

PERSONAL HISTORY (IN BRIEF)

of

Moichiro Tonomura
(Oldest son of four children)
(2 brothers and one sister)

Moichiro Tonomura was born in Shiga Prefecture, Japan, on March 21, 1889, oldest son of a textile merchant. In the year 1900, when he was only 2 years old, his father Senjiro Tonomura immigrated to Canada to seek adventure, wealth and fortune and Moichiro was left, remaining in Japan with his mother Kuni and younger brother Teiji. When he was in Grade 4 (10 years old), his mother joined his father in Vancouver, B.C., and he and his brother were left with relatives to continue with their schooling.

After graduating from the Commercial Middle School at the age of 15, he then in 1913 went to join his parents (together with his brother) who was already in Vancouver (527 East Cordova Street). They were established with a boarding house business catering to non-English Japanese immigrants who were mostly engaged in manual labour employed by sawmill companies in this proximity. His arrival here was an asset to the family by working in sawmills to bring in additional income. Owing to his physical size and stability, at the age of 15 he was capable of handling most jobs required in various plants.

However, his father Senjiro was seeking further adventure and challenge to better his life, and between 1913-1914 (about the commencement of World War II) decided to settle in Mission City, B.C., in or about the same year of Moichiro's arrival here. With the purchase of 20 acres of treed land in Mission City, the family moved to start another new life with a plan to start a fruit farm (which was a new and strange experience). By 1915, clearing of rough treed land was partially completed, just enough to prepare for this new venture. After a lengthy struggle, hard work and grief, this venture was found successful, and this small town became his permanent home.

Married in 1927 to Tsuma, he fathered 2 sons and 2 daughters: in order of age, George, Betty, Jean and John. The family resided in Mission City until the outbreak of World War II, experiencing the forced Japanese mass evacuation to an area a minimum of 100 miles inland from the Pacific Coast, where he was sent to a concentration camp in Angler, Ontario and the rest of the family to the Slocan Valley in Lemon Creek to a family relocation camp for the duration of the war.

The family was re-united in 1946 and repatriated to Japan and started another new life in a war devastated country (started a small grocery store). During this period the two daughters Betty and Jean both had married Americans and immigrated to the United States. In 1955-1956, the two sons, George and John decided to return to Canada hoping to establish a more secure life. In 1961, Moichiro and his wife Tsuma were able to join their two sons here in Vancouver and since the two daughters were already residing in the vicinity of Seattle, Washington, they were also constantly in contact. After his return to this country, he was employed in the foundry company until 70 years of age.

His comfortable retired life from 70 years of age has been a very short one, owing to his wife's lengthy illness: he was occupied 24 hours a day in caring for her until her passing.

At that time, he started attending the church. When I moved from Toronto to Vancouver to be a minister of a Japanese speaking congregation of the Vancouver Japanese Gospel church the Sunday morning service was held at the Sunday school hall of the Reformed Episcopal church. The congregation started out with only two members, Mr. Soya Soga and Mr. Tonomura, and soon after he accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and was baptized at the Ward Memorial Baptist Church in 1965. At first, his wife intended to be baptized at the same church, but she was in the Holy Family Rehabilitation Hospital and was baptized on her bed on the same night.

It is quite rare for Japanese people to convert from another religion to Christianity after the age of 60, but spiritually he had grown so fast, and until the age of 90 he had attended the morning services almost every Sunday. He was a model Christian and an unsunk spiritual hero in our church.

No doubt he has experienced many, many hardships and much grief through many difficult times, socially, domestically, and economically, from the primitive era, through World War I and II till this technically advanced age of today. You could say that he was very fortunate considering all his hardships, experiencing these multiple historic events; and to see the world mature into a place where most people are able to live in peace and comfort was always his dream.

We truly miss him very much, but we can meet him again in heaven, because Jesus said that "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

He is survived by his only sister (Mrs. Sue Yoshida), four of his children, George, Betty, Jean and John, with eleven grandchildren and fifteen great-grandchildren.