

NITTA, MR. GEORGE
(TRANSCRIPT)

3196: 1-2

Mr. George Nitta.
January 26, 1978.

Accession No. 3196; Tape No. 1; Track No. 1.

Ms. I'm going to start at the beginning, Mr. Nitta, and ask you to give us your full name and where you were born and when you were born.

Mr. Nitta: Oh, as I told you in the previous time, you know, when you... when I met you here, eh?

Ms. Yes...?

Mr. Nitta: I was supposed to be born here, but I was in the mother and the mother was visiting in Japan when she went over, ~~for a little~~ longer than what she expected. Okay?

Ms. Yeah. (laughs)

Mr. Nitta: So, I was born in Japan.

Ms. So did that make you a Japanese citizen or a Canadian citizen?

Mr. Nitta: Well that... your guess is just as good as mine, you know. Supposed to be Japanese, so I was... after I come to be twenty years old, eh, or eighteen or nineteen, I forget about now how old I was, I've been naturalized. Okay?

Ms. Yes. I see.

Mr. Nitta: In order to get human right, eh? (laughs) As a, you know, Canadian, okay?

Ms. Uh-huh. Right. And you were born which year?

Mr. Nitta: 1903.

Ms. And your family had been here several generations, I understand?

Mr. Nitta: Oh yes, yes.

Ms. Can you tell us about your grandfather coming over?

Mr. Nitta: I didn't... I can't tell you, exactly, but somewhere between ninety-five to a hundred years, maybe even a hundred and one or two years ago. Yeah. And after

the, you know, my grandparents came in here, then he was entitled to, you know, called his son, as my father, into Canada. You see? And my grandpa was a naturalized and also my father was a naturalized.

Ms. Gee. There's a long history in the family of Canadians.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, it is. Yeah. So they're fourth generation.

Ms. Uh-huh. Your children.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah.

Ms. When your grandfather came to Canada, where did he come to?

Mr. Nitta: To Victoria, I think. You know, they landed, ~~from~~ the Japanese ship, you know. That time, and it was... it's only the steamer was the transportation, you know. You know, from across the ocean, eh? No airplane like today. (laughs) So he told me, oh, dozen, dozen, time, he took over months, you know. Slow, you know, no speed, ~~eh?~~ It's ^a very slow speed boat, eh? You know, ships that come across the ocean. Over a month.

Ms. Was it ~~a~~ hard trip for him?

Mr. Nitta: Well it would be, you know. Took months. On the ship, you know. You know, every morning, you get up every morning, ~~a~~ all you could see, nothing but the sea, you know. (laughs) Day by day.

Ms. The village that your grandfather came from, or the town in Japan, was it a fishing town?

Mr. Nitta: My family in Japan, you know, is a farmer. You know. But, yet, ~~during the~~ ^{the little} time I was raise^d, you know, in Japan, it's more or less halfway fisherman and halfway farmer, like. You know, most of the ways are ~~rice~~ ^{rice} ~~fields~~, eh? You know, what do they call rice fields, you know.

Ms. That's right, yes. Which part of Japan is this?

Mr. Nitta: Called Wakayama.

Ms. Uh-huh. Many people came from Wakayama.

Mr. Nitta: Oh, yeah. Quite a bit. I think about fifty... more than fifty percent, you know Japanese-Canadian in Steveston? They came from, you know... Well, I better say, you know senior, you know, ancestors came from Japan.

Ms. Yes. Did your grandfather go to Steveston then after Victoria?

Mr. Nitta: Oh yeah. He was [there] quite a few years. Yeah.

Ms.
(Phone rings, and tape recorder is turned off and then turned on again.)

Ms. ...^{about}/your grandfather? (tape is turned off and on again)

Mr. Nitta: Uh-huh?

Ms. Did he go fishing?

Mr. Nitta: Oh yes. Nothing else. Fishing, you know, all his life. I mean, when he was here. You know, until he went back to Japan, eh? You know, he has been fishing. Nothing else.

Ms. He must have been one of the earliest fishermen in Steveston?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, well, you see, in history, we are Japanese... I better say "ancestor", eh? They are ^{the}one, you know, organize a small way and start up, you know, can salmon at the Bella Bella area...

Ms. Oh, really? At Bella Bella?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. Yeah, they, you know, no machine, mind you. Boil the fish and hand pack, eh? That's what the original, you know, canned salmon business, you know, started by, you know, that way. And the more experiment and use better machine and build up and improve it to what we have today.

Ms. Uh-huh. Was your grandfather involved in fish packing industries?

Mr. Nitta: I won't say. I never heard it, so I don't think so. I don't think so. But he told me it, or... you

know?

Ms. I see.

Mr. Nitta: Many, many time.

Ms. And then your father, he was a fisherman, too?

Mr. Nitta: Also, yeah. Yeah, and nothing else. All my family. But, you know, from... my children now, maybe change. You know, they may go to different way, to survive, eh?

Ms. Yes, yes.

Mr. Nitta: Well...

Ms. Can you tell us about your education, Mr. Nitta?

Mr. Nitta: Well, I suppose ^{to} be captain, to be a captain upon maru, ship. That's what my mother's ambition, you know? And interest. So, I was in the navigation institute about a year and a half, you know? After I finished in public school, eh? But that days, you know, in institute was just as bad as in a Navy, Navy school, you know. Even worse.

Ms. How do you mean?

Mr. Nitta: Well, so... no enjoyment. Upon, you know, student, eh? So strict. Nine o'clock, whether you like or not, you know, you've got to go to bed. And ten o'clock, it's all lights out. Switched off, see? (laughs) Real, real strict. So I ^{thought to myself} ~~say, you know~~, "Well, I don't think I have a future in Japan. ^{And} Even I have, I don't like it, you know." You know, forcing and... nothing, you know, nothing like Canada, eh? So that's/^{the way}...so I quit and I came back to Canada.

Ms. I see. Earlier you told us, last time we saw you, that in between... I guess it was just after public school, or maybe this was how you finished public school, that you were fishing with your father and you begged him to go to school?

Mr. Nitta: No, that time I already went you know,
give up the navi--... ~~got nothing to~~ study, you know,
any further in the navigation institute, see?

Ms. Oh, I see.

