

# A Japanese Canadian Teenage Exile: The Life History of Takeshi (Tak) Matsuba

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## アブストラクト

この論文は第二世代の日系カナダ人タケシ(Tak)松葉のライフヒストリーに関するケーススタディである。和歌山からカナダに移住した日本人移民から、彼はヴァンクーヴァーで生まれた。この論文の中では、まず第二次世界大戦の始まるまでの幼少期から10代までと大戦中にあった家族の住む家からの強制退去、全私財の強制没収とそれに続く強制収用所での監禁生活、そして大戦終了の際の日本への送還後の経験に触れる。次に彼の終戦後の日本での暮らし、特に占領軍の元で働くことから始まり様々な企業で働いた職歴について述べる。また彼が設立と運営に参加した送還された関西の日系カナダ人グループにおける活動と、彼の退職後の生活にも触れる。最後に他のカナダから送還された日系カナダ人達の経験から、彼の記憶を補完し彼の経験を他の移住者と比較し、この研究がカナダから追放され日本に移り住んだ日系カナダ人の歴史の知識にどのように付け加わるのか考察する。

## Abstract

*This paper presents a life history case study of Takeshi ('Tak') Matsuba, a second-generation Japanese Canadian born in Vancouver to immigrants from Wakayama. It narrates his memories of his childhood and teen years until the beginning of World War II, the subsequent forced uprooting of his family from their home and the dispossession of their family business and all their property, their incarceration in an internment camp, and their exile to Japan at the end of the war. Next it describes his life in postwar Japan, particularly his employment with the American Occupying Forces and then his career with various companies in the private sector. It also deals with his participation in starting and leading the Kansai chapter of an association of Japanese Canadian exiles and his life since retirement. Finally, it discusses how his memories corroborate, complement, and contrast with the experiences reported by other Japanese Canadian exiles and how they add to our knowledge about the history of the Japanese Canadian exiles who stayed in Japan.*

**Key words:** Japanese Canadian, World War II, uprooting, deport, dispossession, internment camp, exile, life history, Occupation Forces

## Introduction

At the end of World War II, almost 4000 Japanese Canadians, many of them naturalized Canadian citizens or children and teenagers who had been born in Canada, were stripped of their Canadian citizenship and “repatriated” to Japan.<sup>1</sup> Compared to the amount of scholarship during the last 40 or so years about various other aspects of Japanese Canadian history, there has been very little research about these virtual exiles, especially those who spent the rest of their lives in Japan. This began to change thanks mainly to Tatsuo Kage who met many of the exiles still living Japan through his role as a member of a Canadian delegation that went to Japan to explain to them the terms of the official apology and redress compensation offered by the Canadian government for the injustices it had perpetrated on the Japanese Canadian community during the war. Kage later interviewed quite a number of them and then summarized and discussed the interviews in his pioneering book, *Nikkei Kanadajin no Tsuiho [The Banishment of Japanese Canadians]* (1998). This book was later translated into English and titled *Uprooted Again* (2012). Another precious collection of life stories told by Japanese Canadian exiles living in Japan is *Japanese Canadian Stories from Japan*, compiled by Nobuko Nakayama and Jean Maeda and published in 2011. Recently a larger-scale research project on exiles still living in Japan, led by Prof. Masako Iino of Tsuda College, has so far surveyed more than 30 subjects issued a positive interim report in 2016<sup>2</sup> followed by another in 2018.<sup>3</sup> So, it appears that in recent years there has been a new and growing interest in this topic.

At the end of his book, Kage expressed the need for more detailed research on

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1 For more detailed discussions of the historical context, see Kage, Tatsuo (transl. Kathleen Chisato Merken). *Uprooted Again: Japanese Canadians Move to Japan After World War II*. Victoria: TI-Jean Press Press, 2012 (1-27); Kirk, Stanley. “Life Histories of Japanese Canadian Deportees: A Father and Son Case Study.” *The Journal of the Institute of Language and Culture (Vol. 21)*, Konan University, March 2017, (3- 42). <http://doi.org/10.14990/00002283>; Sunahara, Ann Gomer. *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company 1981, 2000. [https://www.japanesecanadianhistory.ca/Politics\\_of\\_Racism.pdf](https://www.japanesecanadianhistory.ca/Politics_of_Racism.pdf); Timmons, D.J. “ ‘Evangelines of 1946’ : The Exile of Nikkei from Canada to Occupied Japan.” MA Thesis, University of Victoria, 2011. [https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/bitstream/handle/1828/3475/Timmons\\_DJ\\_MA\\_2011.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/bitstream/handle/1828/3475/Timmons_DJ_MA_2011.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

2 Iino Masako, Takamura Hiroko, Haraguchi Kunihiro. “The Japanese Canadians Who Were Repatriated to Japan Immediately after World War II.” In *JICA Yokohama Kaigai-Ijuu-Shiriyoukan, Kenkyuu-Kiyou II*, 2017 (38-60).

3 Haraguchi Kunihiro. “Japanese Canadians Who Were ‘Repatriated’ to Japan Immediately after WWII: Issues Surrounding Re-Entry to Canada and Domiciliation in Japan.” In *JICA Yokohama Kaigai-Ijuu Shiriyoukan, Kenkyuu-Kiyou 13*, 2018 (49-70).

the life histories of the exiles when he wrote, “At the time of this writing, as far as I know, hardly any of the 3900 odd exiles has written a memoir of their experience. In contrast, a number of books have been published by Nikkei born and educated in this country (Canada) on the subject of the wartime upheavals. It would be a great pity if the accounts of others [i.e. the exiles] were not transmitted to their descendants.”<sup>4</sup> This paper, inspired initially by Kage’s pioneering work, is a detailed case study of the life history of a Japanese Canadian named Takeshi (Tak) Matsuba (hereafter referred to as ‘Tak’), who was born to first generation immigrants from Wakayama. When he was just 15 years old, his family was forcibly uprooted from their life as merchants in the Powell Street area of Vancouver, dispossessed of all their property and livelihood, incarcerated in the Lemon Creek internment camp near Lake Slocan in the eastern interior of British Columbia, and then exiled to Japan after the war. After working for several years for the American Occupation Forces, Tak eventually found employment with various companies in the private sector and had a very successful life as an international businessman. This paper narrates his memories of these various events in his life including his key role in helping to establish and lead the Kansai chapter of a group of the Japanese Canadian exiles. Finally, it briefly discusses how his story corroborates and contrasts with the recollections of other Japanese Canadian exiles, and how it contributes to our knowledge of the history of Japanese Canadian exiles living in Japan.

The gathering of the personal data for this case study mainly utilized a questionnaire followed up with ad hoc questions to fill in gaps in the information. First, a questionnaire consisting of open-answer questions was sent to Tak via email. He typed his answers to the questionnaire and the various follow-up questions sent to him, and sent them back to the writer by email. He was then sent versions of the draft and was asked to fact-check it as well as add any additional recollections that came to mind. Using the data gathered in this way, a narrative of his life history was composed. During this process, it was noticed that Tak is still a skilled typist with a special knack for telling anecdotes in a humorous and interesting manner. Hence, in order to preserve the original flavor of these stories, much of the narrative is presented in Tak’s own words with only minor changes for editing purposes. Additional details were added from a two-part series

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4 Kage, *Uprooted Again*, 138. An exception was the publication (while Kage’s book was still being translated) of a collection of short but illuminating memoirs in *Japanese Canadian Stories from Japan*. Compiled by Nobuko Nakayama and Jean Maeda, Tokyo: 2011.

interview with Tak conducted by Norm Ibuki and published in 2014 on the *Discover Nikkei* website,<sup>5</sup> and from a chapter about Tak in the collection of stories about Japanese Canadians living in Japan compiled by Maeda and Nakayama<sup>6</sup>.

