

Jimmy Hing and Jim Kishi

Interviewers: Marilyn Clayton and Marie Bannister (for the Britannia Heritage Shipyard Project)

Recorded at Britannia Heritage Shipyard, Richmond, B.C., August 15, 1991

(Project) Tape No. 101:1

NO RESTRICTIONS

MC: I don't know if Jim explained to you what we're trying to do but we're just talking to people who have had experiences either living here or working here. We're trying to just get a little bit of a history.

JH: Well, to tell you the truth, the Japanese name is pretty hard to remember. (referring to the name of the Japanese boatbuilders who owned building #12) I know there's quite a few that used to work around here. They'd do their own boatwork and they'd help each other, you know, like a family. You do my share of the work and I'd help you do your share. Sometimes they build a boat, they'd do the same thing, the wooden boats. So they were pretty handy with, like of course, Kishi, he's a shipbuilder, a boatbuilder. But other than that some of them are the..... getting together, you help me build a boat this year, I'll help you build one next year, or repair or whatever has to be done.

MB: Would that be the smaller wooden skiffs?

JH: They, they have what they call the East Hope Engine in it. Of course, in the early days they use paddles, you know oars. And then they have that, what do you call it, single engine, East Hope Engine.

MC: Do you remember when that was? What time would... What year would that be?

JH: I think, it..lets see. Oh, when they use paddles and row boats out here? Oh, that's going back when I was a kid, you'd see them paddle past here with the, with the wooden row boat like.

MC: When they put the East Hope Engine in, do you remember when that was?

JH: I think it was in the, lets see now. I'll have to mull that one for awhile. I'll come up with it.

MC: The other thing is we've seen boats, pictures of boats, just the flat skiffs, and then a little while later you see them with cabins on them. And we have no idea when that started happening. When did they start to get a little bit more elaborate?

JH: Well, in the old days they have, all have open skiffs, and they use, they use paddles. And later on they have that East Hope Engines, the what do you call, the one cylinder. I forgot the name of the engine. Every night you hear all, nothing but putt, putt, all night. Everybody have just a single engine, single cylinder. You hear the putt, putt, putt, all night around here on the waterfront.

MC: So they can fish all (night long)? There wasn't a limit, a time limit or anything?

JH: I beg your pardon.

MC: There wasn't a time limit when they can go out and fish?

JH: Oh yes, seasonal fishing.

MC: Seasonal.

JH: That's only one. The fish run in cycles, you see. Like every month, certain months of the year, a certain type, a certain species of fish comes along here. You take the, up the Adams River the pink run is coming, you see. And then the sockeye run comes before the pink, the sockeye's earlier than the pink. The sockeye is usually start around July you see. And the pink they call the fall fish, they come down about, I would say, down here its around about October. But up in Alaska way, theirs, its much earlier than down here, about a month or so.

MC: They're catching pinks around here now.

JH: Yeah, millions of them, yeah.

MC: So, we've missed the sockeye? Have we missed the sockeye?

JH: Well, sockeye season is just about over now, just about in the middle of it I think. This is August what?

MC: We're up to the 15th., the middle of August.

JH: August. Yeah, the sockeye is pretty near the end of it. They start up north, they start sometime in June, the sockeye in big run. There's the, there's the Skinny River, the Adams River, the Rivers Inlet, and Johnson Straits. Four different types. They are different sizes too and in weight and in colour, those fish. They all the same species but they're from different area they're different weight and different size.

MC: Okay. Jim you were saying that you were born in Richmond, and you grew up.....Did you grow up right around in the Steveston area?

JH: Yes, I was born on River Road on, near Cambie. Of course you wouldn't know where that is.

MC: Well, I do.

JH: Way up, way up, way up above here where the, I don't think that church, that church might still be there, the United Church, at the corner of Cambie and River, corner of Cambie and River Road. You see that's where the Cambie Road ends right at the river front.

MC: You were saying when you were 16, you decided that you wanted to start working. And what did you do?

JH: Well, I was a clean up boy to start with, at the Tea House. And then I did a good job and the boss made me a waiter. At that time they don't hand out slip with the amount of money you pay. You go up there and pay what you eat, you see. You don't give them a bill for the price of meal or tea. You just holler, ""So many people, so many cents, so many dollars"". Just like they do in Hong Kong, in Chinese Tea House in Vancouver at the time. And then, later on, well, I worked there. Of course in those days, when I started out, things were pretty rough in Vancouver then, everything goes. Everything were wide open, gambling and all the joints were open in Chinatown and East Hastings and part of the West Side of Vancouver. Everything goes in those days, during the Depression, in the '30s. That's how I learnt all the Chinese culture and things like that. I picked it up from the old timers.

MC: So, then did you work here on the Britannia site later on?

JH: I think, in 1934 I came down here. Yeah, I think the Phoenix started up, phoenix cannery, that one down there. It was closed down for quite a few years and I think it started up in 1934, start canning, reopened the cannery.

MC: When you worked here, what did you do?

JH: Oh, I was just an ordinary labourer, punching. You know, in those days they filled, the cans were all hand filled. It was on contract work, piece work in other words. 90% of the fellow were Japanese. And they go by the trays, so much a tray, and every tray you punch, punch a hole in a ticket, you see, they give them a ticket. They don't pay them every month, they pay them every season.

MC: Pay by the season!

JH: Same with manual labour.

MB: What would you do without money all season? So, you'd start working in the spring and not get paid 'till the fall?

JH: Well, in those days, the early days, it's contract labour. As a matter of fact, my Dad was a contract for the Terra Nova, and the Richmond, and the Wedhams and Warham. It's all gone, those places are all torn down now. Its just where the Garry Point is. And Terre Nova is way up end of No. 1 Road. They canning fish, all hand work.

MC: Do you remember Buster McKenzie? Did you work here....

JH: Oh yeah, I worked here before, I think, yeah, I worked here a couple of years before he did. He was a, he was a

reduction foreman for ABC up north. I think, I don't know, it was Clam II or Yorklet or whatever you call that place they have a reduction plant down, out there. And they closed that, that down, and McKenzie came out here. And they started the reduction plant at Phoenix. And he was the foreman and manager of the reduction plant, and later on when things got going, I think Bill Lord, he was the first manager I worked with, Bill Lord.

MC: Bill Lord?