Mr. Nitta: So I came back here. You know. But I was
only fifteen years old.

Ms. Oh, you were quite young.

Mr. Nitta: Yes. Because that time, you know, my days,
you know,
you have to go/public school up to about ^{thirteen}~~seventeen~~ years
maybe
old, you know. Up to... something like/Grade Eight here.
Yeah. You know. Then the/... you know, junior high school,
eh? So I came in, you know, Canada. Then I start a
struggle. (laughs)

Ms. How do you mean?

Mr. Nitta: Well, you know, it's..."dog days." (pause)

Ms. This book that Mae has given me...

Mr. Nitta: Hmm?

Ms. Mae has just given me a book to look at. Was
this your school?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah.

Ms. ^{Mio}~~Mae~~ Primary School.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, yeah. Right. She said I'm there.

Ms. Uh-huh. You are in it, are you?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, yeah. Hey, Mae?

Miss Nitta: Yeah.

Mr. Nitta: Come here and show them my picture in that
class.

Miss Nitta: My dad's in it.

Ms. Where? Which one is he? (tape is turned off,/
then back on.)

Mr. Nitta: ... was, you know, it's a real bad game. In
the war it's a bad business, okay?

Ms. Yes.

Mr. Nitta: But make the... you know, most nation in the
whole world to wake up, and realize, you know, discrimin-
ation is a real bad business. You know, for everybody.

still, you know
 Worse than that, I think it's/quite ~~too~~ strong, you
 know, discrimination, floating in the ~~earth~~^{airs} in Canada
 or United States, you know.

Ms. Now or then?

Mr. Nitta: At that time. You know, up to the last war,
 you know.

Ms. I see, yes.

Mr. Nitta: You know. You see, if I'm going to give you
 the example, you know, they call the, you know, "White
 Lunch" okay? And they don't allow oriental descent, even
 going ^{into} / the... in the "White Lunch" for eat, you see?
 It's white people only. Another thing, "Public Pool",
 the same thing. And the picture show and the show, eh?
 Like any theatres in town? There are the two different
 seats. Upstairs is coloured people, see? Including us,
 too, you know. But here it's just two different race.
 It's white and oriental, you know. You know, it's very
 few Indian people come into town, eh? They stay in the
 reservation. So, you know, I was... you know, it's kind
 of, you know, fed up after I found out ~~that~~^{an} this and that,
 and I haven't got/equal right, you know. So I thought
 I'd better go back to some other place, ~~Some~~ other
 country, you know. But after the war, everybody said
 we ~~are nice~~^{realize} and it's... discrimination is real bad. For
 everybody, all of us, you know. And now it's equal right
 and, you know, everybody's--it doesn't matter who you
 are, what colour's the skin, you know, you are. As
 long as, you know, a Canadian, is no second-class Canadian.
 You know, a Canadian is a Canadian. As long as you was
 born in Canada or naturalized in Canada, you know, you
 are Canadian. But it wasn't like that, you know, up to
 last war.

Ms. Yes. That's true.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. So we been, you know, suffered, oh, quite
 a bit, account of that business, you know.

Ms. I want to ask you more details about your experiences during the war but before we do that, I'd like to go back a little bit to when you came to Canada after you had finished your schooling in Japan. That was about 1918. There was a big 'flu epidemic, and many people died. Do you remember that?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. Oh yes, yes. Yes. Oh, it's a... it's a... Killed thousands and thousands, you know. It wasn't only Canada and the United States alone, you know. It was, you know, among the England and French and German. I don't know how the cause of that 'flu was, you know, was started.

Ms. Hmmm... I don't either.

Mr. Nitta: But oh, it was terrible.

Ms. Where were you living then?

Mr. Nitta: I was in Steveston. Richmond, you know.

Ms. Was it bad down there?

Mr. Nitta: Oh, there were quite a few people died, too.

Ms. And your... when you came back, did you join your father in his fishing?

Mr. Nitta: Yes. Yeah. Oh yes, and nothing else. I've been help my mother and my father and (laughs) he don't give me the chance to even go ba--... go to the school, you know. 'Cause that days, we work all ^{year round} ~~day long~~. You know, sweat. Not eight hour or ten, you know. Twelve hours and, you know, fifteen hours a day, and... ^{how long you save, you know,} three or four hundred dollars a year. That's, you know, average.

Ms. Gee.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. But, you know, everything is cheap, that day, you know, of course, you know. Oh, it's... compare it with now ^{next (thing) to free,}

You know. That's the only reason we could survive, you know. ^(laughs) Instead of starve to death./

Ms. Uh-huh. Was your father working for a can-

nery in Steveston?

Mr. Nitta: Oh, fishing?

Ms. Yeah.

Mr. Nitta: And... you know, fishing season, that's the season over, you know, different job, eh? Like, you know, beginning of June, then November, end of November, you know, it's the season over. So you got to.... that days... not only my father. Everybody... they don't select the job, you know. Soon as the season close, they went to work at sawmills, logging.../any-^{or}thing they could have taken, you know. Yeah. That's why, you know, even, you know, in summertime, we work like a slave, you know, fishing and some / year it's a very poor season, too, you know, so we don't make any money, so we work at anything. I been work in sawmills, railways, and everything too, you know. Oh yes.

Ms. So then you decided that you wanted to get some more education? How did you go about getting it?

Mr. Nitta: Well, I went, you know, in... as I am telling you, it's a real... ^{tough job} ~~I've been able~~ to make big money, eh? you know, and... it doesn't matter where you work. Very, very few dollars. So, I got ~~to~~ ^{to} help of my father to support my family, right, you know? So I got to follow him. And only time he give it to me, that time, go to the school, after the, you know, January, ^{first} ~~of course~~. Then maybe end of... beginning of May, we got to go back to fishing/ ^{again,} you see? So, I been ^{starting} ~~studying~~ and ^{starting it} ~~studying~~ and, you know, only a few months every year, you know. So that's what I miss the, you know, educate myself through the proper procedure, eh?

Ms. Was it hard for you, not knowing much English? How did you learn your English?

Mr. Nitta: Well, it's... you know, maybe a few words I pick up, but, you know, the... pick up a few words every year, like, eh? So I'm living in Canada for

more than half a century, so... but yet, you know, lots of English you know, big words, you know, I can't understand yet. So my children are very lucky. Very, very lucky. Yeah.

