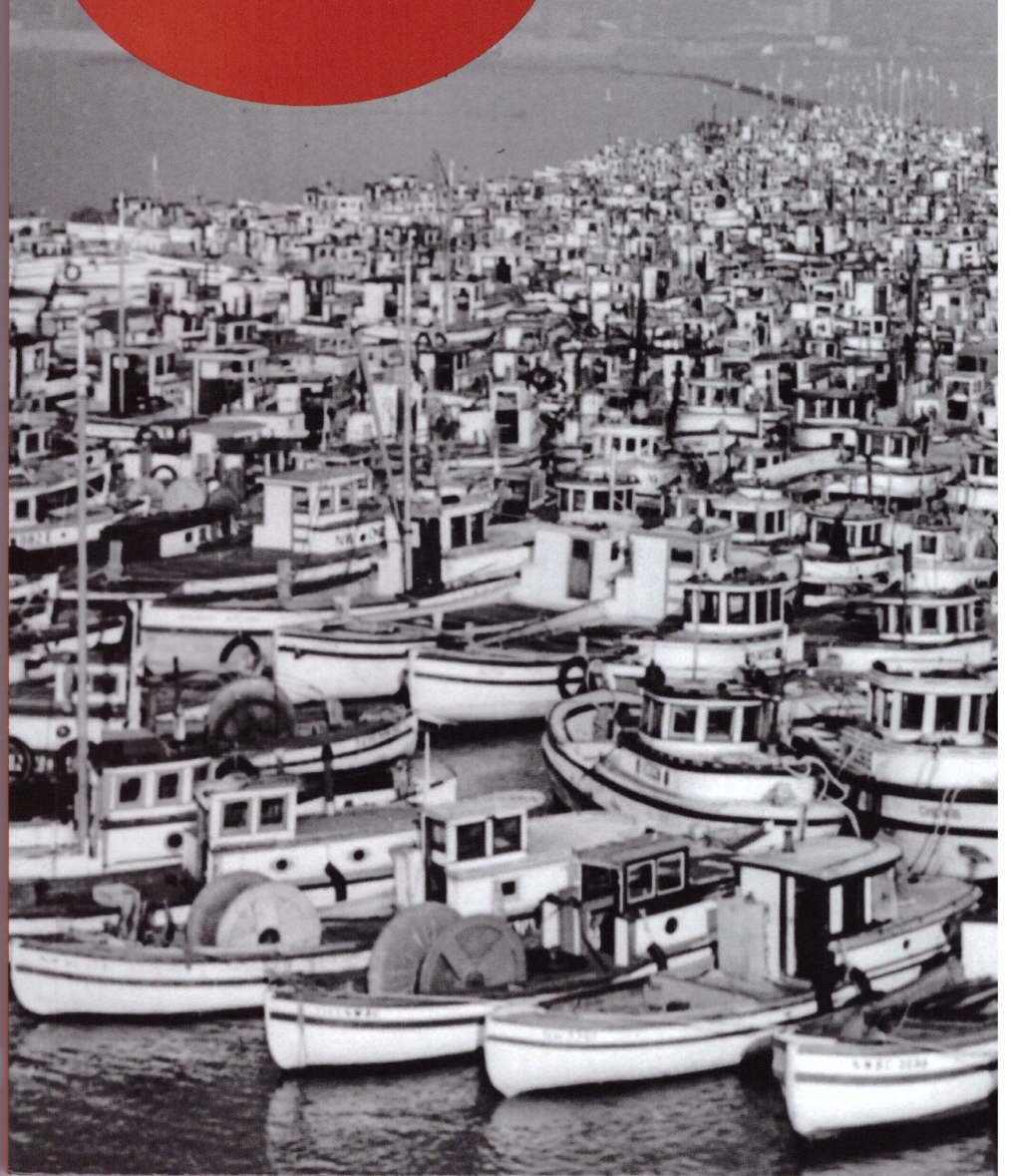


SHIKATAGANAI

IT CAN'T BE HELPED

SUMI KINOSHITA



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Beginnings

New Country, New Adventures

Like many immigrants first arriving in a new country, my parents struggled to make a living. Economic hardships and racial tensions compounded their difficulties.

The first Japanese settler in Canada was 19-year-old Manzo Nagano who likely jumped ship in New Westminster in 1877 before making his home in Victoria, BC. Hearing of Manzo's successes, first as a pioneer and later as an entrepreneur, others from all over Japan began to follow.¹

Since the mid-1700s British Columbia was settled by mainly British and European immigrants, and the intention was to keep British Columbia as a British colony. Due to the need for laborers, British Columbia was unable to exclude the new settlers from entering the country, but the early BC settlers being proud

¹ Historical information is drawn from: N. Rochelle Yamagishi, *Japanese Canadian Journey, The Nakagawa Story*, (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2010); Pamela Hickman & Masako Fukawa, *Righting Canada's Wrongs: Japanese Canadian Internment in the Second World War*, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., 2011) and Rose Murakami, *Ganbaru: the Murakami Family of Salt Spring Island*, (Salt Spring Island, BC: Japanese Garden Society of Salt Spring Island, 1992)

3217 Shelly St.

Victoria, BC

My paternal Aunt Toki moved to Victoria, BC alone and married Mr. Tamashiro. They persuaded my parents to join them. To escape the hard life in Kelowna, my parents moved to Victoria, BC in 1935 with their three small children- Diane, David and Ken. This move brought about some positive changes for them. My maternal grandmother and my mothers' siblings were by then living in Ucluelet on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. My maternal Uncle Soichi was a fisherman and was married to my Auntie Kimi; they had two children. Her youngest sister, my maternal Auntie Lily, single, worked in a cannery. Another maternal Auntie Kimiye was married to Shuzo Tsubota, had four children and lived in Port Alberni. They were able to give help and support to my parents.