JH: Bill Lord, yeah he's one of the, he's the old time, he's, they're connected with the Bell-Irving Real Estate and Insurance Co. And he was the manager here.

MC: Can you remember other names of people you worked with here?

JH: I beg your pardon.

MC: Other names of people.

JH: Well, when I first started here.... You mean just the skilled help or semi- skilled help?

MC: We've met a few people around the area, like Lanky. Did you know Lanky?

JH: Lanky, oh yes, that's way before him, he's a young fellow. Lanky Mizuguchi, he's a young fellow. His dad used to fish out here.

MC: And Jim Kishi is married to Lanky's sister.

JH: Yeah, to Lanky's sister. They used to work for me in the cannery here.

MC: They used to work for you? Did they?

JH: Not Jim, but his wife. I think his wife's name is Sally isn't it? Is it Sally?

MC: Yeah, that name rings a bell.

JH: Is it Sally? I've forgot, that was quite a long time ago. My wife used to work in the cannery with me too. But my wife is Japanese. When I first come down here, I started, lets see 1934, I think I was 'round about 19, no I must have been about 24 or 25. I started just as an ordinary labourer, punching tickets and doing odds and ends. And then done that for a couple of years, just only seasonal work at that time. When I finished the season here, I go back in the Cabaret and work, in Vancouver.

MC: Where did you work? You go back where?

JH: Go back to the Chinese Tea House.

MC: Oh, okay, the cabaret!

JH: In those days they call it, what they call it, a Tea House, its actually kind of a semi-cabaret, they bootleg, you know, they don't have licences, like now a days, they bootleg you see. I worked until, I think 1934 and I come down here and I was an ordinary labourer at the Phoenix Cannery. The cannery, have you been in that cannery down there?

MB: Not yet, no.

JH: Well, I'll tell you about it first and maybe later on we take, take a walk down and take a look at it.

MC: Okay.

JH: I used to go out there and all the Japanese live around the dyke here in shacks, you know, in unpainted houses like this one here. And they go to work at the cannery, filling cans you know. Its 90% almost, Japanese women that work the cannery, filling cans. There's Phoenix, Phoenix cannery, the Great West, and the Imperial, those were the three main canneries that survived all the rest along the coast here.

MC: Now you said they all lived right around here. All the Japanese people lived around here?

JH: Yeah, mostly around here on company property. They fished for the company and lived on company property and there's a way down number, right from here to near No. 2 Road too, there's quite a few that lived down there, and also down in Steveston ways. Of course in around Steveston all those old shacks are all torn down now. They used to live in the shacks, help one another, you know, during the rough time, and do the work. Like in the old days all the net mending, mending net and all that, you know, they'd get together and help each other, they don't hire any help. If I hit a snag and tore my net well we all get together and help mend the net. If yours got torn now we all get together and help. Same thing with the boatwork, they do that painting and repairing.

MC: Okay.

MB: When you were working at the cannery, where did you live? Did you live up in Vancouver and come down here?

JH: Ah no, they have a bunkhouse down here for the Chinese crew. Just on the dyke here. They live down here, they... In those days it was contract work, you see, the contractor contract the labour off say for about, at that time if I remember right, 35c an hour. And they go out and hire those help. Like they hire mostly Chinese help because they're more energetic, and they go for cheap. That's the [main reason] cheap labour, so long as they've got a job and a few dollars. If they earn anything from \$100 to \$150 a year, at that time, it was good money. Some of the good boys would save every nickel of it and a couple, three years, they'd take a trip back to China. Some of the good timers, well, they go out there, go to the gambling joint and buy a couple drinks and go with the hookies. They spent it. They're all single you know, the Chinese population of Vancouver at the time, as a matter of fact, as far as I know in British Columbia and also back east too. They don't allow Oriental women in Canada you see, at that time, just the men.

MC: Just the men. Well, when you stayed here on the site what did you do, like evenings times would you be mending your nets and things?

JH: No, I was just a cannery worker. Sometimes they don't operate eight hours a day every day you know, at the cannery here. See sometime they get fresh fish in and they figure it will take three or four hours to do it. They start 9 o'clock in the morning, you see. No, 9:30 in the morning. They only give you two meals, you see. When the season is slack they give you two meals. See you get your breakfast at 9 o'clock, you go to work at 9:30, go right through till, you put in your, up to 4 o'clock.

MC: And was there, where would you have those meals?

JH: In the bunkhouse, right in the bunkhouse, they have a cook. They hire a cook to cook for you in the bunkhouse, you see.

MC: After work was over, what did you do?

JH: Well, they play in the bunkhouse, they're playing Mah Jong, a Chinese card game to pass the time. Mostly Chinese dominos and Mah Jong.

Joined by Jim Kishi.

MC: Have a seat, come and join us. Have a cookie.

JK: No.

MC: No. Don't be shy.

JH: Can I light up a cigarette in here?

MC: I don't think that's a problem, we'll just have to be careful.

JH: Well, oh, I'm a careful one. I used to be a fireman. To tell you the truth, did you hear about the history of Steveston Fire Department?

JK: His brother was the first volunteer fireman in Richmond.

MC: Oh really?

JK: Henry started the fire works.

JH: Yeah, he, there's, there's my brother. There's quite a few of them, they bought an old broken down truck, they build their own fire truck, a pump wagon. That's going back in the '30s. All the firemen were volunteer in those days. They tore the fire hall down right on the corner of 3rd, and... Is it 3rd and Chatham? Is it?

JK: 3rd and Chatham.

JH: 3rd and Chatham. The old municipal hall is still there. The old municipal hall is right, is still on 3rd Ave.

JK: Didn't they make that building into, they're doing something in there now?

JH: Well, they preserved the building, you see and they use it for, to store, to store those historic things.

JK: Yeah, that's what I mean.

JH: Yeah. And I was, in those early days there were quite a few Chinese around here, there was pretty near 1000 of them. There was about three or four opium dens around here, the Chinese people smoke opium, you see.

MC: Right here on the site?

JH: Around, you know, around Steveston here, in the area. Say within two square miles they have the opium dens, sometimes they have one in the corner there, or underneath the building. As a matter of fact there was one underneath that building (building #11) there when it was over by the dyke there.

MC: One underneath the long house?