Ms. How long did you go to school, then?

Mr. Nitta: Oh, until maybe twenty-one or twenty-two years old. You know, night school, see? Yeah. Oh even Canadian born, ^{the} ~~Canadian,~~ ^{white Canadian,} they wasn't easy going either, you know. You know, a couple of time, eh? You know, halfway so close to ^{the,} you know, I was, okay? So I had quite a few schoolmates for night school, eh? You know, the times I went. One schoolmate and they called him George ^{ie} McKay. He was come to Vice-President of a Canadian Fishing Company.

Ms. Oh, really?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. And Eddie Moore ... he's President of Norpac Fisheries now. And another one is... oh, ~~he~~ ^{we} [he] used to be called Black, you know, Black ^{Debsin}.

Ms. Was it black?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, ^{So, I,} ~~it was all~~... you know, I just went ^{to the} ~~through there~~, you know, night school, you know, you know a couple of months every year, about ^{two} ~~three~~ year. So I never even pay attention to check up ^{the} real name, you know. (laughs) We just called him ^{Blackie} ~~the blackie~~. And he was almost a head staff of the, you know, RCMP office in Vancouver.

Ms. Really?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. I was surprised, when the war started. And then, when the war started, we Japanese-Canadians got to be registered, you know. Once in every month, you see, to the RCMP's office, you know, where we ^{state} ~~stay~~, you know, ~~and~~ what we're doing, you know. Such a ^{pure thing, right,} eh? So they know where we are. Okay? And ^{first} ~~these~~ time I went up to RCMP's office, I met him there. Now, almost about fifteen years to twenty years, almost twenty

years, we never met again, after we quit night school, eh?

Ms. Yes.

Mr. Nitta: And I was a friend. So he treated me real good, you know. Always give me the special permit, you know, and if I want to go to, say, any different town or city, wherever I want to go, right? *Look for a job, just* that. Yeah, he give me the... you know, it's a special privilege, you know. You know, account of a schoolmate, eh? But a friend is a help.

Ms. So was it through your friend that you found... *that* you moved to Kamloops during the war?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. Yes.

Ms. Uh-huh. And you went as an independent family?

Mr. Nitta: Yes. We... I had my uncle, my father's brother was, you know, doing a farm there, *farming*. And that's another reason I went to there, for a vacation, you see?

Ms. I see.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. But I never stayed there with the uncle more than a couple of months. I was... I been spend about seven years in *duration* ~~a division~~ of war in Kamloops district, eh? 'Cause they don't allow us to come back to the coast. Even a couple of years after the war is over, you know. I don't know why. They force us to stay inland, eh?

Ms. Uh-huh. That's right. What kind of work did you manage to get in Kamloops?

Mr. Nitta: Oh, I did everything. Farming and logging, sawmill. Anything I could *take it* ~~have taken~~, you know.

Ms. And where did you live?

Mr. Nitta: Well, it's... Kamloops is headquarter, you know, but I took a job you know, oh, about fifty mile that way and fifty mile another way, you know. (laughs)

All around Kamloops, you know.

Ms. I see. And your family was there, too, with you? Your wife and your children?

Mr. Nitta: Um-hmm. Yeah.

Ms. What were you doing when the war broke out? Were you fishing at that time?

Mr. Nitta: I was, yeah. I was packing the fish.

Ms. You were packing fish?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I had owned the boat, you know. Oh, about three or four boats. And...

Ms. Uh-huh. And you had your own fish packing plant?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I was ^{own} ~~on~~ fish... you know, processing plant, too you know.

Ms. Processing?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah.

Ms. Uh-huh. Where were these plants?

Mr. Nitta: Located on Mayne Island. M-a-y-n-e. You know.

Ms. Yes, I've heard of it.

Mr. Nitta: This side of ^{the} Active Pass. Yeah, you know. ~~If~~ ^{From} ~~you want to~~ go to Victoria from Vancouver?

Ms. Yes...

Mr. Nitta: It's left hand side of the Active Pass, yeah.

Ms. I've heard that there were fish packing plants there and there were quite a few Japanese people on Mayne Island.

Mr. Nitta: Oh, yeah. There used to be hundreds of them working during the winter months. Yeah.

Ms. What happened to your fish packing plant and your boats, during the war?

Mr. Nitta: Well, they are more or less, you know, seized, like, you know. They don't realize... they don't give us a credit as a Canadian. They just took us, "Enemy Alien" division of war. How you like that?

Ms. Yeah, I know. It wasn't very good at all.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. You know. Whether you are Canadian citizen or Canadian born, -- No, no way. As long as Japanese face, as long as a black hair on the head, no, you are enemy alien. Yeah.

Ms. The Security Commission was supposed to give people fair money value for the property they took, and I know that didn't happen very often...

Mr. Nitta: No, no. Not... that's why... I sue the government myself, you know.

Ms. You did sue it?

Mr. Nitta: Yes.

Ms. Oh, did you?

Mr. Nitta: And I won the case.

Ms. Huh!

Mr. Nitta: But lawyer, they're dragging the case, you know, three or four or five years and the bills ^{they} come up this high. So, I won the case, but the lawyers took the biggest part. You know, I got only maybe twenty-five per-
cent, what I... amount of ^{monies} ~~government~~ the government pay us. So we give up.

Ms. Oh, yes.

Mr. Nitta: So I felt like I'm going to sue the lawyer again, you know. (laughter) You know? But...

Ms. Was the American government more fair to...

Mr. Nitta: Oh yeah.

Ms. What did they do?

Mr. Nitta: They returned everything owned by Japanese-American. They just hold it and take care and they protect all their properties and, you know... own/building owned by the Japanese-American. They just hold it and protect the property and return it. Yeah. Your house, your property, your building. And business. And not only that, any Japanese-American miss the, you know, opportunity to make any earning, you know, ^{duration} ~~division~~ of war,

you know, so I'm pretty sure they give them three thousand dollar each. It doesn't matter who they are, you know.