### **Birth and family**

Takeshi (Tak) Matsuba (hereafter referred to as Tak) was born on December 5, 1926 in Vancouver to Kamejiro and Jiyo Matsuba. He is not sure of the exact place of his birth but thinks it was probably at home with the assistance of a midwife. As the firstborn child, he had two younger sisters named Masumi (Marie) and Mikiyo (Miki), and two younger brothers named Noboru (Gabby) and Takumi. All were born in Vancouver, except Takumi, who was born in the Lemon Creek internment camp. Like Takeshi, Takumi was also nicknamed 'Tak' so they were called "Tak 1" and "Tak 2" respectively.

Takeshi's parents were born and raised in rural Wakayama prefecture. His mother grew up in a village called Fuji near Gobo. His father was raised in Mio-Mura, the Wakayama coastal town famous for sending numerous immigrants to Canada, most of whom settled in the fishing town of Steveston (now part of Richmond, BC) and worked in the salmon fishing industry.

Tak's father Kamejiro had originally been born into a fishermen family called Kawaguchi. However, his maternal uncle, Kikumatsu Matsuba, did not have any children so Kamejiro was adopted by him and took the family name Matsuba. Interestingly, Tak's biological grandfather (on the Kawaguchi side of the family) had taken his fishing boat all the way to Hokkaido, and Tak's father was born on the boat while it was there. Tak later learned through his brother (who had been told by his father) that all of his father's siblings (two brothers and two sisters) were also born in Hokkaido. Tak is uncertain about how common it was for fishermen from Wakayama to go fishing all the way to Hokkaido, but guesses that his grandparents were not the only ones who did so.

Although uncertain of the exact dates, Tak believes his grandfather and father first went to Canada shortly before or after 1900. The grandfather, Kikumatsu, went first, and Tak's father followed him later at the age of 17. He is not sure of

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5 Ibuki, Norm. "Tak Matsuba's Odyssey from Vancouver to Osaka-Part 1." *Discover Nikkei*, May 19 2014. <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2014/5/19/tak-matsuba-1/>, and "Tak Matsuba's Odyssey from Vancouver to Osaka-Part 2." *Discover Nikkei*, May 20 2014." <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2014/5/20/tak-matsuba-2/>

6 *Japanese Canadian Stories from Japan*. Compiled by Nobuko Nakayama and Jean Maeda, Tokyo: 2011.

the precise reasons they went, but thinks it was probably because it was difficult to make a decent living in his village at that time. Mio Mura was both a farming and a fishing village, but neither industry was very productive, so many people there had to look elsewhere to make a living. Tak was told by some friends of his grandfather that when he arrived, the Vancouver City Hall was still housed in a tent. Like many other young Japanese immigrant teenagers, Tak's father learned English by attending Strathcona Elementary school, apparently lying that he was younger than his actual age. Later he became a naturalized Canadian citizen.

Tak's mother went to Canada later as one of the so-called 'picture brides' which were common then. As Tak's father did not go back to Japan to meet her, Tak thinks it was likely a proxy wedding, and they did not actually meet until she arrived in Canada. Perhaps, like most Japanese who went to Canada then, they planned on eventually returning to Japan after saving a sufficient amount of money. However, when the children were born and started to grow up in Canada, they ended up staying.

They resided at 151 East Cordova Street in a two-story building, where Tak's adoptive grandfather, Kikumatsu Matsuba, started and ran a retail shop which sold dry goods and Japanese foodstuffs<sup>7</sup>. The building had enough rooms that, in addition to the whole family living there, they were able to rent out a spare room to a Japanese man who worked at a nearby business. Tak's father Kamejiro helped Kikumatsu run the store. In 1935, at the age of 51, Kikumatsu passed away in Vancouver General Hospital from pulmonary tuberculosis<sup>8</sup> and Kamejiro took over the shop.

As far as Tak recalls, his family enjoyed their lives in Vancouver. His father spoke English well enough to interpret for others who needed help for such things as going to the doctor. He never heard his mother speaking English, but he recalls that "she seemed to understand everything her children were saying, especially when we were up to no good!"

### **Life in Vancouver before the uprooting**

Tak attended a kindergarten run by the Methodist church, then the Strathcona

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<sup>7</sup> This location is now occupied by the British Columbia Court Building.

<sup>8</sup> Strangely, Kikumatsu's death certificate lists his occupation as 'farmer'. This could just be a clerical error, or it could indicate that his first occupation, upon entering Canada, was in agriculture (not very likely as he was raised as a fisherman), and that he later made the transition into commerce. Tak believes it was an error on the death certificate.

Elementary School and the Fairview High School of Commerce. The Matsuba family actually lived a half block outside the eastern boundary for Strathcona students, but Tak's father was able to get Tak in by telling the school officials that he wished for his son to attend the same school he had attended. When the war started, he transferred to the Grandview High School of Commerce. In those days, elementary school consisted of grades 1-8 and high school was grades 9-12. He also attended the Vancouver Japanese Language School which he credits with giving him a strong foundation in Japanese that would help him later when his family was exiled to Japan. He remembers little from his kindergarten days but more from when he was in elementary and high school. He recalls having some non-Japanese friends at school, but otherwise all his friends were Japanese Canadian. Unfortunately, the war interrupted his schooling (he thinks he was in grade 10 at the time) and he could not finish high school. He doesn't recall having any particular future dreams at the time. He explains,

It was so long ago. I was still in my early teens (so) most likely I was more keenly interested in going out and 'playing' with friends than anything else...Like most kids of that time, my life outside school prior to WW2 was centered around the Powell Street Grounds playing baseball, softball and soccer. I also played basketball at the United Church gym."<sup>9</sup>

Tak does not have many memories of experiencing discrimination before the internment, but does remember a lot of the people in the community, including his parents, talking about it. "When I was being raised in Vancouver, I was never allowed to forget my ancestry. I was 'a Jap', now and forever. My parents raised me on the basis that we had two strikes against us, so we had to be on our best behavior at all times. Never do anything to let the white population have an excuse to fault us," he recalls.

He does have one especially vivid memory of when he and the other members of his Japanese Canadian basketball team did experience discrimination firsthand:

I do remember very well a group, of which I was one, being discriminated against. It must have been before curfew was in effect, but as a member of a Japanese Canadian basketball team we went to New Westminster where we were to be met by the host team for a game in Surrey. When we got to New Westminster, no one met us. There was a mix-up in communication or some other reason and we had a long wait. To bide our time, we went

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9 Interview with Norm Ibuki in *Discover Nikkei*, May 19 2004.

to a bowling alley but they would not let us bowl because we were ‘Japs’. We told them we were Canadians first, but they just wouldn’t allow us to play. When our friends finally came and got us, it was pretty late at night, but we did get to Surrey and after moving the wood-fired stove in the gym, we were able to play our match. I don’t remember who won, but there was a fellow named Sonny Ohama, and in later years in Japan when Linda Ohama of the movie “Obachan’s Garden” fame<sup>10</sup> came to Japan to show the movie and I met her, it turned out that Sonny was her uncle.”

### **Life in Lemon Creek Internment Camp**

Tak vividly remembers hearing the news of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. “It was a Sunday and I was with friends out on Powell Street on our way home from playing badminton at the Japanese Language School when we heard the news from a radio in a parked car. It had a very sobering effect on all of us.”<sup>11</sup>

The order for Japanese Canadians on the west coast to leave their homes and property soon followed. While Tak has no clear recollection of seeing police officers come to their home or their property being confiscated, he vaguely remembers that they had to rush to pack their bags and were allowed to take very little with them. Later they would learn that all Japanese Canadian property, which was supposedly being held in trust by a government-appointed custodian, was sold without their agreement and the proceeds were used to help cover the costs of the internment camps.