JH: Yeah, underneath. It was on stilts about that high (3 feet), you see, and they go, the people in the summer time they put those Chinese, what do you call, bamboo, rattan sheets and they laid on there and smoke opium, you see. So the police won't see them.

MC: Underneath the building. Wow. When you were on the site, when you lived on the site, did you buy food or did they prepare all your meals for you?

JH: Those, the cannery workers, especially the manual worker, like the Chinese, the contractor would hire them, they board them and feed them. And they only... The company, as I've mentioned, the company give the contractor 35c an hour and they hire the help. Some of them they give them (the contract labourers) 10c, some of them 12c, some 15c, at the very most 20c an hour to work in the cannery.

MC: Well, was there a store here where you could buy food or anything like that?

JH: Yeah, there used to be Hong Wo's store. It used to be, oh that's going back a long time, it's been torn down now. You see, it supplied most of the residents around the dyke here, at Hong Wo's store, they sell groceries, hardware, everything.

MC: Did people grow some of their own food at all?

JH: Oh yes, they do. Some of them, they even grow around here. He (Jim Kishi) should remember.

JK: We used to have a garden behind our house.

JH: A garden.

MC: Did you?

JK: Oh yeah.

MC: And across the dyke too, there were fields there?

JK: Oh yeah.

JH: Oh, those are real farming.

MC: Well when you had your garden Jim, what kind of things did you grow? Vegetables?

JK: Oh, just ordinary vegetables, you know.

JH: Chinese, mostly oriental vegetables. like the Japanese turnip, Japanese nappa, and tikung. Tikung means Japanese turnip.

MC: Japanese turnip.

JH: Nappa, nappa that means Japanese greens.

MC: So what was it like growing up here, or just living on the site? Did you have good times?

JH: We all got along swell. Health, everybody is healthy. We get along, no troubles, no problems, nobody steal anything. Not like today you go out there and somebody put a knife behind your back and try to take a dollar out of your pocket. Things like that happen. If the police don't get him, somebody else, If the fellow, person that know him gets him, well he's going to run into trouble. Without the law. Oh they were very, very trusty, trustworthy persons out here. All, as a matter of fact, most of the nationality are.

MC: Did you go to school around here?

JH: Well, I did, I don't know about you. Did you go to school out here?

JK: Oh yeah.

MC: Where was the school?

JK: I was at Lord Byng.

MC: Oh, that's right, you went to Lord Byng.

JK: And then I went to, I went to Cambie High, that used to be Richmond High. I'd drive on the tram, if I missed the tram, I used to go by bike up to there.

JH: Of course, he's much younger than I am, you see. He started at Lord Byng, I started at Mitchell School. Mitchell School is on Cambie and No. 5 Road. Its only....

JK: Cambie and No. 5?

JH: Cambie and No. 5, that's old building is still there.

JK: Yeah.

JH: Yeah, that's where I started.

JK: Oh.

JH: I think I went there for one year, then we moved down from River Road to Steveston Highway where we live until I went into town to work.

MC: Gerry Miller mentioned about the boardwalk going along there and that that was about the only way to get from place to place.

JH: Yeah. Right from the, right from Steveston tram stand, you have a tram. Those people walk from, right from No. 2 Road right straight down the dyke to catch a tram to Vancouver. Sometimes they walk a mile, mile and a half, two miles, some even three miles, to catch a tram to Vancouver, to Marpole.

MC: Why would you go to Vancouver? Was that just for....

JH: Well, some....

JK:for entertainment, you know, and shopping.

JH: See there, like the, there used to be up in Powell Street used to be a Japanese town, you see, Powell Street. The population, they have all sorts of Japanese food and groceries and what not. And same thing in Chinatown you see. So, that's your colony, while he go back to his colony, I go back to mine, you see.

MB: So you go into town, into Vancouver, to buy speciality things that you can't get here?

JH: Ah yes.

MB: How long did it take to go by tram from Steveston to (Vancouver)?

JH: One hour.

JK: Every one hour.

JH: Tram run every hour.

JK: Tram used to leave every one hour.

MB: And it'd just take an hour to get there?

JH: Yeah, take an hour.

JK: Just an hour to get to..

MC: You said Jim that your wife worked with you here. Did you meet your wife here?

JH: At the cannery? Yeah.

MC: At the cannery.

JH: As a matter of fact, I should mention....

JK: She lived right behind here.

JH: Was it? No, this building here, behind this building here. (building # 13).

MC: Behind this building?

JH: Yeah, behind they had, oh its been torn down now. It was a shack. Yeah, a shack back there.

MC: Now this building (building #13), do you know if its always been there, or was it moved to there?

JK: It was moved here 'cause this building (building #13) was way back there.

MC: Okay, that's what we call #13. It used to be at the back?

JK: At the back, yeah.

MC: Cause its really close to this one. They're almost touching.

JH: Well, this one here was build here, this was a boathouse. This one.

JK: Yeah, I remember that.

JH: Did you?

JK: Yeah.

JH: Atagi, is it, is it Atagi?

JK: No, Murakami.

MC: This is the Murakami.

JH: Amanaka.

JK: No, Murakami.

JH: Oh, Murakami. Where was Atagi?

JK: Atagi used to be in town.

MC: Scotch Pond wasn't it?

JK: Scotch Pond, still there.

JH: Still there, eh.

JK: Now its a net loft there.

MC: Do you remember the Murakami family?

JK: Yeah.

MC: Now, okay you say its George.

JK: Yeah, George.

MC: He's the son.

JK: He's somewhere in Westminster. He's a fisherman.

JH: Yeah, there's quite a few of them, talking about that fire hall, I think there's the Johnsons, and the Mays, and my three, two brothers, Harry, and myself. And of course Joe, my other brother Joe, he was a Brighthouse Fire Department. And Danny, he was down here for awhile, my brother youngest. He passed away now. He....

MC: So there were four of you, four brothers in your family?

JH: There's five all together.

MC: Five!

JH: There's still three of us left. There's twelve of us in the family you know, seven girls and five boys.

MC: That's a big family.

JH: Yeah, they're all born in Richmond. My two older sisters and myself we were born on River Road, and the rest born on Steveston Highway. Just go look straight across, you can't see it now but before these buildings here, you look right across you can see all the flat farmlands. We used to farm out there.

MB: So your parents came from China? Your parents moved from China?

JH: Ah yes, my dad came over and built the CPR Railroad.