Ms. Gee. That was very good.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. But our Canadian government immature, you know. ^{You see,} it's a government ^{made} ^[because] ^{ed} as immature as a controlled by... directly or indirectly controlled by English government, you know, up to last war. Okay? So a little bit complicated, you know, compare from United States and here, eh? But now, ^{every year} it's more understanding and realize as a, you know, human right, eh? So younger generation today, it's very ^{lucky} ~~likely~~. I shouldn't have born, you know, seventy years ago, eh? I should have born, you know, fifteen, twenty years ago. I'm very lucky then.

Ms. Excuse me just a moment. (Tape recorder is turned off.)

End of Track 1.

Mr. George Nitta.
January 26, 1978.

Accession No. 3196; Tape No. 1; Track No. 2.

Ms. When the war first broke out, and you were on Mayne Island, were your boats seized?

Mr. Nitta: Oh, you know, they... it's Coast Guard, you know, force them ^{to} bring the boat to...up the river, here.

Ms. Up to Annieville?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. It's about... in the Fraser River, eh? Oh, somewhere between New Westminster and Steveston.

Ms. Yes, that's right.

Mr. Nitta: Oh, it was thousand boats.

Ms. And then did they say you had to come to Vancouver right away? They didn't let you stay on Mayne Island?

Mr. Nitta: No, no. No, we ... You know, that time I had a family in Steveston. We got a fish processing plant in Mayne Island, but it's working on the... season, you know. In a year, eh? Not all year around. But most, you know, every winter, you know, not miss one year, every year I'd be there, with maybe a hundred people. Used to work, about a hundred people who work for us, you know.

Ms. Quite a big number.

Mr. Nitta: Oh, yeah, fisherman and... work out... you know, process the fish, eh? Most of the herrings, food herrings, you know, went to, ^{we was} ~~what is~~ called a "dry, salted herring." It's export to China, see? You know, Shanghai and Hong Kong, you know. Oh yeah, we are doing it year by year. ^{Nearly} you know, ^{fifty} years. And we also depending on that for, you know, a few smaller income during ~~in~~ the winter months, you know. Or... year by year, see.

Ms. But your family was living in Steveston?

Mr. Nitta: Yes.

Ms. Your wife and your children were in Steveston.

Mr. Nitta: Yes, yes.

Ms. I see. And then did you go to Hastings Park in Vancouver, or did you...?

Mr. Nitta: No. No, I didn't go there.

Ms. You didn't go there.

Mr. Nitta: No, I... You see, ^{Dawson?} as he was ^{the} head of the, you know, Security Commission ^{like,} you know? He told me, you know, "Whether your are my friend or not, you've got to evacuate, you know? So ^[since] ~~in~~ ^{the} that's case, you'd better find out... you'd better check up and find out where you could, you know, survive during the duration of the war, eh?"

Ms. I see.

Mr. Nitta: ^{you know,} And/without any big income." So he give me the permission to take the trip from here to any place I want to go, eh? That's the... already war's on, you see? So I went to the Kamloops and see my uncle. ~~And But~~ ^{you know,} he said, ~~And~~ "Well, I've got enough money to, you know, keep ~~all~~ away from starved, you know, for five or six years anyway, so, you'd better come up to Kamloops and stay with me." So I said, "Well, that's a good idea." And, so I did.

Ms. And when you were moving around working at the sawmill and logging and so on, did your family stay with your uncle, or did they...?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, stayed there, yeah.

Ms. I see. Was it... did you have any hard time in Kamloops?

Mr. Nitta: Well, nothing easy, you know. ^{Duration} ~~Division~~ of war. ^{Oh, it's...} It's an entirely different picture... but, you know, ^{you see} ~~duration~~ ^{it's} ~~division~~ of war, ~~is~~ a big propaganda, both sides, you know.

Japan do the same and American do, and the Canadian do the same. You know, big propagandas floating in the air, you know, Every day, by radio, newspaper and everything, eh? So, you know, ^{is lots of} ~~it's hard for~~, you know, people, you know, simple in the mind, they believe that, you know, ~~They~~ don't understand how the war, eh? War is on, like, you know. ^{Lots of place} in the countryside, ~~We~~ can't buy ^{the} ~~that~~, even a packet of cigarettes, you know. ^{Soon as} ~~Since~~ they know that we are Japanese: "No, you get out. No. We ^{have} ~~are~~ no... nothing is... give ~~it~~ to you." Yeah. So we... it's real tough going. Oh, nothing but tough going, you know. (laughs)

Ms. And then after the war, you returned to Mr. Nitta: Yeah. Ms. Marlatt: Vancouver... Did you start to live in Vancouver then, / or did you go back to Steveston?

Mr. Nitta: No, no. I stay, because nothing I can see. I could rent a room in a hotel or rooming house, apartment in Vancouver, but thirty years ago, right after the war, no such accommodation in Steveston. And, you know, so I haven't a house. Nobody... no Japanese got a house...

Ms. Nobody would rent to Japanese?

Mr. Nitta: No, we could rent the house alright, you know, but no such... somebody is living in every house in Steveston.

Ms. Ah... all the houses were taken.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. So whether I like or not, I've got to stay in Vancouver, which I did. And when I came back here, you know Vancouver, no more than three or four hundred people, you know, Japanese-Canadian, you know, Japanese ~~came~~ back, you know. So... few by few coming and, you know, every days and every other days and... now it's almost about seven or eight thousand, eh?

Ms. Yes.

Mr. Nitta: You know, Japanese population in Vancouver

now. It used to be about twenty... yeah, about twenty-five. Twenty to twenty-five thousand you know.*

Ms. In Vancouver alone?

Mr. Nitta: In Vancouver alone.

Ms. Can you tell us what Powell Street used to be like before the war?

Mr. Nitta: Nothing but ^{the} Japanese. Both side. Alexander Street, you know. Say... yes, you know, somewhere a hundred to ~~shall we say~~ ^{I should say} about seven hundred block, eh? ⁱⁿ Alexander Street and Powell and Cordova Street. Three street, nothing but the Japanese. ~~the~~ Whole street, ~~and~~ both side, you know. So they, in Vancouver, is... white Canadian in Vancouver, they used to be called "Little Tokyo", see? You know. ^{Was [how]} ~~That's the way~~ we are known.

Ms. What were the stores like in those days, along Powell Street? Lots of stores? Little stores.