Unlike many families which were separated at the beginning of the internment and were temporarily housed at the PNE grounds while the camps were still being prepared, Tak’s family were allowed to stay together and were sent directly to the Lemon Creek internment camp at Lake Slocan in the mountains of eastern British Columbia where they would live for the next four years. Being 15 years old at the time, he has only vague memories of the train journey from Vancouver to the camp, although he does recall it being very long. He does not remember his parents showing any emotion at the time. “It must have been devastating to lose almost everything they had worked for all their lives to achieve, but in retrospect, they didn’t show it too much. Being born in the Meiji Era, they had that stoicism of ‘gaman’ and ‘shikataganai’ so they seemed to accept almost whatever came

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10 [https://www.nfb.ca/film/obachans\\_garden/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/obachans_garden/)

11 Ibuki, 2004.



along,” he says.<sup>12</sup>

He adds that his actual memories of life in the camp as a teenager are mostly good.

Being a teenager, I was carefree and intent on having a good time. As teenagers are wont, I looked at the good side of things and managed to find something of interest. I was fortunate that there were a number of friends in Lemon Creek whom I already knew from the Vancouver days. Of course, I made many more new friends and these friendships have lasted to this day. We used to hold dance parties and I had a fairly good collection of records which were very useful and appreciated by friends. However, I was too bashful and never really learned how to dance properly, something I now regret.

In the winter time, the shore side of the river froze and we could ice skate, but had to be careful not to go too far from shore because the river was flowing and the ice got thinner at the far edges. Some guys used to fall in and we had to build fires to dry and warm them. We sometimes stole the railway fence posts to fuel the fires. I can't recall for sure, but quite possibly sometimes railway ties were also pilfered.

Another wintertime favorite was sleighing. There was some danger in this because the best place was the nearby highway. There was quite a steep incline and the traffic had packed down the snow, forming a very slick surface that was good for sleighing. We had to station guards at the curves to signal that the way was clear of any oncoming traffic. The elders did not look too kindly on this sport.

I was not and still am not a very religious person, but got involved in the camp with the Buddhist Youth Group and we used to perform plays on the stage in the Buddhist Church to entertain the internees. These were almost all in the Japanese language and in retrospect, this helped me polish my Japanese. I didn't know then, but in later life, it helped me survive the early years in Japan.

The authorities would not allow us to have cameras, but the Buddhist minister built a camera, using a celluloid soap case for the body, and gave it to me. I was able to use it to take quite a few photos but regret that I have lost the camera and the photos. I am not sure where or how I lost

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.



them, either in the confusion of being shipped to Japan or during the turmoil of the Hanshin Earthquake.

Tak was not able to complete formal high school education in the camp as the war ended and the high school in the camp was closed. He recalls the names of two of his teachers, Ms. Hamilton and Ms. Hurd. About the former he says, "I didn't know that Miss Hamilton had been so active in girls' education in Japan prior to the War. In retrospect, I was not a good student and talked back a lot. I now regret it and have the greatest respect for the teachers, especially Ms. Hamilton for the good work she did in Japan against such odds. It is a wonder that she would continue in the education field after such an experience."

Despite his admission about his shortcomings as a high school student, during the last months of the internment, as people were gradually leaving the camps either to dispersal in eastern Canada or to exile in Japan, he was recruited to help with the education of some elementary students who were still in the Lemon Creek camp.

With the end of the war and people relocating or being shipped to Japan, teachers and students were leaving Lemon Creek, but there were still a number of students who were waiting for their departure dates. The principal at that time was a lady friend of mine and she approached me to help her manage the remaining students. I was not qualified to be a regular teacher, but she wouldn't take no for an answer and I finally agreed. I did not really teach anything, but acted more like a watchman over the kids. I recall that at one time I took a bunch of comic books to school and let the students pass the time reading comics. I was there to oversee the students in school, not so much to study, but to keep them out of mischief. It was a short-lived experience for me. I cannot recall of how long, but a few months at most.

However, he seems to have made a stronger impression on the students than he realized, as evidenced by the following recollection of Susan Maikawa:

In the 1945-1946 school year, Miss Haruko Ito taught us grade 7, but she left us before the end of the term. Tak Matsuba became our new teacher and continued on until June 1946 (We were exiled to Japan the same year!) He taught us to do our best in good faith and to complete our given tasks willingly. I remember him as a pleasant, fair person who was highly

respected.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding his overall impression of his life in Canada, Tak adds, “I was 15 years old when the Canadian government put me in the internment camp. Four years later, I was shipped to Japan. Actually, my life in Canada ended when I was 15. Lemon Creek was not Canada. Those four years in Lemon Creek were like living in a cocoon. Of course, when I emerged from that cocoon, the outside world was quite different and it took me a while to adjust.”

### **Exile of the Matsuba family to Japan**

Tak was 19 years old when his family was exiled from Canada to Japan. He thinks that there were various reasons why his parents chose exile to Japan over dispersal to eastern Canada. One reason was uncertainty about what would happen if they chose the latter, as well as concern regarding the welfare of close relatives in Japan with whom they had not had any contact since before the war. Another factor was that his father still owned a house in Mio Mura, in contrast to his situation in Canada where he had lost his house, his business, and everything else he had owned due to the complete dispossession and sale of his property by the Canadian government.

My parents made the decision to come to Japan and the children followed them. I think the decision was mainly due to the fact that we had no assets (in Canada), but dad had a house he owned in Japan and at least that was a roof over our heads, whereas going to eastern Canada meant too many unknowns: Will we be welcome, how will we support ourselves without a place to live, etc.? Also, I think my parents were concerned about how their parents were faring. We learned later that they were all well, which was a great relief...When we arrived in Japan the biological parents of both my father and mother were still in good health. My father’s biological father had returned to Japan before the war, but his adopted father (Kikumatsu Matsuba) did not as he had died in Canada.”<sup>14</sup>

Tak does not recall whether he himself was against going to Japan or not. “My siblings and I just did as our parents decided. It was tough going at times, but

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13 Quoted by Norm Ibuki in “Tak Matsuba’s Odyssey from Vancouver to Osaka-Part 1.” *Discover Nikkei*, May 19, 2014. <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2014/5/19/tak-matsuba-1/>

14 For a more detailed discussion of the various overlapping reasons why so many chose to be sent to Japan, see Sunahara, Ann Gomer. *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company 1981, 2000 (105-109). [https://www.japanesecanadianhistory.ca/Politics\\_of\\_Racism.pdf](https://www.japanesecanadianhistory.ca/Politics_of_Racism.pdf)

youth was on our side and we made the best of things. We never regretted the decision.” He has several recollections of the voyage:

Quite a number of passengers suffered seasickness. I didn’t and was involved in comforting those who did. I don’t remember the purpose, but I had a portable typewriter and I was requested to type up a list of all the passengers. I only learned this later, but there was a Canadian passenger onboard our ship, a Mr. Herbert Norman, who was on his way to Tokyo to represent Canada at the Canadian Legation (later changed to The Embassy of Canada) in Japan after World War II.

During the voyage, I befriended the ship’s chef. He took a liking to me and, knowing the conditions in Japan from his previous visits, he tried very hard to get me to stay on board and not land at Japan. The chef was like a second in command of the ship next to the captain, and since I would not take his advice, he put together a very large bag full of rolls from the bakery and gave it to me. This fed our family for a few days after landing.

Tak also recalls the conditions, particularly the food, during his time at the repatriation center at Kurihama upon arriving in Japan.

We arrived at Kurihama, near Tokyo. It was August and it was hot and humid with a lot of mosquitos. Our holding quarters were in a large wooden building. It could have been army barracks, but I don’t know. There were mosquito nettings and we slept inside the netting. I don’t remember much about the food except that there was very little and it was hard to tell what it was. There was a soup-like dish we used to call “dishwater”.