MB: Okay, and your mom come over later?

JH: My mom came over later when she... My mom came over when she was a baby. Her family lived in Vancouver in, what you call, Canton Street in Vancouver. Canton Street and Shanghai used to be the biggest Chinatown street instead of, now its Pender Street. In Chinatown, used to be, it would be Shanghai Alley and the Canton Alley, they call it. That's where the Chinatown used to be.

MC: So you met your wife here on the site, (speaking to Jimmy Hing) and you met your wife here too (speaking to

Jim Kishi)? Right?

JK: Yeah, we went to school together.

MC: You went to school together?

JK: Neighbours.

MC: That's right cause where your home was, behind the boatworks, that must have been really close to where the Mizuguchi lived too. Was it?

JK: Yeah, it was about three or four houses over.

MC: Oh.

JK: The other side.

MC: So you went to school together and then....

JK: No, we didn't go to school together. No, we are five years apart.

MC: We want to get in touch with Lanky as well sometime. And see if he'll come down and talk with us.

JH: How is Lanky doing now, is he?

JK: He's good.

JH: He's okay.

JK: Yeah. He's out fishing now.

JH: No, is he? Well, its about time he retired.

JK: Yeah, he goes fishing.

JH: He still goes fishing?

JK: He still does as good as them.

JH: Oh, has he.

JK: He's trying to sell it, but hard to sell it now.

JH: Yeah.

MC: When we were looking at that building there, the long house building, and that's the one that used to be towards the back and then they moved forward. We're trying to remember what kind of roof was that on it, and do you remember what it was? It was shingles, wasn't it?

JH: It was shingles, yeah.

JK: It was shingles.

JH: Yeah, it was a shingle roof.

JK: Like those shingles up there.

MC: Okay. See in this one the planks are far apart, you can see the shingles through, when you look up. And when you look up at the ceiling in the one next door, the roof, ceiling boards are butted right against each other.

JH: Yeah. Well, they done that when they moved it over here. See they take all the whole roof out and rebut the roof and put the corrugated iron on it.

MC: But the wooden part, that would have still been there, they just put the corrugated on top of it?

JH: Yeah. All the rafters are the same, original, except the boards on the roof. They call it shiplap, you see they lap, they got the tongue and they lap on another, see they call it shiplap.

MC: Okay.

JH: [You should know this.]

MC: So you're saying then, when they moved it forward they took the roof off except for the rafters?

JH: No, they moved the whole thing over before they took the roof off, if you took the roof off it won't be steady you see.

MC: Okay. So they brought it over, and then took the roof off?

JH: And then took the roof off.

MC: And then put a new one on and that corrugated?

JH: I think that was done in the '30s. '30, lets see, it would be around '34 or '35, around there '34 or '35.

JK: When we moved out in '41 it wasn't here. (Refers to the Japanese internment of 1942)

JH: This one here?

JK: Yeah, we left in '41 or early '42, this wasn't here.

JH: Oh, that's right too, yeah, yeah. Yeah, that was just before the war.

JK: Must have been during the war time when they moved it.

JH: I think that's right too Jim. Come to think of it Jim, you're right, yeah. Because I know that bunch of contractors that moved it, this thing down here.

JK: Oh yeah? How did they move it?

MC: Do you know who the contractor was?

JH: Oh gee, I couldn't... Well, they just brace it up and put it on skids and skid it over. Same thing with that thing, big building there. From up north, they brought it all by scow and they skidded it over there. I'm one that helped put the foundation in too.

JK: Yeah, I remember that building coming in.

MC: Well, that building there, (building #11) did it used to be just one big long room inside? Because there was only one door on the front, you can see that.

JH: Well see, they have an aisle inside, you see, you could go walk down inside the aisle.

MC: Okay, so you go in the front door and there would be an aisle and smaller rooms inside?

JH: Yeah, just like a hall, you know, you walk down.

MC: That's what we couldn't understand, how it was.

JH: Of course in those days, people they get along together, you walk by me well, I do the same thing, just like a family. They don't bother you. Today a little different. See they're all individual like, you see.

MC: Now that's the way that building there is too. (building #13) Now there's sort of a, that would make sense what that little aisle is, down the side, so. We found bits of newspaper and things on the walls, so that gives an idea of

when, you know, wallpaper was put up.

JH: Yeah, this building (#12) is quite old. They used it for storage. It used to be a boatbuilder. And after, when the war started they used it, used it for storage, lumber storage.

MC: There looks like there has been a part added onto it, there at the back. The roof is different and the floor is different. Looks a lot different.

JK: That must be an addition they made.

MC: Looks like it doesn't it.

JH: Yeah, that, that did, added on afterwards.

JK: Yeah.

MC: The back part?

JH: Yeah.

MC: Would you know when that was done?

JH: Oh gee, I don't remember. I think that was added on before I even came down here.

MC: You can see its a little bit different.

JK: Yeah.

MC: The boards and the battens and the ceilings different too. Okay now, in that one there, that long one (building #11), that you say was moved forward, did it ever have a low ceiling on it, or was it always really high inside?

JH: No, its an original. See what that, see that lapping on that lumber there, see they overlap it so the rain won't get in, you see.

MC: Oh, that's why that's like that.

JH: Yeah, yeah.

MC: Okay. So the top one hangs down over top the lower one.

JH: Yeah.

MC: So that's what that is, okay. And there's, up in the top part there's a window up there, its all boarded in now. And..

JH: Well, they use that, probably be the skylight. I don't remember, all I remember is that we put the roof on when it moved over here, new roof.

MC: That's good, that's what we were trying to figure out. When, about when that roof has been put on it. So that explains it. How many people would live in a building like that? (building #11)

JH: At that time, gee I couldn't tell you now. My golly, I'd never been in that building, as a matter of fact. Even down here now, we moved down here, I have been in only one place, the first time I'd ever even walked in there. I hadn't been in that place all the years I worked here.

MC: How about this one here, (building #13) do you remember many people living in that one?

JH: That one there, its a private house too, I'd never been in there.

MC: Its pretty big, isn't it? That one there.

JH: Oh, there used to be quite a few shack around here but they're all torn down. I think...

MC: Do you remember the Shoreys?

JH: Shoreys, yeah, George Shorey, he's the foreman at the Britannia Shipyard.