Mr. Nitta: It's both stores... most of the stores are both sides, you know. And they claim clean ^(cleanest) spot on the whole ~~of the~~ city. You know. Is clean! Talk about clean.

They get up early, you know. Japanese is, ^{Those senior,} ^{old-} you know, ~~all the~~ time

Japanese?

Ms. Uh-huh?

Mr. Nitta: They're... they like it real clean, more than any nation, any nation in the whole world, you know. On the street?

Ms. Yeah.

Mr. Nitta: They get up about seven o'clock. First thing ~~that~~ they do is sweeping, then, you know, even wash the street, you know.

Ms. Oh really?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. You don't believe it if you don't see it. So the street was, oh, so clean, just like, you know, church.

* sic. According to Census of Canada tables p.413 of Ken Adachi's book, The Enemy That Never Was, in 1941 There were 22,096 Japanese in B.C. and 8,458 Japanese in Vancouver.

Ms. Gee. (laughs) When you came back to... after the war, what did Powell Street look like? Had it changed?

Mr. Nitta: Oh, ~~it's~~ nothing but a ghost town. It's a real ghost town, you know. Lots of, you know, other people.

Ms. Lots of other people who had moved in?

Mr. Nitta: Yes. Yes, had come in. Oh, it's a different... entirely different, you know. But it's a ... war is a bad game, you know. You know, I ~~can~~ could think you know, Maybe... wasn't too many, but maybe few others, you know, white American, or English, you know, Maybe has been suffered maybe more than we did in Canada here, you know. I could see that, because war is, you know... you can't even think about, you know, no more way, eh? You know. Everybody's so excited/^{and}you know, it's... (clears throat)

Ms. If... Well I want to ask you, you know the excuse that white people give, who were here at that time, for the Japanese evacuation, sometimes they say, "Well it was for the safety of Japanese-Canadians, because it was a wartime." Did you ever feel that it would have been dangerous for you to stay here? [telephone rings]

Mr. Nitta: As far as my memory, I don't see any. I don't see any. You see, and special one case happen. It's a soldier, young fellow, you know. (Another voice interrupts and tape is turned off, then on again.)
(hardly)? believe it, you know. Is a special case... was happen. It's one soldier/^{young soldier,}went to, you know, beginning of the war, eh?... to the Japanese young fellow, Canadian-born too. He was owned a little grocery store, somewhere, you know, Commercial Street. He went to the... just a little confectionary store, for holdup. Okay? And he was young, so he refused to give ~~him~~ anything, and ~~they~~ fight. Now, I think he ^{had} have a gun and ~~they~~

shot him to death, you know. He killed the Japanese
guy... owned the... young ^{fellow} ~~boy~~ ~~that~~ owned the gro--...
you know, confectionary store... grocery store. But
that days, making me real mad, you know. You know
why? Everybody talk like ~~you're~~ ^{you know.} heros,/ Never mind
that you killed one Japs, you see. And send this
soldier to the front. ~~Get to~~ ^{Let that} be a... You know,
send him as a right aways,
and never mind if ~~they~~ ^{he} kill the Japs, you know.

Ms. That's very poor. Very bad.

Mr. Nitta: You know. And, you know, you can't even think
about this ^{you know,} ~~through the~~ common, ~~or in an~~ ordinary way, eh?
You know, holdup and to kill him was still... you know,
everybody stood up and told the public, "Never mind kill
the Japs." Let's send the boys to the front, you know.
It's, you know... for the fighting in Europe or Africa,
I don't know. They say, "Send him to the front." You
know. Now, this way, we believe we are protected by
justice of the nation, the ^{law.} / Don't we?

Ms. Yes.

Mr. Nitta: (laughs)

Ms. Did he get off? Did the soldier?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, I couldn't tell you, because ~~the~~ ^{duration}
~~division~~ of war, you know. And every day's paper, you
know, and the radio, they talk like, you know, crazy,
you know. Oh, you know, ~~how do~~ ^{hardly} believe it, you know? I
don't think you could believe it, even ^{now} ~~when~~ I'm telling
you. There is a monument, you know, in/Stanley Park,
as you know, as the Japanese sacrifice their life for
the last war... First World War, eh? You know, the
people, you know, scream ^[their] head off... "Move that monument!"

Ms. Really?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. Gee, I was so sad. What's the differ-
ence? They sacrificed their life, you know. You know,
only one life, but they're willing to sacrifice their life,

and they did, for Canadian sake. What's the difference of second war or third war? You know? And (laughs) it's a jo--... it wasn't a joke, you know. I'm telling you nothing but the truth, okay? I don't mind ^{could} you/tell the Mayor of Vancouver, or Premier Bennett, you know. If they don't know about it, I could tell them.

Ms. Yeah. I think many young people don't know about it.

Mr. Nitta: No.

Ms. That's why it's good that you can tell us.

Mr. Nitta: You know that cherry trees ^{...} in Stanley Park? They are/cherry tree in Stanley Park?

Ms. Um-hmm?

Mr. Nitta: Donated by our ancestors, you see. Senior people.

Ms. Oh, are they?

Mr. Nitta: Into the...you know, Stanley Park. Because a park. And... you know, it's a nice, you know, blossom time all the cherry, eh? Give you some kind of enjoyment, you know.

Ms. The ones that lead down to the War Memorial.

Mr. Nitta: Now, every cherry tree is grow so big, and old now, you know. But every cherry trees ~~is~~ in the Stanley Park donated by our old timers.

Ms. Do you remember....

Mr. Nitta: Do you know what they say in ^{duration} ~~division~~ of war? And they did, too. You see our Japanese cherry tree, they change the name of Chinese cherry tree!

Ms. Really! (laughs)

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. Gee, I was... What a ^{-? - feeling} War is, you know. (laughs) It's a... ^{meanwhile} time it wasn't a joke, you know.

Ms. So those cherry trees were... had been al-

ready for some years...

Mr. Nitta: Oh, quite a few years before the war, you know.

Ms. Oh, really?

Mr. Nitta: A good ten years. Maybe more than that.