He also remembers the arduous train journey from Tokyo to Wakayama.

The trains were crowded and everybody was fighting to get on. Some even climbed through the windows instead of the doors. There were many tunnels en route and soot from the coal burners filtered into the coaches and it was not clean. We also had to keep a close watch on our baggage lest someone steal it.

Tak’s parents had very little money when they arrived in Wakayama and his first impressions of Japan were negative. His father turned to farming and raised rice and vegetables on the family’s land in Mio-mura, but the situation was not good. He says, “At first, it was a matter of finding work so that we could live. Nothing else came into my mind.”

In contrast to the experience of many of the exiles, Tak does not recall being

discriminated against by relatives and fellow-villagers, or being bullied by other teenagers. Because he had studied Japanese at the Vancouver Japanese Language School and practiced it further as a member of the Buddhist youth group during his incarceration at Lemon Creek, he could speak fairly well and did not have problems with daily communication. Also, because so many people had emigrated to Canada from Mio, the people of the village were relatively used to household members coming back and forth from Canada and hence were more accepting than those of other villages. Yet, he does recall “some feeling of envy on the part of the locals because what little we had brought from Canada was still very desirable to the locals who had less.”

He felt very discontented with the primitive living conditions in Mio. There was no piped water or plumbing system—so no flushing toilet, and the heating was poor. Realizing that he had no economic future there, after only a month he went to Tokyo where he was able to quickly find employment (including room and board) with the Occupation Forces base at what is now Haneda Airport. Hence, he does not recall suffering real hunger as so many others did. Nor does he recall having other serious problems in his daily life “except for sitting on the tatami and using the old Japanese style toilets. After all these years, I am still uncomfortable with both. Fortunately, present day Japan is quite different and the toilets are even better than elsewhere.”

Although he had a good basic grounding in spoken Japanese before arriving in Japan, he did occasionally experience some difficulty with the language during the early years and was continually having to consult dictionaries for both English and Japanese at his work. Eventually he came to feel more proficient though he never felt he had reached the point that he could stop studying. As it was necessary for him to go out and make a living, finishing high school was out of the question. He says, “Instead of going to school, I tried to teach myself. I am a very curious person by nature and asked my friends a lot of questions. Also, I learned by osmosis.” Hence his adjustment to Japan was relatively smooth compared to others.

He does remember missing his life and friends in Canada, especially the latter. “I missed my friends more than the life... ‘Life in Canada’ to me was as a boy living in an almost completely Japanese community from birth at 1926 until 1942 when they shipped me to Lemon Creek internment camp. And then I came straight to Japan from Lemon Creek.”

Unlike the other members of his family members who eventually moved to the

United States, Tak would live the rest of his life in Japan. He does not recall his parents talking much about Canada after they returned to Japan, partly because he did not live with them (he had moved to Tokyo shortly after arrival in Japan), and when they did talk other topics predominated the conversations. Likewise, they apparently never discussed whether Tak should return to Canada. He says, “I think my parents wanted me to make my own life choices.” He himself also never really felt like living in Canada again, partly due to the financial and other formidable obstacles which he felt would be waiting for him if he ever moved there.

However, his siblings and parents eventually would leave Japan again—not for Canada, but for Hawaii. His sister Masumi (Marie) lived seven years in Japan and moved to Hawaii after marrying an American serviceman. Another sister, Mikiyo (Miki), stayed nine years and was still single when she went to Hawaii, where she ended up marrying the brother of Marie’s husband. Tak’s younger brother, Takumi, lived fourteen years in Japan where he finished junior high school before he was sponsored by his sisters to immigrate to Hawaii. Likewise, the parents eventually followed their children and moved to Hawaii. Tak explains, “At first my parents went to Honolulu where my sisters, having married Hawaiians, were living. Then they moved with the youngest son, Takumi, to San Francisco where he attended university. My father did odd jobs to support them and eventually Takumi finished school and started working.” Regarding Takumi’s life, Tak adds,

My younger brother has had his share of life ‘s experiences. He was one year old when he arrived in Japan. He went to school in Japan and I think he finished junior high school and with no English went to Hawaii sponsored by his sister. It was like a reverse edition of my experience (coming to Japan). After Hawaii he went to San Francisco and worked as a restaurant busboy while continuing his studies until he finished university as an electronics engineer, but the year he graduated, NASA was not hiring engineers so there was a big turn in his career before it even started. He worked part time as a bartender at a Japanese restaurant called the Bushitei where there was another student from Japan who was washing dishes to support himself through school. One day this guy told my brother that his father was going to buy the Bushitei and asked him if he would work for his father. My brother wasn’t sure if this guy was serious, so just humored him. It turned out that the guy’s father did buy the restaurant and the dishwasher and part time bartender (Takumi) became the manager and

assistant manager. Later the new manager didn't manage well and the father fired him and promoted my brother to manager.

Takumi eventually became the owner of the Bushi-tei which prospered and was awarded a Michelin star. In 2012 he sold the restaurant<sup>15</sup> but continued another business, exporting wines.

### **Employment with the US Occupation Forces**

Like many of the exiles, soon after moving to Japan Tak was able to find work with the US occupation forces (October 1946-April 1950) as mentioned above. While it included room and board, the salary itself was rather low and was frozen by law at about 1500 yen per month, of which he was only permitted to withdraw 500 yen per month while the remainder was kept in the bank. This was part of the government policy to fight post-war inflation. Yet, he was able to send some money each month to support his parents and siblings. Officially, his main work was to keep statistical records of personnel and cargo moving in and out of Japan. He recalls,

I didn't like the living conditions in Mio Mura where we had a house, so I only stayed a month and went to Tokyo to find work. I went to the personnel offices of the U.S. occupation forces in Tokyo and applied for a job. I was interviewed and passed the language test, but the only position available was a clerk typist's position. They tested me for my typing ability which I passed with high marks and I was assigned to Haneda Air Base (now Haneda International Airport). Although I was hired as a clerk typist, I never did any typing, but my responsibilities were as a statistician, keeping a record of passengers and cargo arriving and departing from the base. I did not care what kind of job they gave me as I was just happy to be hired. At a time when food and housing were scarce in Japan, my job came with a bed in a dormitory and I could eat three meals a day at the Air Force mess hall, so I could send the large part of my earnings to my parents in Wakayama to support them and my siblings who were in school.

Tak was also used frequently as an interpreter.

I was not trained to be an interpreter, but in those days there were so few who could interpret that even someone like me with a limited Japanese language capability was useful. I always did the best I could to be of help

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<sup>15</sup> <https://sf.eater.com/2012/4/16/6595481/bushi-tei-to-close-at-the-end-of-april>

<https://sf.eater.com/2012/2/2/6617059/michael-hung-moves-on-as-bushi-tei-hits-the-market>

and enjoyed helping, but there was one case where I was asked to interpret at a court martial (Tak does not remember what the specific crime was, but thinks it was probably a case where the soldier stole some army supplies and then tried to sell them on the black market). The presiding judge and jury were all high ranking military officers. As things proceeded, the prosecutor would ask me to ask a question of the accused. I was told to reply in the first person. In other words, he would accuse the defendant of a crime and when the defendant replied, I would have to say, 'Yes, I did' or 'No, I didn't'. I was not supposed to say, 'He says that he did do it or that didn't do it.' I didn't like that at all. I felt like I was the person on trial. That was one of the rare times I didn't enjoy helping.