MC: That's right, and they had a big house over.....

JH: A white house just in front of the, what you call it there. I think....

JK: Mrs. Shorey's still alive isn't she?

MC: Yes.

JH: Mrs. Shorey is. Mrs. Shorey is still alive but George is gone. And the old man is gone. George Shorey, he was in the U.S. Airforce.

JK: George Shorey's gone.

JH: Eh!

JK: George Shorey's gone.

JH: Oh, Barbara?

JK: No, Barbara is in Seattle.

JH: George is gone.

JK: Yeah, George is gone.

MC: Barbara is going to come and see us next Tuesday.

JH: Who?

MC: Barbara, the daughter. She lives, you're right she does live down in Seattle.

JK: Somewhere in the [United States].

MC: But she has a place, a summer place in Point Roberts, so she's going to come and see us next Tuesday.

JK: Mrs. Shorey gives us a phone call once in awhile.

MC: Mrs. Shorey? Does she?

JK: She's living now in Lion's Manor. And she's getting blind.

MC: I think she's 92. 92 or 94, she's going a long ways.

JK: 94 now.

MC: 94!

JH: I guess what the information you want is about these buildings around here.

MC: What, whatever you can remember.

JH: You're not, you don't, you're not interested in the cannery operation or anything like that?

MB: Actually we are. We're interested in everything. We have so little information that even how the canneries were, the schedule you had, you know the time you got off, and when you're coffee breaks were..

JH: Well, in the old days, when I come, first started here, like all the people who work in the cannery they live along

the dyke here and most are Oriental. And, sometime when the fish come in, they want to start up, we used to just pull the whistle. It whistled twice didn't it?

JK: Yeah.

JH: For the people to go to work.

MC: Call them to work then when the whistle blew?

JH: They blowed the whistle twice and they all be rushing to the cannery to work.

JK: We see all the Chinese men, they come run, walking down here from the cookhouse, they lined up all the way down the walkway. I remember that.

MC: Where was the cookhouse?

JK: Just at Hong Wo's.

JH: Just down here about a quarter, no not even, just about a quarter of a mile isn't it?

JK: Yeah, just about.

JH: No. Yeah just about quarter of a mile. Oh the building is not there now, its all torn down. Even the bunkhouse I used to use is torn down now.

MC: So would you go back there for lunch as well?

JH: Yeah.

JK: There's another big cookhouse down here, where there used to be a lot of fruit trees growing there.

JH: Well, that's....

JK: Is that the cookhouse for the white guy?

JH: Yeah, just for the white guys. Cannery cookhouse for the white people, white labour.

MC: Okay. So you couldn't eat..

JH: Not, not white labour, white regular crew. But if you, ordinary cannery workers want to go in and eat they got to order their meal before hand because the cook only cooks so much, only so many meal a day, you see. If there's any extra you got to order it.

JK: Yeah, it was something like the house over at London Farm. You know, it was a big building like that. Yeah, with a porch on it.

JH: Yeah. They, they have a bunk...

JK: I remember that because we used to steal, you know, pears, fruits and plums that was grown there.

MC: Out of the orchards?

JK: Yeah, it was a good orchard in there.

JH: Are you talking about back here?

JK: Yeah, way back there.

JH: There were two good plums there, the Italian plum right behind here. I remember, just only a few years back, we used to get some. I don't think the tree is still there or not.

MC: The purple ones?

JH: Eh?

MC: The big purple plums?

JH: Oh, those Italian plums.

MC: Careful where you're walking.

JK: I don't think you'll see any trees here because its all sand was poured in here.

JH: Oh yes, its all gone, its all buried.

JK: Oh yeah.

MC: So what would happen if you got caught stealing fruit? Did they just chase you?

JK: We got chased away.

MC: So they chased you down the road?

JK: Yeah.

JH: Yes, imagine just...

JK: The carpenter foreman used to live right close to there, opposite it. He was a nice guy. He's the man I, who I asked him to take our radio.

MC: Oh right. What was his name?

JK: I don't remember.

JH: Who was that?

MC: The carpenter foreman.

JK: He was a big tall fellow.

JH: Oh, carpenter....

JK: He was a carpenter foreman.

JH: Big Ed. He's a

JK: Maybe it was Big Ed, he was a really tall man.

JH: He's a Swedish. Big Ed you call him. Big Ed, he's the head carpenter at Britannia.

MC: Oh Ljunggren? Is that the name? Cause that's the name that Gerry. And he lived, he lived in the house behind the winch house?

JH: Right there yeah, yeah, Ljunggren, yeah he's a Swedish.

MC: From Sweden. That's very good. So Big Ed he's the one you meant? (Edward Ljunggren).

JH: Yeah, Big Ed.

MC: He must have been here for quite a few years too?

JK: Oh yeah. Yeah, my Dad used to get along with him.

MC: What do you remember about the weather? Was it about the same as it is now or were the winters colder or

warmer?

JH: Its, its the same. Yeah, about the same only...

JK: I think we had more snow.

JH: Yeah, well until the early years, we have, that's going back.

JK: I don't remember the Fraser freezing over though. I don't remember the river freezing over.

JH: Ah no, no. I can remember when I was round about 5 or 6 years old, when it frozen right over, you could walk across it.

JK: Yeah?

JH: Yeah.

MC: Really? When would that be about 19....

JH: That would be about seventy four, five years ago.

MC: Really, it froze right so you could walk right over to Shady Island? Could you?

JH: Yeah. No, from here to the rock, not the other part, just this part here. But this part here is more or less like a dead end you see. The tide doesn't go race back and forth. But of course it does rise and go down too, but during the cold weather, you see, the water is kind of still and the wind keeps whipping back here and it starts freezing about three or four inches deep, in some spots.

MC: (Discussing photograph, of 1947, from Buster McKenzie of the Britannia / Phoenix site) ...of the Phoenix Cannery, but see, but you can. Okay, I'll show you here. This is the Phoenix cannery, okay, but this that long house that, you know that one that's right there, okay that's when its moved forward. And you're right its got the corrugated roof on it there. Can you see right there where it used to be? This kind of a, if you look really (close) you can see like an indentation in the grass where it used to be. And this is the big Shorey house, right there. And that's another one.

MB: Did you take any pictures when you worked here at all?

JH: No, no, I hadn't take any pictures, no.