My parents purchased a small one acre piece of property on which they built their first house and settled down to raise their family. Their new address became 3217 Shelley Street.

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1985 - Courtesy Private Collection - Amy Chan, George Morisawa, Sumi Kinoshita visits old Victoria house (now renovated).

My mother said, “Dad and I built the house together. The foundation was mainly rocks picked up by Diane and David. Together we mixed the rocks and cement in the wheelbarrow. The house had no insulation and no ceiling — just rafters. The floor was so drafty the carpet lifted whenever it was windy out and everyone helped hold it down.” We as children gleefully jumped on the carpet to hold it down as it buckled up here and there whenever the wind blew through the basement and up through the living room floor. As rustic as the house was my parents must have felt like they were living in a castle after living in such a humble shed in Kelowna.

My mother explained how they bought 20 chickens and 30 rabbits to raise for food. One day the rabbits escaped when someone forgot to close the door of the rabbit cage. One can only imagine the commotion it caused with the rabbits scampering about everywhere. My father was furious as we ran around trying to catch as many rabbits as possible. We did manage to save a few.

Most escaped and made their home in the Chavez Creek bank. Did they ever multiply in their new found home and freedom!

In order to feed their family which by now had grown to six, my parents raised cauliflower, carrots, beets, scarlet runners, lettuce and tomatoes to earn extra money. My father spaded the garden causing holes in his boots from the constant digging. Not able to afford new ones, he wrapped gunny sacks around his boots to make do while he continued digging.

During the summer my father (known as "Kane-san") worked on an ocean-going cable ship with my uncle, Mr. Tamashiro, the chief cook on the ship. This was the way my father learned some cooking skills which held him in good stead in later years. When my father was away, a friend kindly took the vegetables into town to sell for us. This same friend taught my mother how to write Haiku poetry. Writing poetry eventually became an excellent hobby for my mother providing a venue for expressing her emotions.

My brother David also remembers trips to Beacon Hill Park and going downtown with my mother while my father was away on the cable ship. She quietly put money aside for such occasions. He also remembers helping our mother water the vegetable garden and walking to the local dairy farm to buy a five-cent quart of milk. On the days my father had off from working on the cable ship, he would arrive home carrying boxes of Japanese oranges, coconuts, and other treats and was greeted with squeals of delight from all of us little children.

My brother David fondly recalls playing with his friends Raymond and David Hanson and watching their father build things. The boys had fun building their own soap-box cart from an apple box using rope for steering. These boys all attended Cedar Hill Elementary School a mile and a half from their homes. On the walk, they enjoyed eating the juicy apples which they plucked off

3217 Shelly St.

the trees along the roadside. During recess they had fun sliding down a solid rock hill on their backsides. I remember watching them go off to school, books in hand, passing the large oak trees while shadows of the oak leaves danced off their backs as they ate their apples. Later, when the U.S. and Canada became involved in the war with Japan and the Canadian government forced the Japanese Canadians to leave the West Coast, the Hanson's brought us hand-knitted toques, mitts, and socks when they came to say goodbye.

After the fish cannery season ended my mother's youngest sister — my Auntie Lily, fondly known as "Tomichan" often came to babysit. David remembers how he and the others often snuggled up to her while she knitted. When my Auntie Lily's fiancé Ming Mah came over to visit sometimes brother David would be allowed to climb into Ming's green Ford Coupe. He then would attempt to work the long floor gear shift. What a lot of fun for a young boy.

Oak trees also graced our property. There was a large hollow made by the enormous roots where we children played house. Much to our delight the chickens laid their eggs in there as well, making it a treat for us to go looking for the eggs.

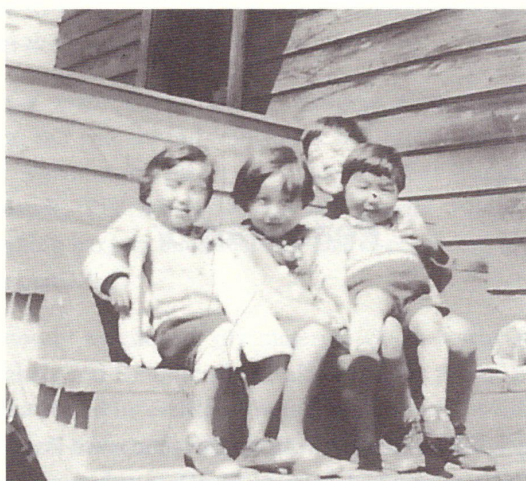


1940-Courtesy Family Collection - Victoria, Diane (standing)-
David (far left) clockwise- Amy, Sumi, George (Ken, away).

My sister Amy and I often visited my grandmother, Auntie Lily and my Uncle Soichi and Aunt Kimi Nakata. I have memories of being carried onto their fishing boat in Ucluelet in the Nootka Sound on the western side of Vancouver Island.

Although my parents continued to eke out a living and our material possessions were still meager, life in Victoria was a great improvement compared to the harsh days living in the Kelowna shed. They now owned their own home, and because the Depression had lifted by the end of the thirties, the economy was improving. Life in Victoria was relatively calm for my parents, and by 1942 three more children were added to their growing family: my sister Amy was born in 1936; I was born in 1938, and my brother George in 1939.

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1941- Courtesy Family Collection - Victoria, Sumi,
Amy beside George on David's knee

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