I had an aunt who was a school teacher in the Haneda area and one time one of her former pupils was arrested by the police and was in custody at the police station. I used to accompany the U.S. Military Police to the station when U.S. soldiers and Japanese civilians were involved in a crime case and I was a familiar figure in the area. Word got around to my aunt to ask my help in getting the former pupil released. I didn't do anything to help, but for some reason, the student was released and the village thugs thought I had helped. After that, whenever I was walking through the village, young thugs would come up to me and thank me. That was uncomfortable for me in that, first of all, I didn't have anything to do with the release and secondly, I was still a naïve young man and afraid to talk with the thugs, even if they meant well.

Some other uncomfortable situations occurred when the Military Police needed Tak's interpreting services and asked him to accompany them on night raids on black marketers.

It was after my working hours and I went to the Military Police Offices where they gave me a handgun. I promptly gave it back, telling them that I had never handled guns and I would be very dangerous with one. During the occupation days, flints for cigarette lighters were sold by watch sales and repair shops. Flints were imported and so much in demand that there was a profitable black market. That night, I went with the patrol unit into the nearby village and we raided a watch shop. We pried open the door and went upstairs where the proprietor and his wife were sleeping. The proprietor knew what his misdemeanor was and was resigned to the fact (of his arrest), but his wife was scared to be awakened by a group of American



soldiers and was shaking with fear. I really felt sorry for her.

At another time, I was called in to go on a raid to nearby base of a U.S. Army Engineering Unit. This was an all colored soldiers unit and they were smuggling prostitutes into their barracks. We arrested several soldiers and women and the next day I had to go and help with the investigations where I oversaw one of the women write an account of what transpired. I was not that good at writing Japanese, but the woman had very little education due to the war, so I sometimes had to correct her kanji. The officer in charge saw me doing so and thought I was helping her write the account whereas I was only helping her with a few kanji characters. I was starting to be frequently asked to help the Military Police so finally my commanding officer had to tell them to stop. He felt it was not fair for them to take so much time away from my regular job.

Through his work Tak was able to develop meaningful relationships with members of the occupying forces.

My main job was to keep records of troop and cargo movement, but it was my nature not to say no when asked to help out elsewhere and I made many friends among the officers. At one time, an officer came to my office and we chatted and in the course of our conversation, he asked what my neck size was. It seemed odd that he should ask my neck size, and I can't recall now, but at that time, I probably thought there were going to be some excess uniforms and he was getting a shirt for me. It turned out that, at Christmas time, he came to my office with a huge package which was a gift for me. I was very surprised and opened it to find a shirt, sweater and cardigan. In those days, decent clothing was scarce and the officer and friends had ordered from a mail order catalog for me. Needless to say, I appreciated that very much.

Likewise, his improving skills as an interpreter and willingness to be of help to anyone made him a valued assistant to Japanese American members of the occupying forces as well as white soldiers with limited literacy in English.

There were Japanese American Nisei soldiers at the base. They had very limited Japanese language skills, so quite often, when their Japanese relatives visited them, I was asked to go with them to help with the language. At first I was just an interpreter, but after a few meetings the families often got to know me better than the relatives they were meeting. With one family, I became good friends and I was not sure whether they

came in order to visit their relative or to visit with me. Another experience was with a white American soldier friend who was from the southern part of the US. To my great surprise, he asked me to write a letter to his mother. He told me very little about what to write so I had to ask him questions and coax information from him before I could write a letter. I was a fairly fast typist so I could type up the letters for him and I got the feeling that he had very little education and couldn't write.

During this time, Tak lost his younger brother Gabby. After Tak had moved to Tokyo in 1946 and found employment with the US occupation forces there, Gabby started working in 1947 at an Occupation Forces base in Osaka. Like Tak, he also developed good friendships with members of the American military. However, he later became ill with spinal meningitis. During his illness, some members of the Military Police who had become his friends gave him medicine which they had apparently confiscated off the black market. Unfortunately, however, Gabby did not recover and passed away in 1949. Tak reminisces wistfully, "Gabby was a good student and excelled in studies and sports. He was quite a good swimmer, he could draw well, did some carving. Hate to admit it, but he beat me all around. In my business career, I often wished he had not died so early. He would have been a good partner. He was the most talented of all of us."

### **Employment with Amerex**

As the Japanese economy began to re-emerge during the postwar years, there was an urgent need for employees who could speak English well. This became a lifesaving economic opportunity for many of the exiles, even those lacking a strong formal education. Tak was one of those who made the best of this situation, using a combination of native wit, natural curiosity, good social skills, network building, and a willingness to offer his assistance to anyone who needed it.<sup>16</sup>

After four years of working in the sheltered environment of the Occupation Forces, he was beginning to feel restless and anxious about his future. This led to his being introduced by an American army officer to a private sector company affiliated with the Sogo Department Store chain called the Amerex Trading Company. He worked there from 1950 to 1952.

As time went by I started to feel that I was leading a protected life and that the real world was outside the Occupation Forces. I cannot recall how

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16 See Tak's comments about this to Kage in *Uprooted Again*, pp. 40-41.

it came about, but I must have mentioned this to one of the officers and one day he asked me if I wanted to try for an outside job and if so, he could introduce me to a Japanese business executive. But it was on the proviso that I not tell anyone that he had helped me get a job outside of the Occupation Forces lest he get in trouble with his superiors who valued my services and wouldn't want to see me leave.

I was beginning to think that the occupation would not last forever and that my future was elsewhere, so I took him up on it and he introduced me to the Japanese manager of Amerex Trading Company, owned and operated by some Jewish Americans who had fled Russia after World War II and emigrated to the U.S.A. I was hired and started working in a civilian environment. The main business of the company was to import supplies, mainly foodstuffs for sale to specialty shops which at that time catered to foreigners who were not affiliated with the Occupation Forces.

Being naturalized Americans, the president and vice president of the company were proficient in the English language, but it was not their mother tongue. One day, they called me into their offices and said that they couldn't find in the dictionary a particular word in a letter they had received. I took a look at it and told them that it was a misspelt word and it should have been spelt so and so. I can't recall what the word was, but they soon found it in the dictionary. That happening helped me later in the office. Whenever the Japanese manager would ask me to translate at times long and not really necessary material, the president would tell the manager not to "burden Tak with such minor chores as we have more important things for him to do.

In 1952, two years after I started working at the company, I was sent to Osaka as manager of a joint business specialty store with a Japanese department store. At this point, perhaps I should explain the term, "specialty store." In those days, there were PXs (post exchanges) which were stores for occupation force military and civilians (civil service personnel) and their dependents, where they could purchase all the necessities of life, but there was a foreign civilian group who did not come under the category of 'occupation force civilians.' They were non-Japanese who were living in Japan when the War ended. Some were Italian and German military personnel who were stranded in Japan and continued to live there. Specialty stores were set up to supply the needs of this third-

party group and the currency used was a U.S. dollar script. To deal with the banks in script, there was a need for a foreigner to sign checks, etc. and that is probably how I got the job.

### **Employment with Sogo Department Store**

In 1952 Tak started working for the Sogo Department Store chain in Osaka where he continued for seven years. It was here that he met his wife who was also an employee of Sogo. They would have 3 daughters to whom they gave names that sound both English and Japanese: Amy, Alisa, and Serena.

The present Japanese department chain store, Sogo, with which the joint specialty shop was established, had their main store taken over by the Occupation Forces and was being used as a PX. As time went by and the peace treaty was signed, the PX was returned to the Japanese owners and the specialty shop was closed, and I was invited by Sogo to become their employee, which I accepted. This really started my career in the Japanese business world. I worked there from November 1952 to June 1959. I don't know what went on behind the scenes, but the Japanese manager of Amerex Trading Co. later ended up becoming a vice president of Sogo Department Store.

