

OND, REV. YOSHIO

(TRANSCRIPT)

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TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW RECORDED AT
VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA, DURING CONFERENCE,
MAY, 1975, UPON RECOGNITION OF HIS RETIREMENT,
JUNE 30, 1975.

Interview conducted by: Marilyn Harrison

Interviewee: Rev. Yoshio Ono

This is part of an interview with Rev. Yoshio Ono, during Conference 1975, at the time of his retirement, by Marilyn Harrison, May, 1975

Marilyn Harrison - I talked with Yoshio on Saturday for well over an hour and I became very, very excited and rather moved by the story he told me of parts of his life. I am sure he could have gone on for much longer, but I want to touch on a few of the highlights with you here tonight.

Yoshio was born in Japan of a Christian family. His father was a Methodist minister. It was rather unique because at the turn of the century he was one of the first Japanese who came to Canada and studied his ministry in Toronto.

Harrison: Yoshio, what was it like to grow up in a Christian family in Japan?

Ono: Well, I don't know, I don't know. What I am I'll just show you. I can't tell because I was never in a non-Christian family.

Harrison: But how did you feel with your neighbours, that kind of thing?

Ono: Well, when I was a kid, the older kids around me used to tease me quite a bit, because I was the only Christian boy there. They knew that. That is why I became very tough. I had to fight them off always, all the time.

Harrison: Before you went into the ministry you were in business administration for five years in Japan?

Ono: Yes.

Harrison: And then you decided to take up the ministry, what made you decide on that career?

Ono: Well, the reason was, there was a Christian gentleman working among the Japanese people as a missionary, who was sent by the United Church, who was educated in Saskatchewan, whose name was Walter G. Coates. He was a military cross winner, and he was quite a strong, husky fellow, but his missionary work was huskier than his looks. Very husky job here he has done. One day, his daughter's birthday it was, they were just about to cut Dorothy's birthday cake after dinner when there was a phone call from about 25 miles south of where he was, and he immediately started off from this birthday party, without finishing the cake, went for this place. He was called by a sick old man, and on that day it was a very foggy day, and he had to travel about seven miles along the river, and that road ran along the river, sometimes very high, high cliff. He couldn't see in front of him very well in the fog. He fell from about 150 feet over a cliff and died immediately. That is where I thought, well, Walter was Canadian, but as a Christian he died for a Japanese and Walter's motto was "Take up your cross and follow me, if you want to be my disciple", and he did exactly that. This is sort of a coincidence, or our Lord's hand was there. I was taking a vacation and my father was attending United Church General Council which was held in Hamilton, 1932. I was a delegate of the Japanese Methodist church, and he asked me, while you are loafing around at home, why don't you help my work, so I know what my daddy was always doing, except preaching, so I helped his work. During that time, I wrote to my father who was in Canada at that time, I think. After all, I found myself a child of frog, nothing but, I have to croak after you, (that is an old Japanese saying), so before he came back to Japan, he set up the entry to Union College for me to come here. He got every necessary document from the late Dr. Osterhout, and from the late Dr. Brown and received a letter saying I would be accepted as a bonafied student. This is how I came to this country when I was 29 years old. Now I have lived in this country longer than I lived in Japan where I was born.

Harrison: In 1939 you were ordained and you went to Cumberland. Now 1939 is a date that many people will remember. It was a year that changed many lives, but I guess for you, December 1941 is a date that you will remember which changed

your life considerably. How did you feel when the Government ordered you and all the other Japanese to move east of the Rockies, or to move into a evacuation camp?

Ono: I was a Japanese National then, so I thought we are enemy, so we have to follow Government instruction and it caused a lot of trouble, but later on what the Government did, caused me and some of us to be quite irritated. I think it was this afternoon somebody read on tape record - "On September 1, 1942, many Japanese kids weren't accepted in their elementary school", was it? Well that kind of thing happened. That's not only for kids. We Japanese Nationals sort of deserved treatment like an alien, as we were, but these Canadian-born Canadians were treated as enemy alien. This, we couldn't stand, and as a Christian we thought this is not Christian, so not too strongly, violently but steadily got a government official tackling the proper channel and this caused about 400 Canadian born being interned. These young people were interned in Petawawa. That is a prisoner of war camp and treated as prisoners of war. That is a fact.

Harrison: What about the United Church's response?

Ono: Well, I don't like to talk about it too much, because of war, under war situation, I think everybody's mentality or fear, was not normal, hysterical, excited and well, riding that sentiment, some of the politicians aroused Japanese feeling. That's true. Is there anything else I should say? You switch me off any time, as ministers, we sometimes speak too long.

Harrison: When the evacuation first took place, you worked for awhile at an evacuation camp called Tashme, which was a few miles east of Hope, as a carpenter, erecting some shacks for the families to move into. Then you moved east to Montreal. What did you do in Montreal after you moved there?

Ono: First, I'll answer your first question.

(Here - There was some kind of an interruption in the tape here, so I had to pick up the interview after Mr. Ono arrived at Hasting Park Camp)

Ono: Gathered in Hasting Park where we used to call a clearing center or pool, 3000 Japanese were there and in there many Japanese who were not familiar with the English language had suffered quite a bit, so there were ten Canadian born young men who volunteered to make themselves to be a bumper, between the Government and Japanese people. They told me they tried to shock, or push, as soft as they could make it to the people. So I joined them and a lot of people actually blamed me or called me - you are RCMP stool pigeon, and these busy security officers thought I was a ring leader. I was in between, so I told the Japanese people who actually assaulted me in the night two or three times in Hasting Park, (I told you I was very tough from a kid, so I protected myself well). Anyway, I told them "You call me stool pigeon, sure, I'm a stool pigeon of Jesus Christ." And these busy security officers, I faced them as a Japanese representing all these elder folks, babies and women, and did what I could do. I have a story, I could write a book out of it, but I like to mention just a couple of things that happened in Tashme. I went to Tashme as a carpenter to make little shacks. Yes, I did, but one time an old man died in Tashme and the security officers staff didn't know what to do about it. They decided to send his body to Vancouver to be cremated. So I went to see supervisor, and said, "Why can't we handle that here, why can't you get a special permit for us to cremate our old man?". So he got permission.

from the B. C. Government, but he said "somebody got to be undertaker", otherwise they wouldn't give such permission. "I'll be undertaker," I said. So I performed the funeral and cremated his body as undertaker. Do you know how many cords of wood we used? Well, that's a secret. I had that experience and before I left for Montreal I asked one old man who would volunteer to be my successor as undertaker.

So, I left for Montreal.