

The good doc who licked injustice

The surprising thing about Dr. Masajiro Miyazaki is that he never was embittered about what happened to him and his family.

Bad enough that in 1942 they were among 17,000 men, women and children who were herded off the West Coast and into wartime internment camps. Their only crime was being Japanese.

For Miyazaki, it meant leaving a busy medical practice in Vancouver to become the doctor for 1,000 internees in camps in the Bridge River-Lillooet area.

Three years later, Miyazaki, his wife and two daughters got a break of sorts. Old Doc Patterson had died in Lillooet and the town needed a replacement.

The good burghers of Lillooet petitioned the authorities to release Miyazaki and his family from the camp if he agreed to become the village doctor.

The Miyazakis rented the main floor of the elegant and gabled Casper Phair place, circa 1890s. Miyazaki hung up his shingle there but he couldn't buy the house. It was against the law for Japanese to own property in Lillooet.



Here was a man who'd been rooted out of Vancouver, interned for three years and now was good enough to be the village doctor, but unacceptable as a property owner. It didn't matter much because Japanese didn't have the vote then, either.

Somehow, Miyazaki was able to forgive and forget. For a good many years he was Lillooet's only doctor. It was a frontier practice. This doctor made house calls by car, freight-train caboose or railway speeder, rowboat, on horseback or slog-ging through knee-deep snow.

He also became the town's Mr. Reliable — a village commissioner for five years and the man they turned to, to organize an ambulance service, raise money for a Sunday school hall for St. Andrew's United and to serve as the mainstay for boy scouting in the area.

The Miyazakis were able to buy the Phair place after the property law was rescinded. The scout troop always got to use their front lawn for fund-raising Christmas tree sales.

In 1970, the year Miyazaki became a freeman of the village, Lillooet's weekly newspaper described him as a "very modest and unassuming gentleman."

There were even greater honors to come, among them scouting's Medal of Merit and a 1977 Order of Canada for community service.

These days, widower Miyazaki is a patient at Kamloops' Royal Inland Hospital. His kidneys have packed in and he needs dialysis treatment three times a week. He turns 84 next week.



MASAJIRO MIYAZAKI
'water under the bridge'

On the phone from his hospital bed, his voice is as dry as ashes when he explains how he was able to forgive and forget 40 years ago.

"I accepted things the way they were and become part of the community," he said. "Now it's all water under the bridge."

There is an ironic measure of his forgiveness in the way he disposed of the house he couldn't buy when he first went to Lillooet.

Last week, Dr. Miyazaki donated the old Phair place, worth \$100,000 now, to the village of Lillooet so that it can be preserved as a heritage site.