A little aside: Years later, an article appeared in the Reader's Digest magazine about a German journalist stationed in Japan who was a spy. The article also implicated this Japanese manager at Amerex in the spy's activities. I recall hearing that the manager was furious and denied anything to do with it. I would not be surprised if he had something to do with it as there was something about this man that was difficult to figure out. To me, he had a mysterious aura. It was difficult to get to know him really well.

### **Employment with Santai Trading Company**

After seven years with Sogo, in 1959 Tak moved to the textile export division of a medium sized trading company called Santai Trading Company through a connection he had made years before while working at Amerex. He would stay there until 1977. As he explains, this job involved a wide variety of business endeavors and interesting experiences.

While working in Tokyo at Amerex Trading Co., I had met many Japanese businessmen and one of them became a director of the department store.

He was also president of his own trading company, Santai Trading Co., and in 1959, he asked me to join his company, which I did and worked there from July 1959 to July 1977. At Santai I was involved in exports and imports. The company started importing blue denim fabrics from the US to be made into jeans in Japan. This business took off and we were so successful that we were importing denim fabrics by the container loads. Eventually, Japanese weavers learned how to make blue denims and were exporting the fabric to U.S. and Europe. In my opinion, Santai was one of the pioneers of the Japanese jeans market.

Another project I was involved in at Santai was the lumber business. We started a joint venture company with a Japanese lumber company to manufacture door jambs. The equipment and know-how to make the jambs were supplied by an American company. Our Japanese partner in the joint venture was well versed in the local lumber industry and our American suppliers had the manufacturing know-how. However, the Japanese partner had no experience in working with a foreign company and the American company had no experience in Japan, so we were an important link.

This project gave me the opportunity of travelling to the U.S.A. with our Japanese partners to visit our American suppliers who were located in Los Angeles, California. In the US we made tours arranged by our American friends to various lumber mills to get a feel of the business. One memorable trip was going by car throughout California for two full days non-stop. We also went to the famous Weyerhaeuser Co. in Tacoma, Washington, where, much to our surprise, their log pool was the Columbia River.

One of my responsibilities was to accompany the president of Santai on his trips overseas. He had never been overseas before and was looking forward to his first overseas visit, but had some qualms. He told me that he was concerned lest he get lost. I told him that if he got lost, I would be the one most concerned so he should stay by me. We went to New York and from there to Florida and on to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic where we had an office staffed by a man we had sent from Japan. An interesting experience was when we were invited to the Japanese employee's home for a Japanese dinner (the president was beginning to miss Japanese cooking). We were there for about an hour when our hosts started to worry. It turned out that as is usual, they had ordered some fish

from a Japanese retired man living there who liked to fish and took orders to supplement his income. It turned out that on this occasion he couldn't catch anything for a long time, but finally about two hours later he came back successful and we were able to enjoy sashimi.

At that time there were very few Japanese companies in Santo Domingo and on one occasion when the president of a Japanese company visited, the Japanese Consul General invited us to his official residence for dinner. He had a first-class chef from Japan working for him and we enjoyed a great meal.

On one of my frequent business trips to the U.S., I was visiting our liaison office in New York. We had sent a man to manage the office and his wife and 3-year-old daughter had just joined him in the U.S. The manager was driving me through Long Island on our way home when a young American in his father's Buick rammed us on the driver's side. Fortunately, the accident occurred right in front of a doctor's house and he came out and laid the manager, who was unconscious, on the ground and placed a pillow under his head. The ambulance took us to a hospital and the manager's damaged spleen was taken out. I had a few stitches, but nothing serious like the manager's injuries. Since the manager was going to be hospitalized for a long time and his family had just arrived in a foreign country, I had to extend my visit to take care of the office and his family. So, what started as a one month visit lasted for six months before I could return to Japan. However, it was not all bad since it gave me an opportunity to visit the New York World's Fair which was being held during this time.

Santai's parent company was Fuji Spinning Co., one of the big 10 spinning mills of that time. Fuji signed a licensing agreement with an American company to manufacture spandex, a synthetic elastic fiber, and I was called upon to help in the transfer of the technology. I was not trained to be an interpreter, especially a technical interpreter so had to learn "on-the-job", so to speak. Through these activities, I accumulated a lot of experience which was a great asset for me in later years.

### **Employment with Fujicopian**

In 1977 Tak moved to Fujicopian, a company which now manufactures various kinds of stationary and printing supplies as well as ink cartridges, etc. for

computers and high tech business machines. He would stay there until retiring at age 78. He was placed in charge of foreign affairs and travelled overseas a lot as he worked to establish subsidiaries and technology licensees in various countries including the US, the UK, Hong Kong, Malaysia, France and others.

Ever since I started working, I was also moonlighting to supplement my income to support my family. All the companies I helped were involved in export or import from overseas and English was the language used in communications. I could type, so I was very fast at writing business letters. I also helped in the business negotiations, by letter or telephone. When the business friends visited Japan, I would help with the negotiations and in the evenings I would be involved in entertaining them as well. In those days, salaries were not very high. Individuals were not highly paid as profits were kept in the company. Hence moonlighting was very lucrative for me and one of the presidents of a company for which I moonlighted asked me to join his company. I had been helping him for 17 years and he knew me well as I did him. He used to say that the interview took 17 years and we couldn't find anything wrong with each other. I decided to join his company without discussing the usual terms such as position in the company, salary etc., but he stipulated that I should stay with the company for a long time and not decide to return to Canada in a few years. I agreed and my terms were that I be assigned to a responsible position and that I not be used as a tool for just translating and interpreting. We agreed on a handshake and I joined the company in August 1977. In March, 1978, I was elected to the board of directors of the company as manager of the Foreign Affairs Department.

I served five presidents while at Fujicopian. My responsibilities also included overseas trips with the then president and our wives. One trip was to sign a very large and lucrative financing contract undertaken with German and Japanese banks. While the men worked, the banks arranged for chauffeur-driven cars with interpreters for our wives and they were entertained royally. Every evening we would be invited to dinner at the best restaurants. The contract was signed in an old castle on the Rhine and they flew Japanese and German flags and there were rumors the next day that the Japanese had bought another castle.

My wife enjoyed those trips which included opening ceremonies of our subsidiary companies in England and the U.S.A. She enjoyed the



sightseeing and being so nicely entertained. Of course, the best part was that she didn't have to do any housework during these trips. We ate at the best restaurants and the hotel took care of our other needs like laundry.

Around 1988, shortly before the Berlin Wall came down, Tak visited Berlin with a group of tourists. He was surprised at how the people he saw in East Germany were always somber faced and never smiled. The East German officer accompanying their group did numerous headcounts, specifically after every site they visited to make sure no one was missing from the group. At one point, when they were at Checkpoint Charlie undergoing a customs check, a cat suddenly dashed into the room. To break the tension, Tak made a joke, asking if the cat was escaping East Germany and if they were going to catch it. Apparently the other members of the tour group laughed, but the East German border guards did not, either because they did not understand the joke or they were just not amused. Tak later realized that his joke was a dangerous mistake and regretted it.

He also remembers watching people boating on a lake on the east-west border. The lake was divided into east and west by a line of ropes and floats. There were two guard boats patrolling the east side of the lake, while on the west side he could see several pleasure boats. Whenever the pleasure boats would approach the line of floats on border, the guard boats on the east side would rush to intercept them lest they crossed, and the pleasure boats would of course do a U-turn back to the west in time to avoid being caught.