MC: ...the long house right. You can sort of see, right there, where it used to be.

MB: We actually were asking people if they had taken photos of the cannery, inside and such. For the most part everyone is going, ""Well, why would we take pictures of work?"".

MC: And this is the boardwalk.

JH: This picture was taken quite late, I can see here now there's the Phoenix store.

MC: Okay.

JH: There's the Phoenix office. And this is the, this is the boarding house for women cannery workers. All these, ten of them. I think its ten of them, yeah.

MC: Looks like it.

JH: Yes. And this is the cannery store and this is Shorey's house and this is the, what you call it, the cookhouse and bunkhouse for white labour.

MC: Oh, that's the one. Is that the one with the fruit trees that you used to steal from, Jim? Okay, now we know.

JH: Was a pear tree used to be near here.

MC: A pear tree?

JK: It was good pears. I loved that pear.

JH: Gee, oh great pears, fine pears you know.

MC: You used to go for the pears.

JH: Of course this building here is one of those over there.

MC: So how old would you have been when you were stealing the pears? (directed to Jim Kishi)

JK: I was 16 when I left.

MC: Okay.

JK: So it was 13 or 14, around there.

MC: 13 or 14, yeah. Still real quick so you could get around.

JH: This part of the cannery was added on when I was, when I came down. The, what do you call it, it used to be a reduction plant oil storage. But since the thing began expanding, they moved it. They moved it on this side, its not in this picture. Did (Buster) McKenzie send you this picture?

MC: Yeah, yeah, he sent it to Mary (Gazetas). You can see, like, this is, this is the building that's just over there.

JH: Yeah.

MC: Yeah, and this is that, that one that you were talking about that had been moved from back.

JH: Yeah, from the back.

MC: And you can see just a little bit of that roof there which is where we are right now. Okay, can you see, back in the grass there, you can see the grass is flattened out, that must have been where this building (building #11) had been before. Okay now, you were saying about farms?

JH: Here's a spot right here, see it?

MC: Yeah, yeah, that's the one. So is this where the, like the farms would have been?

JH: The farmers? The farmers on the north side of the dyke, that one there. North side of the dyke. What do you call it, oh, Darling used to own those lands. Remember Magistrate Darling?

JK: Yeah.

JH: He owned those lands and he rented it out to the Chung family, Chinese farmer. And eventually, they, he farmed for a few years then they sold the land to the Chungs. Dirt cheap too. Yeah.

MC: There was a Chung family in Ladner. But I...

JH: No, that's a different Chung. Chung Chuck.

MC: Yeah, Chung Chuck.

JH: He's an old big.....

MC: Potato.

JH: Potato grower.

MC: Potato grower.

JH: Yeah, he got a couple of big fat daughters too.

MC: I went to school with them.

JH: Don't tell them what I said, okay.

MC: I won't tell them what you said.

JH: Oh, Chung Chuck, I'd known him for years. He's, he's a tough guy you know. Do you remember the marketing board? Like, they control the potatoes and vegetables, you know and cabbage. You know, all the big items (in) farming. And he would take a load across what the old Marpole wooden bridge, what the Oak Street bridge is the old wooden Marpole bridge. And they'd block him, you know, wouldn't let him through. He'd come out of the truck and beat everyone of those policemen up and then he drives on.

MC: That's right, that's right. He even got put in jail one time.

JH: Oh yes, yeah.

MC: For causing a disturbance.

JH: Well, he's quite right you know. He said, ""Well, I'm, I farm here this a Canadian law, I grow my own stuff, I'll sell my own stuff.""

MC: He wouldn't join that marketing board.

JH: Yeah. No he wouldn't.

MC: That's the Shorey house there.

MB: He's taking a stand.

MC: Is this the place where, no that's the...

JH: Yes, sometime you know, you got to, when you ask a different question you got to think back a little while before you remember it accurately, you know.

JK: These were individual houses.

JH: I used to, before the war my dad used to farm out here. I used to come down with a wheelbarrow along the wooden walk here. Wheel. I was selling those Japanese turnip to the restaurants down here, to the people down here, the fishermen and their wives.

MC: Now you can see that this is that big house that was right there.

MB: After you and your wife got married did you live and work still at the cannery?

JH: I worked, I worked in town for about ten years, and then I came back down to the cannery. And then I worked, that was before the war, and that's when I met my, my wife. She was just a little kid then, she (was) 14 years old, 13 or 14 years old. Her mom used to hand fill for the cannery. And then, years go by, and during the war years they got evacuated and then that was it and I be, was on my own. I never got married until she got back, you see. After the war and worked in the cannery.

MC: So how old were you when you got married?

JH: Oh, gee, about 40 I think.

MC: Were you. Just a swinging bachelor were you?

JH: Oh, I wasn't worried about anything back then. I wasn't worried about female company. There's lots of it. Especially when you work in the cannery.

MC: Long hours?

JH: Yeah, oh, sometimes we worked fourteen hours. It depend how, what the season is. If it a big season, in those days, you know they, either you can them or throw them away. No such thing as big freezer like they have today. They just throw a little ice on it, and you got to can them right away. Sometime we work, we start 7 in the morning and work till noon, have lunch. There's no coffee breaks, you know, in those days. And a half an hour for lunch, then work till 6 o'clock and have supper.

MC: Did they feed you supper too?

JH: No, well, the Chinese help did but not the other help. Just the Chinese help. See the contractor, see they hire the help, they feed them and board them, you see. And they gip them out of so much, percent out of each hour of work they do.

MC: What kind of things would they feed you?

JH: Oh, just a bowl of salt fish.

MC: Salt fish?

JH: Yeah, salt fish, they go for the rice, you see. The Chinese people, they mostly, their big part of the meal is rice, a little bit of vegetable and meat. Oh, they have a small, maybe a small chunk of meat, maybe as big as a biscuit there, and maybe a half bowl of soup. And they eat, and they eat two bowls of rice with it. Rice is the main meal, I think its the same thing with Japanese. Course Japanese diet, they use more pickle than we do.

MC: Do you still eat lots of rice?

JH: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. As a matter of fact, I noticed when I work in the, all the years I work in Vancouver, in the restaurant in the Cabaret, the Occidental people begin to adapt to the Chinese food and the Japanese food. Because you get your rice, all your meat cut up, all your vegetables cooked together and meat cooked together and the flavour's all there. Where you's people you bake your roast beef or fry your steak and boil your vegetables and potatoes and you throw all the goodness away and you eat, you eat the scrap.