Yeah. Our, you know, senior people donated. So you put in, in your magazine, ^{This true light?} this is too late. We got to avoid such nonsense, you know, in the future, eh? Because that's a bad business. You know, discrimination is real bad. Nobody ⁱⁿ a gain. It doesn't matter what race you ^{was} ~~are~~ born, you know. We've got to forget about ~~it~~, because we are... you know, coming out, ~~just us~~, through the same nature. It doesn't matter what the colour's the skin, you know. Could it be Canadian, ^{make} is a Canadian. Shouldn't be/a difference by colour of the skin, eh?

Ms. That's right.

Mr. Nitta: Don't you think I'm right.

Ms. I agree. Yes, definitely. Going back to before the war, Mr. Nitta, do you remember the Depression?

Mr. Nitta: Yes.

Ms. Can you tell us about it?

Mr. Nitta: Oh, it's a ... you don't believe it, you know. It's a real hells. No job nowhere, and... I should have said a good fifteen, twenty percent, you know, in the population in the city here, just about ready to starve. And I seen it, ^{Through} ~~in~~ my own eyesight, you know, even my own sight, two or three of them try to pick up something from a garbage can in the alley, you know. I seen two or three of them myself. So I hear is hundred, hundred of them was doing it. 'Cause you, no job nowhere, even you wanted to work, you know... doesn't matter... anybody willing to work, any job, they could take it, eh? But no jobs nowhere. Nothing. Everything is stuck. ^{By} economical. Somewhere, you

know. And United State, the same way. But it wasn't just as bad as it was here, you know. Oh, it was bad.

Ms. Did you... do you remember the...

Mr. Nitta: But I was... but that time, you know, is a fisherman only group was very lucky. Because as long as they has market for the fish, well, you know, we make a few dollars. So, beside, we used to be fishing for a big company, like, you know? And the company^{to,} you know, help the fisherman just in case^{of} you stuck for money, like, you know? They always, you know, to help them, you know? So...

Ms. Which company was that?

Mr. Nitta: I was fishing^{oh,} /two or three different company, you know. Started from thirty.../1930, I think.^{yeah,}

Ms. That's right.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, 1930 to 1933 just *about finish*.

Oh, it was terrible. Real, real... You know, was... Just about as good as twenty percent population in the city's ready to starve.

Ms. Do you remember the young men coming into Vancouver looking for jobs, that came out on the trains?

Mr. Nitta: Oh, it's... hundred ~~and~~ hundreds ^{coming} ~~would come in,~~ the into /Vancouver, you know. But... because I believe ~~there~~ may be other provinces ~~were~~ maybe even worse than here, maybe, which I never know, you know. Because I was in Vancouver ⁱⁿ and this coast, you see. No, I hate to see... I don't want to see any more Depression like that for anybody life. Not for my life, you know. Anybody ^{to be...} life, you know. Oh, it's a real...oh, going / it's a thousand time worse if a Depression like that come,eh?

Ms. Yeah.

Mr. Nitta: *There be...just about a little war then. You know?*

Ms. Did you actually hear of anyone who died of hunger during that time?

Mr. Nitta: I don't hear anybody, you know. You know, starve

to death. No, no. That day's no welfare, nothing, you know.

Ms. Yes, that's true.

Mr. Nitta: No pension, and... (clears throat) So, compare that time to today, it's entirely different.

Ms. Around Powell Street in "Little Tokyo" during the Depression, were there associations or societies that helped the Japanese-Canadians. Or churches that helped them?

Mr. Nitta: No, they... you know, one thing, they are quite a bit more industrial, you know, nature. More than... quite a bit more than other races are, you

know. They don't depend on anybody ^{progress (?)} They sink ^{ing} and they go to survive ~~by~~ themselves, you know. ^{People go} So they work. ~~They~~ work in the sawmill, no job ~~at~~ sawmill, they are just too happy to do... even to help the shoeshine, you know. Anything that come, eh? Anything they could see. Yet I see a couple, three, what I told you a few minutes ago, you know, pick up a few things from a garbage can, was a Japanese, too, you know.

Ms. Oh, were they?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah.

Ms. Did many people leave the city to look for work?

Mr. Nitta: Oh, I believe so.

Ms. Uh-huh.

Mr. Nitta: Oh, I believe so. I was young and, you know, and I don't see... I don't acquainted to many old people, like, you know. We been... work together among the young people, you know. ^{I was real...} ~~As we are~~ young yet, and... So, oh, I been ~~at~~ work at everything, that time, yeah. Railways, you know. Logging, sawmill. Everything. Beside the fishing, you know.

Ms. Anything you could get.

Mr. Nitta: Anything I could... yeah, I could see, yeah.

Ms. When you were in Kamloops during the war, were medical facilities open to you, like if you hurt yourself...

Mr. Nitta: Oh yes, oh yes...

Ms. ... could you go to the hospital and they would admit you?

Mr. Nitta: Oh yes. You see, we are what... ^{you} call...

Self- support, you see?

Ms. Yes.

Mr. Nitta: You know, not ~~the~~ helping by the government, okay? So one thing a public institute, like, you know, hospital or, you know, for doctor, they can't refuse for us. So they... and not only that, you know, they was ... you know, groups ~~the~~ people ... most of the/ ~~who~~ understand ~~it for~~ ^{upon us,} you know, ~~just~~ ... you know... our situation, eh? You know, condition what was ~~pronounced~~ ^{duration} like, you know, ~~division~~ of war. And, specially the Chief of Police in Kamloop? You know, town? We knew each other. I knew him, He knew me when he was the Chief of Police at Prince Rupert, you know. So I help him and he help me, you know, quite a bit. You know, we help each other, you know. It's name was Barber you see, Mr. Barber.

Ms. Barber?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, Barber. Just like your barbershop, you know. Yeah. And... well, we are talking about thirty-four years ago now, you know. You see, after the wa--... from the ~~division~~ ^{duration} of war to now is, you know, so... That days ~~is~~... you know, it's... very few Japanese speak enough English to understand it, you know, ~~to~~... you know, ~~worse than~~ white Canadian ~~like~~. So, Mr. Barber, Inspector Barber, is always picking me up, you know, and ^{yeah?} be a interpreter, like, ~~you~~ you know, for all the people eh?

Ms. I see. Yes.

Mr. Nitta: You know. (laughs) Which I did, quite a bit.

