

Aug. 27, 2012

Aileen's Story 2

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My name is Aileen Reiko Yokota (nee Takata). I was born a breeched baby to Reiji and Tokiwa (nee Ohori) Takata October 8, 1941 in Ocean Falls B.C. My father was born in Hiroshima, Japan February 20, 1909 the youngest of six siblings. My mother was born in Vancouver, B.C. May 4, 1917 the middle of six siblings. However, she was raised in Hiroshima till after her High school graduation and returned to Vancouver B.C. My grandparents on both sides were also born in Hiroshima.

On my father's side, the Takata clan had a Japanese Tea Garden in the Victoria, Gorge Park started by Mr. Joe Kishida and uncle Hayato Takata in 1907. My father Reiji came to Victoria B.C. from Hiroshima as a 19 year old to join his older brothers, Hayato and Kensuke who came to Canada 1903. Uncle Kensuke and my father worked at Rivers Inlet near Ocean Falls doing work in sawmills and fishing. In reference to the original Tea Garden, many years later, my cousin Toyo Takata (1920 – 2002) re-established a new Takata Tea Garden in the mid-1990s within the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific 505 Quayle Road south of Bchart Gardens. A plaque is placed in front of the Tea Garden in honor of Toyo Takata's memory. Toyo wrote the "Nikkei Legacy" the story of Japanese Canadians from Settlement to Today published in 1983. My husband Stan and I were able to visit that plaque and garden in 2001 and 2006. This September 8, 2012, there will be a ceremony to commemorate Esquimalt's 100th year of incorporation. Some of the Takata descendents – George and Dotty Takata with son David, Toshie Yokoyama, and Marie Matsui will be at that Gorge Park surrounded by Japanese – style bridge, wooden gate with the Takata family crest, large stone lantern, small water falls, a pond and many Japanese plants.

As a young man, my father enjoyed baseball, ping pong, a Japanese card game "gaaji". He liked photography taking photos of the Takata Tea Garden as well as many events in Ocean Falls. In his retirement years, he took great pleasure in finding tree trunks or roots and polishing them into interesting sculptures. He loved to take people on many different trips including travelling north for Matsutake (mushroom found under pine needles)

For a young Japanese, he was tall, lean and good-looking. In May of 1940, he married my mother Tokiwa Ohori. My mother was a Japanese language school teacher from 1937 to 1940 under Principal Mr. Tsutae Sato with his wife Hanako at the "Gakuyukai" on Alexander Street. My husband and I met Mr. and Mrs. Sato while we were living in Vancouver 1965 to 1968. In the 1970's, we visited them from Toronto when he gave us his autographed book. Thirty two pages of the book are in English. This section is entitled "Building the Bridge" by Roy Ito. The rest of the book is in Japanese with many photos of the staff. Recently, at the JCCCentre, I was privileged to meet Mrs. Kamitakahara now 103 years old who taught with my mother at the same Vancouver Language School. Co-incidentally, her daughters attended Jarvis Collegiate Institute with me during the 1950's in Toronto.

My mother (1917-1948) was born to Mr. Chiyoto Ohori (1873-1963) and Mitsuno Tachiyama. For a number of years, her parents operated a rooming house on Powell Street in Vancouver, where my mother and one of her sisters Yaeko Ebisuzaki (1919-1997) were born. The family returned to Hiroshima where my mother was raised till her graduation. While in Japan, my mother received her certificate for

Master of Ikebono flower arrangement. I was told that she was a quiet, gentle person who had a talent for making garments from patterns she designed. To this day, I have her 66 year old Singer Sewing machine which still works.

In February of 1942, my father sold his photography equipment, bought train tickets and travelled to Toronto before the nightmare of the mass evacuation of all Japanese from the West Coast of B.C. At that time, there were very few Japanese living in Toronto. I remember the Hirabayashi family helped us find an apartment building where the Jewish community accepted us. Other families I remember were names like Sugai, Kato, Nakashima and Ohi. My father found employment as a cook at the french "La Chaumiere Restaurant" on Church Street. My brother Ken was born January 12, 1943. So living from an apartment led to purchasing a house at 46 Belmont Street. I remember starting Kindergarten at Jesse Ketchum P.S. in 1946. My mother was expecting with my youngest brother Gordon who was born June 25, 1947. My mother's pregnancy was complicated by a lump in her abdomen; sadly the lump was cancerous and ten months later, she died on April 16, 1948 before her 31st birthday. This left my father to raise my baby brother Gordon, 4 1/2 year old Ken and myself at 6 1/2 years. During those difficult years, my Aunt Yaeko, Uncle Kojiro, (Ebisuzaki) along with our relatives the Takata family supported us especially at Christmas, New Years and all through our childhood years.