Tak frequently made business trips to New York, during which he often stopped in Toronto and Vancouver where he met up with old Japanese Canadian friends and attended special events such as school and internment camp reunions. He recalls another experience during this time:

I was at New York airport (JFK) in the Concorde Lounge of British Airways waiting for my Concorde (super-sonic) flight to London and there was a familiar Japanese man in the lounge. It was a man who had tried to hire me away from Santai Trading Co. years earlier. In those days, many U.S. products were desirable and companies vied with each other to obtain exclusive import rights. This man worked for a U.S. company with which I was negotiating to obtain the rights to their products and had taken a liking to the way I worked. We were both surprised to meet at such a location. There were more surprises for me after that. If my memory serves me correctly, the flight from New York to London on the Concorde only took three hours whereas other aircraft would take twice as long. The

flight was rather noisy (loud engine) and bumpy. Also, the seats were narrower than conventional airplanes, although not bad for someone like me, but for the bigger passengers, it must have been not so comfortable. They surprised me by passing out cigars in flight, only to then tell us not to light up in the plane.

When he reached retirement age (65), Tak was asked to stay on at Fujicopian as an advisor which he did until finally retiring at age 78.

### **Involvement in forming and leading the Japanese Canadian exiles group in Kansai**

Following the official apology in 1988 by the prime minister of Canada to Japanese Canadians for the injustices they had suffered during and after the war, a delegation was sent by the Canadian government to Japan to explain the terms of redress to the Japanese Canadian exiles still living there. These explanation meetings brought together many exiles who had not seen each other since the internment and deportation. Tak says that they had some idea of others who had been deported to Japan, but many had lost contact with each other and did not know where in Japan others were located.

When Tatsuo Kage and the Canadian delegation came to Japan to explain to us regarding the redress compensation program, my understanding is that they first came to Tokyo and contacted Japanese Canadians there. There were probably some Japanese Canadians back in Canada who knew Japanese Canadians in Japan and provided the contact information. Anyway, this led to word getting around that there would be an explanation meeting and all those interested should attend (ads were placed in newspapers as well). At the meeting, many ran into old friends, some of whom they thought weren't even in Japan, and for future liaison, they probably figured they should form some sort of organization. I can't recall how it came about exactly, but there were a number of ex-Lemon Creekers in Tokyo whom I knew and one of them was a classmate from Vancouver days.

One chap, Kaz Ide, who was my younger brother Gabby's pal in Lemon Creek days, was very active in the organization and I think he was the first president. There was another ex-Lemon Creeker, named Lloyd Kumagai, also in Tokyo, and they both contacted us in the Kansai region and invited us to join the association. At that time, we were still waiting for more

redress information and application papers, and things were being organized so more people could be more expeditiously contacted. The original organization had a membership of about 70 or 80 persons from all over Japan.

Eventually Tak and some other exiles living in the Kansai region banded together and formed a small Kansai branch in which Tak played a leading role. He explains about its formation and the relationships of some of the leading members as follows:

We formed a Kansai chapter (about 20 members), and Tom Mizuguchi and I, together with another chap, Kiyoshi Muraki (now deceased), used to go to Tokyo to attend the meetings twice a year in the spring and autumn. We were sort of self-appointed directors. Later I had to resign due to my business commitments requiring many overseas trips which resulted in my absence from Japan when the meetings were held.

The Tokyo and Kansai groups continued as social groups after redress. Tom and I, as sort of caretakers, tried to keep the Kansai group going. We would arrange for the meeting place and would send out notices to all the members. We used to get together at hotel restaurants in Osaka and, in the later years, we used the Kobe Club quite a bit. Fuji Fujino was a member of the Kobe Club, so we could take advantage of her membership privileges. I tried to keep the group together by writing a sort of circular letter addressed to all who attended our luncheons. Later, as we got older, some could not attend, others passed away and the organization went out of existence.

I had a cousin who lived in Steveston, B.C., and I think it was through him that I got to know Tom Mizuguchi. Tom's real name was Tatsumi then, but like many JC's, he got the English name after coming to Japan and starting to work for the occupation forces. It was not a strong friendship in those days. In fact, I used to think of it as a nodding acquaintance until we met again in Osaka, many years later. When I eventually moved from Tokyo to Osaka, we used to see each other quite frequently so our friendship grew in Japan.

I believe that Fujino-san and Hosoi-san, who were both important members and were my seniors, had been stranded in Japan when the war started. They had been brought here by their parents and the war started before they could return. My recollection is that I was introduced to

Fujino-san at the now defunct Osaka Grand Hotel by a mutual friend. It turned out that her older brother, Abe Korenaga, was an Asahi baseball star and of course as a kid I had been his fan.

I was introduced to Hosoi-san by her sister Trixie Uyeno, a classmate from my Vancouver days. I was at Itami Airport years ago when I ran into Trixie, who was visiting her sister in Japan and returning to Canada. Her sister happened to be Hosoi-san. One day quite a bit later, Hosoi-san phoned me and we got better acquainted. Needless to say, both Fujino-san and Hosoi-san became active members of our Kansai Group.

There were a lot of Lemon Creekers so I knew most of them and had helped put the Kansai group together but had to resign my responsibilities due to my job requiring frequent overseas trips and I was starting to miss meetings. However, I continued to be a member.

### **Life after Retirement and Thoughts about Canada**

Tak has kept active ever since his retirement from Fujicopian and has made several travels with his wife. She unexpectedly passed away due to complications resulting from the treatment of esophageal cancer in 2015. Now, in his early nineties, Tak still tries to stay socially active, but confesses that recently he has been feeling like he is slowing down. He especially feels socially hindered by his loss of hearing in recent years. At present he lives in Nishinomiya, a suburb of Osaka. He has three daughters, all of whom are married to Japanese nationals, and six grandchildren.

Reflecting on his internment and exile from Canada, Tak says he does not feel any bitterness towards Canada now, although his indignation sometimes surfaces when talking about the experience of being exiled. He vividly recalls attending the meeting held by a Canadian government delegation explaining that he, along with other Japanese Canadian exiles, was eligible for redress, and the subsequent process of filling out the required forms and showing proof of citizenship. He believes in putting the past behind and looking ahead, but he hopes that young Japanese Canadians will remember what happened to their community and “will work to ensure that something like that will never happen again, not only to Japanese Canadians, but to other minorities in Canada as well.”<sup>17</sup>

He still has Canadian citizenship (living in Japan under a permanent residency

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17 Ibuki, *Ibid.*, May 24, 2004

visa) and hence feels that he is a Canadian “because of my birthright”. He thinks he might have wished to return to Canada during the first few difficult years in Japan, but after ten or so years had passed, he came to feel quite comfortable in Japan. He says he doesn’t think he will ever feel completely Japanese, but on the other hand, thinks he would find it very difficult to ever feel completely Canadian, partly because of his lack of contact with Canadian society even while a child and teenager in Canada.

All those years we were in Lemon Creek camp, I was isolated from Canadian society, so I hardly knew what a truly Canadian society was when I was growing up, and I became an adult after I got to Japan, so it’s difficult to say. However, I guess I have to say I feel more Canadian than Japanese because when I’m thinking, I’m thinking in English. My wife used to tell me I talk in my sleep in English.<sup>18</sup>

This ambiguous sense of national identity was also reflected an interview with Norm Ibuki in 2014 when he noted, “When forced to live in a ‘foreign country’, the language, customs, food, etc. can make things unbelievably difficult. Even for Nisei with the advantage of racial origin, the conditions in Japan were so severe that I think many could never adapt. Although I have lived in Japan for so long, at times I get the feeling that I am not completely used to the country.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Generally speaking, Tak Matsuba’s life history follows a pattern that is quite similar to that of other Japanese Canadian exiles who ended up staying permanently in Japan although in some aspects he is also quite distinct.

One similarity between Tak and many of the other exiles is why his family chose exile to Japan over dispersion to eastern Canada. The reasons he gives are very typical of other families who made the same decision: They had been completely dispossessed of their businesses and all their property in Canada, they were concerned about the welfare of relatives in Japan with whom they had lost contact during the war, and they feared that they would not be able to successfully make a new start in eastern Canada. In the case of Tak’s family, an additional reason was that his father still owned a house in his hometown in Japan.