Ms. And did you do that in court, there? Did you... in the Police Court?

Mr. Nitta: Well, yes, and... something... *request*
by Japanese, you know. Like, you need a permit going *farther*
so ~~far~~ the... more than fifty mile, they got to have
a permit, you know. Oh, many, many hundred different
case, you know. And Inspector Barber, you know, wanted
me to be an interpreter, like, which I did.

Ms. And did your children go to school in Kam-
loops?

Mr. Nitta: Maybe... oh, about four years, I think. Yeah.

Ms. And then when you came back to Vancouver,
they went to Strathcona School?

Mr. Nitta: Yes. It's a... before the war, it was a
Strathcona School here is, you know, *about* ~~more than~~ fifty per-
cent the children was Japanese children.

Ms. Yes, we've heard that.
Yeah.

Mr. Nitta:/(laughs) Now is about ninety percent Chinese.
(laughs)

Ms. Uh-huh. Yes. Can you tell us a little
more about what Powell Street was like before the war,
because we didn't see it. We have no idea what it used
to be like when there were many Japanese here.

Mr. Nitta: Um-hmm. Well, I hate to tell you, you know,
but they are, you know, real particular people. More
than other, you know, *but* ~~and~~ yet what I hate to see, you
know, *worse than* ~~was then~~ they *are* ~~had~~ copied too much from Japan,
eh? You know, *took* too much idea from Japan. They don't...
they should have understand a little more better as a
part of Canada, eh? That's the only part I, you know,
I thought not... that wasn't right, you know.

Ms. Can you give us some details? Like, you're
talking about old customs from Japan, they would follow?

Mr. Nitta: Um-hmm. Yeah.

Ms. What kinds of things are you thinking of?

Mr. Nitta: Well, ^{is} teaching the... well, maybe that's an idea, too, you know, ^{to} have a Japanese language school in Alexander Street there. I don't know whether you know that ~~one or not~~ ^{well enough}.

Ms. Yes, yes.

Mr. Nitta: You see? And... it's, you know, they teaching a Japanese, you know... oh, customs you know, quite a bit more than they should have, you know, the way I thought myself, you know, because they should have realized *other* Canada, you know. But, maybe nice to know that *two different* culture, eh?

Ms. Uh-huh. That's so, too, yes.

Mr. Nitta: You see? Because that's the only way they could teach us something about Japanese cultures, you know. So my way's maybe not right. I don't know. (laughs)

Ms. Can you tell us where the Buddhist Church used to be before it was in the building where it is now? Now it's on the corner of Jackson and Powell Street.

Mr. Nitta: Oh yes. It's... just ^{about a} ~~for the~~ few years before the war, was Cordova and ... what is it? Next to...
...?.... *Street*----

End of Track 2.

Mr. George Nitta.
January 26, 1978.

Accession No. 3196; Tape No. 2; Track No. 1.

Mr. Nitta: Then before they build that, oh, somewhere ... Victoria, Nanaimo, some... I was about seventeen, eighteen years old, they had another one, old one there somewhere, you know, for the east side, you know.

Ms. Oh, did they?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, yeah, somewhere close to Hastings Park somewhere, you know. Close to. Not exactly, you know, Hastings Park.

Ms. Were you raised a Buddhist at home? Did you go to Buddhist church?

Mr. Nitta: Well, I suppose to but I... you know how the children are, you know. I don't want to go to church very often. Yeah. ^{Go in the} Going to church.

Ms. And the community organizations, were there Japanese associations in Powell Street. I know there were in Steveston. Depending on where you^{'d} come from in Japan, the people from that place all get together? And they meet every once in awhile?

Mr. Nitta: Well, they was helping each other, you know, some... just in case somebody took sick or, you know, and no money and ^{that} ~~bad~~ days, you know, no Welfare Department or nothing, eh? No such, you know, organization at all. here in... connected with the government, you know. So ... and that's why/they had,, you know, in Steveston we had our own hospital too, you know. And own...

Ms. Yes, the fishermen built that hospital.

Mr. Nitta: Yes, yes. And doctor, and the school and everything ... owned by them, you see.

Ms. Um-hmm. That was a great accomplishment.

Mr. Nitta: Yes, you see? And so they're helping each other, you know.

Ms. What about on Powell Street? Where did

people go for a hospital?

Mr. Nitta: I think they went to General Hospital/ ^{I think.} Yeah.
Oh. No, there is one at.... ^{it's} street there. It's
Powell and... Campbell Avenue there. Campbell Avenue,
eh?

Ms. Uh-huh. It's now an old people's home.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, yeah.

Ms. Oh, that ^{was}...

Mr. Nitta: ^{That's the one was...}

Ms. ... that Mount Saint Joseph?

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, yeah... yes. Yeah. That's ^{the one} /... I
believe own... you know, not owned by them, you
know, but they donate it and the City or government help
them and they build that building there. Yeah.

Ms. And would there be white nurses and doctors
or Japanese nurses and doctors?

Mr. Nitta: That time is... about... just about half and
half I think.

Ms. Do you remember the bathhouses on Powell
Street? Did you go to the bathhouse?

Mr. Nitta: Oh yes. Oh, that's... you mean joint baths,
eh?

Ms. Yes.

Mr. Nitta: Oh yes. Yeah. Gee, you've studied it quite a
bit, eh? (laughter)

Ms. Well we find out a little more each time we
talk to somebody, you know.

Mr. Nitta: Oh yeah. That's the biggest enjoyment for the
senior people, you know. You know ^{why?} they quit work
and had a little supper, then they used to be going to
the bath... have a bath, you know. And just like a little
pool, you know. In a warm pool, eh? And, oh they'd talk
nonsense and laugh and joking each other and jump in and
wash down, you know, and... oh, about... you could jump
in fifteen, ^{twenty} at once, you know. Oh, it was real

If...
 big. /you know, two or three, you know, you could ~~go~~
~~swimming~~ in, you know. Oh I think it was four or five
 different place, you know, like that in ^{the} Powell Street.
 Yeah.

Ms. And... were there any sake houses? Where
 you could go and have a drink?

Mr. Nitta: Oh yes, yeah. I don't know whether they had
 a licence or not, but they ^{had} ~~have~~ a licence as a restaur-
 ant, I think, eh? You know. So... There was quite a
 few place.