From August 1948 to September 1949, Mr. & Mrs. Seitaro Fujimoto and their two sons and two daughters, all older than I came from Greenwood B.C. to look after us as my dad went to work. Ten of us squeezed into our small three-bedroom row-house which was only 12 foot wide. It is interesting that today, that house located in a prime area near the Rosedale subway station is worth over a million dollars. The Fujimotos kept in touch after they moved. For another year and a half, Mrs. Kimura and her son Nobby who was in his late 20's looked after us while my dad worked at the Canadian Pacific Railway at the Round House near the Lakeshore. Nobby's older brother Ron Kimura invited us kids to his farm in Pickering during the summer and holidays. The Kimura family had children close to our age which made it fun. From the time I was 9 or 10 years, we went to a subsidized Daycare next to the Jesse Ketchum P.S. where we attended. As a point of interest, Nobby Kimura lived his senior years at Momiji as did his brother Ron until their deaths. Another special event relating to our childhood caregivers, occurred on January 28, 2012, when we reunited at Clare McCabe's (Fujimoto) 80th birthday gathering. It was good to meet with her younger sister Margaret Rose Fujimoto as well.

My earliest memories goes back to the 1940's regarding any discrimination experienced. As we were the only Japanese Canadians in our public school, a few children used words like: DP, Jap, Chink; however, in high school we felt no trace of discrimination as there were more Japanese Canadian students in the 1950's. My ability to memorize Bible Verses at the Salvation Army's Sunday School, Brownies, Girl Guides all helped me to integrate more with the Canadian community.

My father impressed upon us to excel in our studies; he instilled the importance of hard work, honesty and yet not to make waves or upset situations. Unfortunately, we did not do well at the Japanese Language School on College Street because socializing was more important to us than learning the Japanese language. Had my mother lived, we would have probably excelled. Apparently, I spoke only

Japanese until she died. Yet I am grateful that I did well in High School and Teachers College which led to a successful teaching career of 35 years from 1961 – 1996.

Stan and I first met through friends at the Stone Church and I started attending the Japanese Gospel Church in 1960. After Stan's graduation from Theological College we were married on August 1, 1964 in Toronto with a reception of 120 guests at the Grenadier Restaurant in High Park. In the summer of 1965, we moved to Vancouver where Stan pastored the Vancouver Gospel church and I taught in an elementary school for the three years before returning to Toronto in September 1968 where he was the pastor of the Japanese Gospel Church of Toronto until 1992. After retirement, we became more involved in volunteering at the JCCCentre, Momiji Health Care Society, and the church. This year, Stan received the Ontario Volunteer Service Award for 25 years of volunteering at MHCS.

Since 1996, we enjoy activities such as: curling, lawn bowling, travel, church and family gatherings. Stan has officiated many funerals and weddings; this year he will officiate a second generation wedding with over 500 guests and a Bridal Party of 20 attendants; also a wedding in October at Whistler B.C. for our niece will be special.

The most important event in our marriage was the birth of our son Darryn Kazuo Yokota on December 15, 1972. He is presently a graphic designer looking for his next employment and meanwhile he is helping his partner Teresa Mak, with such things as gardening and renovating their Scarborough home.

What do I feel are my greatest achievements?

One of our achievements has been the building of the Japanese Gospel Church of Toronto where 195 volunteers physically helped to erect the church which officially opened on October 25, 2008. On October 23, 2010, the JGCT celebrated 50 years with photo displays, articles, historical books, memorabilia, guest speakers and a potluck dinner.

A special trip in 1991 occurred when three generations of Yokotas travelled together for a memorable journey out West to celebrate Mr. & Mrs. Tadao/Toshie Yokota's 88th and 77th birthdays respectively. We travelled to Ganges, Salt Spring Island where Toshie had worked in the early 1930's; we travelled to Kelowna, B.C. to visit the gravesite of Inokichi Yokota (1872-1952); we visited Mr. Jim Shirai, the bestman at Tadao & Toshie's wedding in 1935. Finally, we had a reunion of friends from B.C. and Alberta at the Japanese Christian Camp, Sylvan Lake, A.B.

Other achievements were the following: Stan & Aileen won the Scarborough Senior Games gold medals in lawn bowling 2002, 2004, 2006; both of us winning awards in curling; many articles about the church, sports and special trips written for the Nikkei Voice.

Yet, most fulfilling is my spiritual journey giving thanks to hundreds of people who have encouraged me in acts of kindness and caring. "To God be the glory, great things He has done."

"Greatness is not found in possessions, power, position or prestige. It is discovered in goodness, humility, service and character." William Arthur Ward