubing.

CO: Who made the wonderful pots and pans you gave me?

TT: Oh yeah, that was Everingham [?], did pots and pans, they were making aluminum pans first and then they changed into stainless steel like nowadays. And I did all their engineering, yeah.

PW: Okay, right.

CO: GM [General Motors]?

TT: Yeah, I did work for GM too.

PW: It's amazing that the Niseis who- The older Niseis who came out of the camps went into- They became- They started up their own business without a heck of a lot of, you know, capital or anything but enough to get going. More so than today's generation, that somehow there's age group, people your age, who had the guts and confidence to get out and start their own business and do their own things. Like right now it seems to me a lot of the people this generation are going into more professional but-

CO: Consultants.

PW: Your generation was to do the hands on stuff- My brother in law, my- Ethel's sister's husband is born and married to Ko Katanaga [?], and he has a sheet metal thing in Stoney

Creek with a couple of partners and he did the same kinda thing that you did, he went through high school and then he didn't go on to university but he, I mean, he could, you know, do all these things that the specialty items right, the specialty items for the Stelco and the steel mills in Hamilton. And so he bought equipment, had a big plant, and sold it so- To me it's really amazing that these people have the chutzpah to do all this and here's another example-

CO: Well, there's another your- You know, probably there's this majority classification that people who are determined to assimilate and stay low key and be employees and then there was this small majority- [speakers speaking over each other]

PW: Entrepreneurial people-

CO: That said, "Hell with that I'm not working for anybody, I'm doing it myself". [speakers speaking over each other]

PW: [speakers speaking over each other] Yeah not working [chuckles] yeah very entrepreneurial-

TT: No, no, no, no but what happens, I get to know more than the foremen there, so why am I going to work under him, you know? He's getting all the benefit because of my knowledge and- You know, that's why I left, you know, and then- Oh yeah and the owner of the company really gave the foremen hell when I left Saturday, I left on the Saturday and he's not there, eh. [smiles, laughter from the room] Oh yeah Monday, oh he gave him hell-

PW: [unclear speech]-

CO: That's when they find out how valuable you are-

PW: Yeah, how valuable this guy was. [chuckles]

TT: Yeah, oh God, gee, God, hell, gee, this a friend of mine told me that "Boy, John get hell, holy God he didn't know what to do." [smiles]

PW: I guess they didn't see this one coming. [chuckles]

TT: Because but the boss knew that I knew and a lot of these problems that we had with us I know there's one with the General Motors product you know they took me out there, right to the big engineering plant you know. [points finger]

PW: Right.

[60 minutes]

TT: Oh huge! And I show up and they got a whole wall got a whole blue print of a whole car, of the left side of a car, another one's a right side of the car, another one's from upside down, so when you get a drawing you take that drawing and there fits right there, you see like this, you know, and we had a problem and I says, "This head man in the engineering department, he didn't know what to do". Because to make a change they had to report it to the U.S., the head company, and this takes time. But I told him you can stretch the material but you can't shrink the material, you know [chuckles from the room] and to do that I got a shrink vac, you know, then they bring me back that so I tell him we can't shrink it, but if you accept it, we'll wrinkle it. So if you wrinkle it, you're shrinking it, eh? So they said, "Well, yeah we better go ahead and do that." [chuckles from interviewer] Then, next year, we saw

the thing- in the States, what they did, they chopped that piece right off [laughter from the room] instead of trying to shrink it, they cut that piece right off. [smiles]

PW: So then you got married and your raised how many children?

TT: Hm?

PW: How many children-

TT: Five.

PW: Five children. And were you involved with the Centre from early on or you know-?

TT: Oh yeah right from the beginning.

PW: Right from the beginning.

TT: Yeah.

PW: And you believed in the Centre and what they were doing?

TT: Well, first of all, the Centre, how it started was: there was always a dance or so forth for fundraising. So like, they need a hall for fundraisers because they were always renting a hall, and so why not have our own hall, build our own hall? And that's what the charter was, to build a hall so they could have a badminton court you know for- and so forth and the niseis were along for that but the isseis won't donate for the hall you know. So then they had to change it because niseis didn't have that much money because a lot of them were just married and having families, and they can't donate that much money. So after a while they changed it, okay let's build a hall that can be a cultural centre like, you know, and then they start to donate. And not just the Isseis. There's a lot of Japanese corporations from BC that had money, like the different schools and so forth and they had money. They would gladly give to the Centre. See, because niseis didn't have much money, you know, they were still struggling. But the thing is the charter wasn't changed, so they had to pay tax. Yeah, so they had to pay realty tax and holy God they were getting behind on their realty tax [chuckles] with the interest, holy God, that was really something. So then they got the charter changed to cultural centre, so they didn't have to pay any more tax. Oh, they were borrowing money from the bank to pay the taxes, things like this, it was a panic you know. God.

CO: So, it would have been- it was chartered as a profit making enterprise in the beginning-

TT: Yeah. [nods head]

CO: Okay.

PW: Ah, alright, alright so it became a non-profit-

CO: Yeah-

TT: Yeah.

PW: Non-profit Cultural Centre-

CO: Yes, it was suppose to be a rental hall before.

TT: But the thing is- But at the beginning it was for the sports, for badminton. So the floors were all painted up for the badminton court. But, they told the badminton group that they had to pay rent [chuckles from the interviewer], okay, because it cost money to run the place and they were quite upset because it was their idea in the first, it was their idea [smiles, chuckles from the room], but then the whole idea changed. Yeah, it was something,

there was all kinds of squabble. [chuckles from the interviewer] So you know to even to run the place with all the lights and that it costs money you know-

[65 minutes]

PW: Yes, yes maintenance operating cost.