Ms. Would they be big places or little places?

Mr. Nitta: No, not a big place, but not too small either,
 you know. You know, every place bigger than this house,
 anyway. Yeah. But nothing fancy, you know. You know,
 house or building, you know, nothing ^{took} like
 fancy ways to build, eh? Just build, you know, ^{for} purpose
 only, you know. It's good enough for, you know, service
 for the customers, eh? And you know that... did you ever
 be^{en} in the Japanese restaurant in Powell Street?

Ms. Yes.

Mr. Nitta: Did you?

Ms. Yes.

Mr. Nitta: Did you

Ms. Um-hmm.

Mr. Nitta: Some green... what-you-ma-call-it.... you
 could sit down, eh?

Ms. The tables....

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, yeah.

Ms. ... and you sit on this...

Mr. Nitta: Yeah, both side, yeah.

Ms. Yes. Uh-huh.

Mr. Nitta: Uh-huh. You seen that?

Ms. Yes. Is that what they used to have?

Mr. Nitta: Yes.

Ms. You sit on the floor?

Mr. Nitta: Yes. Sit down, you know.

Ms. And there's a little hole for your feet?
Or did you just sit with your feet crossed?

Mr. Nitta: Sit down, yeah. Just like... that's for
the Canadian, ~~Halfways~~ a Canadian, you know. That's a
kind of compromise, eh?

Ms. Yes, yes. (laughter)

Mr. Nitta: Because, you know, even myself, I can't sit
^{do}
down like everybody/in Japan. One year's... one hour's
^{even}
time, I can't/get up.

Ms. Yes.(laughter) But in the old days on
Powell Street, it would all be sitting on the floor?

Mr. Nitta: In that time, yeah. Oh, exactly like Japan.

Ms. You've come back after the war, to the
neighbourhood, and there's been very few Japanese-
Canadians here. How have you found the neighbourhood
to live in and to raise your children in? Say, in the
1950's and '60's?

Mr. Nitta: You know, very fortunately, you know, after
~~we~~ ^{they} say,
we came back rather anybody we know/ "Welcome"; you know.
^{"For come}
~~"Welcome~~ back," eh? Oh, thousands of them are, you know,
happy to see us come back, you know.

Ms. ^{Do}
/you mean people in the neighbourhood?

Mr. Nitta: People in the neighbourhood, yeah. No, it's
... that part was real good, you know. Because they
know we are, you know, struggles and suffering and
everything, you know, ^{duration} ~~division~~ of war, eh? And any-
body we knew before the war, oh, they were so...

welcome, you know, us to come back.(Phone rings and
tape recorder is turned off, then on again.)

Ms. Did you start fishing again? What did
you do?

Mr. Nitta: Yes, yes I did. I went to Skeena, you know. I
came back. I took a little money with me when I went to
Kamloop for a vacation, eh? But I spent all the money,
I come back, just very close to the bare foot and ~~the~~

bare hand, eh?

Ms. Oh.

Mr. Nitta: So I have no choice, you know. And all I knows is nothing but the fishing game, you know. Something working on the water, eh? So I took, you know, a little ~~that~~ opportunity and went to Skeena River, fishing, you know.

Ms. Did you...what did you do for a boat? Did you rent a boat, or did the company lend you a boat?

Mr. Nitta: Yes, the company rent the boat for me, yeah. Oh, they was... you know, welcome us, because they knew we... is good fishermen, like, eh?

Ms. I have heard that there were some fishing companies that sent representatives back to contact Japanese during evacuation...

Mr. Nitta: Oh yeah, when we was evacuated...

Ms. ... yes.

Mr. Nitta: Oh yeah. Yeah, that's...

Ms. Did that happen to you?

Mr. Nitta: No. Because I, you know, ^{soon as} ~~since~~ I... ^{soon as} ~~since~~ the government give us... announce you know, ^{official} which we ~~are~~, you know, Canadian-Japanese you know, to... a chance to come back to Vancouver coast, you know. So I did almost maybe... ^{first} the groups that came back to Vancouver. You know. Before the... most of the, you know... everybody come back, say, you know, gradually, like, you know. A few hundred every year, like, eh? But when I came back, is very few Japanese was in Vancouver yet, you know.

Ms. And you had no trouble when you came back?

Mr. Nitta: No, no. No trouble at all.

Ms. That's good.

Ms. Do you have any....? Neither Carole nor I have any more questions to ask you. Do you have anything else you would like to tell us?

Mr. Nitta: No. (laughs) No, I have... you know, ?

well, when you started thinking about so many, many years, you know, ^{be fight} behind, eh? You know, especially ^{duration} ~~div~~ ^{ion} of war. ^{Not more than be could read?} The way I feel now.

Ms. Well, you have done very well since you came back.

Mr. Nitta: Well, it's, you know, it's... I've been fight for my life, you know. Because, you know, it's... you see, not only anything, you know... I was ^{own} ^{property} ^{and} ~~in~~ the business. It's continued from three different generations, you know: ~~My~~ grandpa and my father and me, you see. You know, between the three different generations, to work hard and build up, you know? And what I had, you know, when the war started, eh? And that damn things are gone.

Ms. Yes. ^{hard enough for}

Mr. Nitta: So I've got to work, ^{in} ~~the~~ three different generation, (laughs) ^{My} time, you see.

Ms. Yes. You have to do as much work as three generations did for you. Yeah.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. So, fortunately, you know, build up inch by inch and what I have today, you know. So, not too bad, and... so I'm going to continue it another couple or three more year, until ^{little baby, you know,} ^{Ferry's} graduate university-- that will be about four to five year, eh? Then... but I don't think I'm going to quit, completely, because you know, it doesn't matter, you know, male or female, you know... nice to have a ^{little} ambition for tomorrow. That's the real... you know, kept your health so good.

Ms. That's right.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah. You know. And if you have no hope in the next day, that's bad, you know. You are... worries get you weak, too, when you come to my age, you know, especially, you know. So... I think... I don't quit. I don't... if I am lucky enough to ^{live} ~~be~~ eighty years old,

I still do something every day.

Ma. Good for you.

Mr. Nitta: Yeah.

End of Track 1.