MB: We make too many dishes that way too. One for your meat, one for your vegetables, one for your potatoes. Stirring it all together is much easier.

JH: Yeah. Did you watch the TV when one of the white fellows teach you about Chinese cooking? The one Chinese, ""Wok with..."".

MC: ""Wok with Won""? ""Wok with Yan"".

JH: He teach Chinese cooking.

MC: That was a good show.

JH: Yeah, he explain everything to you.

MC: That's right. We taped a bunch of those cause there are good ideas.

JH: It is, just to... Well, there's no harm in learning things. I mean, it doesn't matter what it is, good or bad, you got to learn in this world here. That's how I learn all my English. I put the bad with the good and the good with the bad.

MB: So you learnt Chinese first, then learnt English later?

JH: No, in our family my parents were pretty strict. You could speak any language when you were outside of the house, any language at all but when you're home, with the family, you've got to speak your own language, Chinese. Same as with the Japanese, no difference.

MB: What kind of Chinese did you learn?

JH: Cantonese.

JK: We used to speak Japanese at home. Even at school. I still remember a time when we were retained one year. When we were to travel to Junior High, in grade 6. We were detained one year to learn more English, to speak

English. We were all Japanese in Lord Byng, but we talked Japanese when we were playing on the ground. The only time we talked English was inside our classroom. Wasn't enough to learn.

MC: No.

JK: And that's why we were retained one year. The whole class.

MC: The whole class?

JK: The whole class, yeah, even the top grader was retained.

MC: Is that right. What grade would that be then?

JK: It would have been grade 6.

MC: Grade 6.

JK: Grade 7 we would be in Cambie Junior High.

JH: Most of the Canadians born out there speak the both languages when they're kids, you know. When they're amongst friends sometimes they talk the, you three, English language at home.

JK: A lot of the time we went to special Japanese school, one hour every day.

MC: You did?

JK: Yes. So and we talked Japanese at home, parents didn't understand English at all, no.

MC: Do you speak Japanese at home now?

JK: Yeah.

JH: Did you see my picture in the television about that Saltwater City?

(Yee, Paul Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver, 1988 p.61-63)

MC: No, when was that?

JH: I think it was two years ago they interviewed me out here and they took, they took the movie pictures of me walking around the cannery here and down at the, down at the Gulf of Georgia Historic Society.

MC: I didn't know that. Maybe we can get a tape of it, see a celebrity.

JH: I think it was CBC, I think, or CBS or CBC.

JK: [Found] my own tape, I (was) interviewed, what's that man's name, Steves.

MC: Oh, Harold Steves.

JK: Harold Steves, interviewed me walking around that boat shop, for Rogers Cable.

MC: Okay.

JK: I brought that tape along.

MC: Oh, good.

JK: To let you guys see.

MC: Oh, thank you.

JH: Which Harold Steves, that his grandson or his son?

JK: No, son, Harold Steves is a councillor now.

JH: He, he must be pretty near close to 90 now, isn't he?

JK: No, no. This is young Steves.

JH: Oh, his grandson, grandson.

JK: Son or grandson, I don't know.

JH: Grandson. Old Harold Steves he's older than I am.

JK: Oh yeah, he's long gone now.

JH: But that's Joe Steves grandson.

MC: And there's Allen Steves.

JH: Allen Steves used to work here.

MC: That's right. He lives over in, on the Island.

JH: He, I think he moved over to Surrey. I don't know if he's still there or not.

MC: I think he's on the Island. And he hasn't been too well but he's going to come over and visit.

JH: He's still around?

MC: Uh hum.

JH: Gee, he, let's see. Allen Steves, Allen Steves, he be about 84, 85?

JK: Yeah. He came down for the ceremony at Britannia Shipyard.

JH: He's about 3 or 4 years older than I am.

JK: Oh yeah. [He's a short fellow.]

JH: Allen Steves to run for the tram every morning from way up on the waterfront there to the Branscombe Station, just about a mile.

MC: He'd run?

JH: Yeah, run every morning. He'd toddle every morning.

MB: Was he always late? Was he always late for it, was that why?

JH: No, he, that's his habit, running.

MB: Okay.

MC: For exercise.

JH: Exercise, yeah. He'd get up first thing in the morning, he'd get up in the morning, they have a dairy here, they bottle milk in those days. And he'd get up early in the morning and bottle all the milk. Well, to start with, he'd bring his... Where his living quarters (were) about 4, 5 block from the dairy, where they bottle milk, and he'll bring his lunch and everything and book, into the dairy there. And after he'd bottle the milk and all that, all finished, and he'll run for the tram. He worked about an hour and a half, two hours, before he catch the tram to school, to Bridgeport.

MC: That's when he was a kid then when he was running like that every morning?

JH: He was, at that time, he was going to high school then, he must be 14, 15, around there. And there's another one too, remember Bancroft, Mary, was it Mary Bancroft? She work in the Royal Bank in Marpole. She runs every morning for the tram too. Both of them. Of course we live on Steveston Highway. But you (Jim Kishi) live down here (on the Britannia Site). We live on Steveston Highway you see, and they run every morning for the tram, the two of them, this Miss Bancroft and Allen Steves. Every morning they run for the tram.

MC: Do you have any funny stories about things that happened when you were here? Do you remember anything in particular?

JH: Well, I don't know.

JK: [Too many to remember I guess.]

MC: Too many.

JH: Well, in that case I'll have to think back, depend on what subject you're....

MC: If you were to think of what was one of the funniest things that ever happened when you were here. One of the most entertaining things? We understand that sometimes there were big storms that came and, sort of, flooded around here.

JH: I don't remember that. I remember my dad was telling me, I think it was in 1906 or 7, there was, there about 3 or 4 inches of snow right in Richmond here, in June.

MC: In June!

JH: In June.

MC: Now that's a funny story.