TT: Yeah, so they had to pay, and they said, "No, oh hell no." [chuckles from the interviewer] and they rented a school, and they never had the badminton.

PW: Right, right. So now you've lived a long time, still living pretty healthy, you've got a great family, what do you think about the future of the Japanese, the Canadian?

TT: Well, really, unless we got to get more niseis, I mean sanseis, involved you know, I think we are getting into a rough time. Although they've got a nice place now and they can make it so that they can make income on the second floor, you know, and it's ideal that they got a large parking lot and so forth, so you know and it's run properly they should be able to- But somebody would really have to work on it, you know.

PW: But it is- Like your family has been involved as the next generation and so, I mean for that, you know, I think the Centre has been pretty fortunate and not I mean, Marty's a Sansei and Gary is a Sansei so there is a group. But I guess it's the next generation 'cause they are in the 50s right? So you need that 20s lot more to keep the supply going because- I mean, it's so amazing that there's still a lot of niseis involved. You go to some of these events and they're still volunteering, they are still doing a lot of work in there, but eventually in a few more years I mean they're getting old, and they are getting tired so they [chuckles] you can't blame them that they won't do all these things but yeah so-

CO: And we don't have the endurance by the way- [laughs]

PW: Certainly don't have that stamina that the other people do. [chuckles]

CO: There's no way. [chuckles]

PW: Now it is amazing-

CO: I mean I have to work hard but I don't have that kind of stamina.

PW: It's amazing the stamina's that the older niseis have. It is just amazing.

[67:35]

[Conversation redacted]

[69:45]

PW: Were you involved in the Redress Movement?

TT: [shakes head] No.

PW: What did- How did you feel about the Redress Movement? You know when the NAJC [National Association of Japanese Canadians] was going for the compensation

[70 minutes]

and the [unclear word], 'cause there's a couple of camps in Toronto especially with George and then the other Sodan Kai and all this other group, were you- Did you get involved in that discussions very much-

TT: [shakes head] No.

PW: During that period?

TT: No, I was, at the time I was more involved with the Centre, eh-

PW: Yes, mhm.

TT: What the Centre was trying to do, so I wasn't. And the thing is, personally, I didn't lose out. See-

[unclear speaker]: Oh, because you were in Ontario.

TT: Yeah-

PW: 'Cause you were one of the- Must have been really one of the early ones here, obviously-

TT: Yeah-

PW: You were really early-

TT: '42 December. In '42 I was here-

PW: Yeah, I mean that was like-

[unclear speaker]: Right after the war-

PW: Right after the war!

TT: Yeah-

PW: So, you didn't have to go-

[unclear speaker]: No, before the war, before the war-

PW: Before, oh so you were here before the war?

TT: '42-

[unclear speaker]: No, no, he was here '42-

PW: '42-

[unclear speaker]: Just before the war started '41, end of '41.

PW: Yeah, oh yeah, right-

[unclear speaker]: 'Cause Pearl Harbour was '41-

PW: '40- Oh sorry '41 yeah. So you were one of the really early ones-

TT: Yeah.

PW: Very early ones yeah-

TT: Well, but I was gonna come here anyways-

PW: Anyways! So you already had plans-

TT: Yeah.

PW: In that sense-

TT: Oh yeah, because I used to wonder, why are all these nisei going to university and they don't have that much money, scrounging the money to pay for the university and they got no jobs you know-

PW: In fact a lot of them who went to university and the professions that they went in or the courses they took, they couldn't get into them with the discrimination in BC-

CO: Yeah, some of them changed professions-

PW: But they could-, They couldn't get in, they couldn't get in the professions so-

TT: So some of them went to Japan-

PW: Yes.

TT: And like Tommy Shoyama, he had a double degree, couldn't get a job, so what's he doing? He's running the New Canadian. And New Canadian wasn't making any money, I mean he wasn't making anything you know. Yeah, he wasn't making hardly anything. They had a little office on York Hotel there and he hardly had any money. But what else can you do-

PW: Right, right, right. But in the end, in the end he did well. Because he was smart and he- And he, in some ways, whether by luck or hard work, he got in the right position and he was able to make a wonderful career out of himself so- So that's what happened to a lot of the nisei people, I think anyways. Well I think I've talked and questioned you a lot [chuckles] so it's over an hour so- Thanks Tom for your comments I appreciate that. You got anything- Have you any questions you'd to ask?

TT: Yeah, in a way, in a way, it looked pretty bad but it turned out okay. But still, because you know- What's that Yatabe-

PW: Min?

TT: No, the older one. While Mas was doing- He had the [unclear] business, the oldest one.

PW: Yes.

TT: He took over the father's business, the father passed away, so he took over. And his next brother, he was a chemical engineer. Yeah, at UBC [The University of British Columbia], chemistry. And he, all he was doing was cutting grass for his brother in the summertime and that on Saturdays. Then he gets his master's, and he was still cutting grass [chuckles]. Then he went into atomic energy, but, here he's going to university and cutting grass, Jesus. I used to think, "What the hell they doing", you know-

PW: It's- I've often wondered if the war hadn't come, and we were still in BC, what our lives would have been like in B.C, have you ever thought about that?

[unclear speaker]: I've thought of it-

PW: What did you think?

[unclear speaker]: I don't know 'cause I thought-

[End]