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18 In *Japanese-Canadian Stories from Japan*: compiled by Nobuko Nakayama and Jean Maeda. Tokyo, 2011, p. 29.

19 Ibuki, Norm. “Tak Matsuba’s Odyssey from Vancouver to Osaka-Part 2. *Discover Nikkei*, May 20, 2014.” <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2014/5/20/tak-matsuba-2/>

A second similarity is how, like a number of other exiles whose stories we know, Tak found a way to survive and eventually make a new life for himself in post-war Japan. After going through a period of shock and dismay at the appalling living conditions, he and quite a number of the exiles in his age group were able to use their English skills (and, in Tak's case, typing skills) to get hired by the American occupying forces for several years until the occupation bases closed down. Some then transitioned successfully from their employment with the American military to successful careers in the private sector of the re-emerging Japanese economy. Tak is one of those who did so extraordinarily smoothly. Unfortunately, it also has to be acknowledged that there were others who could not make the transition so successfully and suffered economic hardship as the American bases that had employed them gradually downsized and eventually closed.

Another similarity is the reasons why Tak ended up staying permanently in Japan though his parents and siblings eventually moved to the US. Like many of the others who stayed, he found fulfilling employment and became relatively comfortable in Japanese society, eventually marrying a Japanese national and raising children in Japan. Perhaps for these reasons, in addition to the sense of injustice at what he had experienced at the hands of the Canadian government, he did not even feel a strong wish to return to Canada.

An additional similarity he shares with other exiles who succeeded in Japan is the significant contributions he made to the internationalization and success of the various Japanese companies for which he worked. In his career he became a valued international businessman who played an important liaison role in helping the companies he was working for develop cooperative business relationships with various companies overseas as well as establish subsidiary companies around the world.<sup>20</sup>

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20 For another example of a Japanese Canadian exile who became a successful international businessman and contributed significantly to the internationalization of postwar Japan, see the life history of Mikio Ibuki (Kirk, Stanley. "Life Histories of Japanese Canadian Deportees: A Father and Son Case Study." *The Journal of the Institute of Language and Culture (Vol. 21)*, Konan University, March 2017, (3-42). <http://doi.org/10.14990/00002283>. For examples of those who eventually returned to Canada and made a significant contribution to Canadian society, see the life history of Basil Izumi (Kirk, Stanley. "A Japanese Canadian Child-Exile : The Life History of Basil Izumi." *The Journal of the Institute of Language and Culture (Vol. 22)*, Konan University, March 2018, (71-108) <http://doi.org/10.14990/00003109>), and Kazuko Makihara (Kirk, Stanley. "A Japanese Canadian Teenage Exile: The Life History of Kazuko Makihara." *The Journal of the Institute of Language and Culture (Vol. 23)*, Konan University, March 2019, (3-20). <http://doi.org/10.14990/00003339>

Yet another similarity to other exiles of his age group is his ambiguous sense of national identity. On the one hand, he does not feel completely Canadian because he grew up in a Japanese immigrant enclave in Canada (Powell Street area), then spent about four years in an internment camp even more isolated from Canadian society, and then was exiled from Canada at the age of 19. In other words, even while living in Canada, he never really experienced what it was like to fully be a part of Canadian society. On the other hand, although having lived so long in Japan, having enjoyed a successful business career in several Japanese companies, having married a Japanese national and having raised his daughters in Japan, he still does not feel completely Japanese either, nor even completely comfortable in Japan.

However, despite these various similarities with other Japanese Canadian exiles, there are aspects of his story that make him distinct. One is the extraordinarily high level of success he achieved in his career, especially considering he had not finished high school and by his own admission was not a diligent student and had a bad attitude while in the internment camp high school. It seems that much of his success in Japan was due largely to his strong interpersonal skills and willingness to help anyone who asked, his ability to learn quickly and excel at any job he was given, and his initiative to actively take advantage of the opportunities that came his way. These personality characteristics clearly compensated for his lack of high school and university education.<sup>21</sup>

Tak's life history also contributes significant information to our knowledge of the history of those Japanese Canadian exiles who remained in Japan. Perhaps most noteworthy in this regard are his memories of his role in helping to found and lead the Kansai chapter of the organization of Japanese Canadian exiles. Sadly, as far as the writer can ascertain, the other members of this group have either passed away or are no longer in good enough health to be interviewed for this research. Hence, Tak's recollections, not only of his own life as a Japanese Canadian in Japan, but also of this group and his important role in it are extremely valuable and make a significant contribution to our knowledge of this aspect of Japanese Canadian history.

Finally, the very significant contributions of Tak Matsuba and other Japanese Canadian exiles to Japanese society as well as to the growth and internationalization of the emerging postwar Japanese economy beg a nagging

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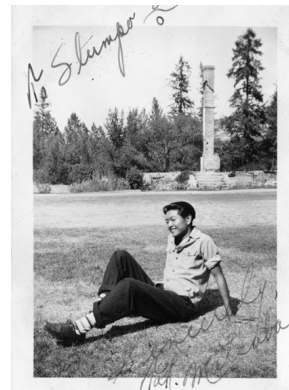
21 See also Kage's comments about Tak in *Uprooted Again*, 40-41.



“What if” question. Before their uprooting and incarceration, the dispossession and sell-off of all their property, and their exile to Japan—all at the hands of the Canadian government—the Matsuba family had established and were running a successful business in Vancouver and were thus contributing significantly to the local economy. As already noted, after their exile to Japan, Tak eventually became a successful international businessman who contributed to the re-emerging Japanese economy as well as to the internationalization of Japan. His younger brother Takumi later become a very successful restaurant owner in San Francisco. According to Tak, their other brother, Gabby, who unfortunately passed away a few years after returning to Japan, was the cleverest member of the family and Tak speculates that he would have made an excellent business partner had he survived. Thus, one has to ask, what if the Matsuba family had not been exiled and had instead remained in Canada after the war? It is difficult not to think that they would have made similarly significant contributions to the postwar Canadian economy and society, just as they ended up doing in Japan and the United States. In other words, their story provides a compelling example of how Canada’s exile of almost 4000 Japanese Canadians at the end of World War II was not only an unjust and illegal act against these Canadian citizens, but ultimately turned out to be an economic loss to Canada itself. Perhaps this is one of the most important lessons contemporary Canadians can learn from the life histories of the Japanese Canadian exiles.



**Lemon Creek High School students. Tak is 3<sup>rd</sup> from left in back row. (Nikkei National Museum 1995.103.1.2.a-b)**



**Tak as a teenager (Nikkei National Museum 2012.11.471)**



**Gabby Matsuba (center front, holding plaque) with student union council members (Nikkei National Museum 1995.103.1.2.a-b)**



**Tak (left) as interim teacher at Lemon Creek (Courtesy of Jean Maeda and Nobuko Nakayama)**



**Tak in a skit at 2007 Lemon Creek Reunion with Kiyoshi Ito (Japanese Canadian Cultural Center 2011.47.06.05.18)**



**Tak at 2007 Lemon Creek Reunion with Tom Matsui (Japanese Canadian Cultural Center 2011.47.06.05.16)**



**Matsuba Family New Year photo in 2002 (Courtesy of Tak Matsuba)**



**Tak with granddaughter in 2001 (Courtesy of Tak Matsuba)**



**Tatsuo Kage, pioneer researcher of Japanese Canadian exiles, 2019, in his home (Vancouver)**



**Tak playing with the writer's son in Ashiya, Japan, 2016**



**151 East Cordova Street, former location of the Matsuba family business, now occupied by the BC Provincial Court Building**



**Tak in a coffee shop near his home in Nishinomiya, October 2019**

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