JH: In June, that's what my dad told me. Well, when he tell me something it got to be truth because my old man he's strictly a person that doesn't like any false statements, you know. You know, in the early days I just mentioned about, he came over to build the CPR Railroad. In those days you just slaves, you know, when they came over here. They bring you over, say like they need about 200 people, in all wooden boats, they don't have big steamers like they did today. They have all wooden boats, so no bigger than double size of these Seiners you see out here, (on the Fraser River), you know. Take them about, I think my Dad says sometimes in good weather it take them about 4 to 6 weeks to get across the Pacific. In storm, you got a storm, it take them about 2 months. And when they, they don't have bunk or anything like that to sleep in, you know, just like a bunch of cattle all in one room. Eat there, sleep there, do everything there.

MC: That would have been early 1900's?

JH: Yeah. In the 18, I think my dad said 1880, it was round about 1882 or 4, when he came over and built the CPR Railroad. (The CPR Railroad was built 1881-85) No, I think before that. No, I think it was before that. He came away before they cut the ties for the, for the railroads. Those are all hand hewn, they're not like you saw, zing through with a saw, you know, it was all hand cut. Everyone of them from here, from here to Alberta.

MC: Where would they do that? Where would they cut those? In saw mills?

JH: Well, in B.C. here there's a lot of forest in B.C, they take those, cut those trees a certain size you see. They're right close together and they're slim and they're tall, you see. One tree will make, say about 8 foot tie, 8 foot, about 4.

JK: Its what the Japanese used to do during the wartime. Go out in the woods and make railway ties.

JH: Yeah, you'd be making them too.

JK: [I hadn't been there myself mind you], but some of them did.

JH: Now, you use a broad ash generally.

JK:there's a camp there.

MB: Where did you go during the war, where was your camp site? (addressing Jim Kishi)

JK: Oh, I was at Christina Lake.

MC: Christina.

JK: Its a beautiful lake. I want to go back there and see how it is. Its all [grown] I hear. One of my cousins still back there.

MB: He, they stayed there?

JK: Yeah, they never came out.

MC: As kids do you remember playing tricks on one another? Just stealing apples, stealing pears out of the orchard.

JK: The only thing I remember was when the thunder hit the Britannia Shipyard.

MC: Oh, you remember that?

JK: Yeah. I remember the whole room, the bedroom, I was in the bedroom, the whole bedroom just lit up all white. I was so scared.

MC: It didn't catch it on fire, just sort of....

JK: No, just.....

MC: ...chunked it off.

JK: ...chunked it off.

MC: Was that late in the middle of the night?

JK: No. I don't know what time, early in the evening, early evening, around 6 o'clock.

MC: Hid under your bed did you?

JK: No. No time to do that.

JH: Have you been down to the Society down here, down at the Gulf?

MC: The Gulf of Georgia, yes.

JH: Did you look at those pictures and what not, how they operate in the old days, the cannery?

MB: Yeah, they have a little model. A model showing the machines.

JK: Yeah, they got a model there.

JH: Yeah. They have them. They, remember the.... They ask me about those hand butchering knives, you know its all the henckles knives, and they got one great big one like that, that's a halibut knife, that's not a salmon knife. You ever see that one there, about that long? (about 1 1/2 feet)

JK: No, I haven't seen it.

JH: They, they, when they use those butchering knives for salmon, you see, they depend on the size of the salmon. Like the pinks and the sockeye they use 8 inch knife, and the dog salmon and bigger than that they use a 10 inch knife. Yeah.

JK: I've got one about 12 or 13 inches long at home now. I still use it.

JH: See, 10 inches. I think it's ten, ten, twelve. Eight, ten and twelve. Three of them depend on the size of the fish.

MB: I didn't know that.

MC: And they're a little bit curved at the end aren't they?

JK: No.

MC: Just straight?

JK: No, no, just straight ordinary knives.

MC: They go very pointed at the end?

JH: No, just like, same knives as you have today. The only difference is, instead of a black handle they have white wooden handle with small rivets. And what the, what the butcher do, they wrap string around it to give a better grip. You see little string wrap around the handles?

JK: I got one of those.

JH: Do you?

MC: So its not slippery in your hand?

JH: Yeah.

JK: So they don't slip.

MC: Sometimes when we get fish at home, you know how you scale them a little bit, and the little scales pop off all over the place and then they How do you get them off once they stick on? They're real hard.

JH: Oh, those pretty hard to do, they're like glue you know, when they get stuck.

MC: That's right.

JH: Once they get dry you can't get them off, you got to wipe them off when wet.

MC: Okay, that's the trick is it?

JH: You got to use a wet cloth and wipe them off. When its dry, well you've had it, its just like glue.

MC: Well, because I was doing that last night, going like this with the knife, you know, to get the fish nice and cleaned off and they were bouncing up all over the place and I found some this morning stuck on the wall and I couldn't get them off.

JH: You know, that's one thing you know like, as I told, I told my wife, you know, today you got a lot of those plain plastic bags. Well, I told my wife you put the fish in there, just get the scaler and....

MC: Good idea.

JH: ...they won't splash.

MC: Make a tent around it.

JH: Yeah.

MC: That's pretty good.

JH: I learned all these things when I worked in the restaurant, you know. The old timers used to teach me these things. When they get those....

JK: Especially when you're scaling rock cod, rock cod got the big scales.

JH: Rock cod, rock cod and red snapper and all that. In those days they keep it alive you see. In most restaurants you want this one, okay I take this one out and dress it and cook it for you. What they do, instead of scraping things and fly all over like flies, you know, put it in a bag and scrape the scales off.

MC: Oh, that's a great idea. I'll have to tell. Because they're terrible once they stick on something. I know we have a big problem in our kitchen right now. Should have talked with you yesterday before I did that.

JH: Well, of course, you know, there's things you don't know and I lesson you. Some people tried it and tell you about it, you know, I tried it myself you see. It keep them from splashing.

JK: There's always a little trick for everything.

MC: Well, we have asked so many questions, thank you. That makes a lot of information. You got anything you just feel like saying? Or have we exhausted you?

JH: Have you been down, have you been in that cannery there? The old, the old Phoenix?

MC: No, no.

JK: No one can get in there now.

JH: You can't get in there now?

JK: No.

MC: Its blocked off?

JK: Its too dangerous now. Its all falling down. I know this because I can look at the roof, its dropping.

JH: Its caving in now?

JK: Caving in. I think nobody is allowed to get in.

JH: When I came down here the last time, quite a few years ago, they used it for storage. Now they condemned that. Its too bad, all the years I worked there.

End of Interview