

INTERVIEW: Alfie Kamitakahara, Kami Insurance Agencies,
330 Heatley, Vancouver. August 15, 1973.

Surname means Upper High Meadow...born January 29, 1929, in the village of Vancouver Cannery...two canneries, Vancouver and Acme Cannery were side by side...at southwest corner of Sea Island...official birthplace was Eburne, B.C. ...the two canneries operated by B.C. Packers closed down c. 1930...born at home...mid-wife, no doctor attended... eight in family...Alfie was fourth child. Father emigrated at 15 to Canada...came to Vancouver Cannery after WW I from Edmonton because older sister lived at Cannery...father fished several years...was fish packer or buyer until 1941 and village interpreter.

Childhood:

...public school was segregated there...Japanese children attended school in their community...Occidental children were bussed to Bridgeport.

Early 1920: Cannery operating...school built by villagers but teacher supplied by Richmond School Board and school attended just by Cannery Children...situation continued until WW 2...up keep of school voluntary by villagers... painting...janitorial...it was self-segregation...because of father's position in community Kamitakahara family was in close contact with most Sea Islanders...

Recreation: not organized...farmland corner made into playground...childhood playing like Tom Sawyer...played on dyke.. clamdigging...catching frogs, wild berries...black berries... all kinds of flowers and birds...ducks...most houses were outside dyke...Kami's house was on the dyke...village built on poles...at high tide (winter) logs banged under the house... toilets outside over the water played in rowboats of fishing boat...rowed under abandoned cannery...learned to swim early in the Fraser...first pollution warning posted a year or two before WW 2.

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Salmon fishing was right in front of house...season once a year when tide went out to sea...placed a net and a small shrimp $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ " flowed into it...it was cooked...sold to Vancouver merchants...a small secondary industry now gone... ..used to be more swallows flying...both barn swallow and tree swallow...thousands nested in cannery...all kinds of birds...gold fish...game every spring to see who saw first bird of any type.

Children in southwest Sea Island community were all Japanese speaking until they entered school. Teachers at School:
Grades 1-4: Miss Thompson now Mrs. Charles Paxton
Grades 5-8: Mr. Fitchett (later principal of Bridgeport School)
Grade 9: Successor Mr. Thomas was Kami's teacher, taught at Richmond High School.

Vancouver Airport Close: in its infancy...2 small hangers... then TransCanada Airlines...planes lettered CFTCA...CFTCB... CFTCC etc, a game to guess next letters...numerous small planes landed...as kids Kami ran to scene of crash across field a mile or two.

Winter 1941-2: rained heavily...large part of field under water... ditch around it overflowed and field froze first time...skated there.

At School: children carefree...everyone knew each other in small community...grade 8 was limit of schooling with only 1 or 2 going further.

1939: whole grade 8 class entered high school...due to unusual teaching ability of Mr. Thomas who opened up B.C. history for kids...also economic reason as survival ruled earlier, youngsters and sons automatically became fishermen like fathers... Japanese excluded from some fields...girls went into domestic work...some parents send children to be educated.

Duties: 1) firewood gathering from beach...and from East Indians who brought a truck load of wood...dumped it at village (cannery depot)...kids hauled it into home by wheelbarrow. 2) School work...loading coal...took turns at firing school stove....Janitorial work done by mothers.

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Kami's house had only telephone in community (on Vancouver Cannery side) until 3 years before WW 2...because father was fish packer.

Two other vehicles in community including father's...Kami never rode in street car until properties confiscated 1942... always in father's truck.

Community patch garden was inside dyke...each family had small plot...population only about 100 unlike Steveston where large number of Japanese.

Village started to open up economically or socially 1 year before WW 2...youngsters started going into Vancouver to play sport...lacrosse and basketball.

Kami daily in summer to Vancouver with father for supplies... afternoons loaded fish for certain types for Edmundson Walker, a wholesale fishing company, foot of Campbell Ave., Vancouver, cold storage plant, New Westminster...fishing gear at Vancouver wholesale...village mail picked up by father at Eburne, P.O.

Sea Island: Japanese language papers from Vancouver came in... Vancouver Sun delivered by local boys...English only read by children in high school close to WW 2.

Religion: Four Square service held in school hall...kids given free pen if went so attended for fun...predominantly Buddhist families but no church except in distant Steveston...weddings and funerals handled in Vancouver.

Christmas: (childhood) was a small thing...few candies... gifts exchanged at school.

New Years: celebrated...wished good luck...men went from house to house visiting...women cooked...drank home made brew... regular police raids...at signal youngsters hid bottles behind wood shed...Japanese men sang songs...ate traditional dishes, suski made with rice, prawns, seaweed.

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May 24: celebration, Sea Island School took part in Brighthouse events at old race track...bussed over as a family... given lunch...highlight was May Pole dance...disciplined so school came first year before war declared...believes until 1938, track meet included only high school students so school not in track events.

Recalls: December 7, 1941...Kami riding on bike...someone shouted Pearl Harbor was bombed...declaration of war followed... registration of Japanese came...then confiscation of automobiles, boats, radios, firearms, cameras...only 3 automobiles in their village...few more next village...possible total of ten...all taken by owners to Exhibition Park and left there. Early in war, got letter from B.C. Securities Commission declaring truck was disposed of for \$10.00, expenses were \$10.00 and return was nil.

Boats assembled north east corner of island (Eburne)... escorted by navy boat to New Westminster...there moored in center of River...navy boat took owners ashore to New Westminster...had a meal then bus home...in following spring, ice, flow, large number of boats sank.

Evacuation: was early spring, 1942.

...as family lived near airport, they were shipped out early, April 2, 1942, by bus to Hastings Park...housed in 2 buildings, north of the Forum...livestock building for the women and children under 13,...Kami was in teen-age building, but being small-built, slipped through...hot summer 1942...Happyland going full blast so looked over barbed wire fence...allowed into Vancouver by pass only...across Renfrew was a grocery store so Kami bought sunflower seeds...because his family was so large and children small, his father was allowed to stay with the family instead of being shipped away...the family sent to Slocan City for 4 years...until September 1946... had a choice of relocation east of the Rockies...chose Alberta as closest to Vancouver...farmed for 5 years in Lethbridge area (Turin 1 year then Taber 4 years) in sugar beets,...his family remained in either Lethbridge or Calgary...except for Alfie.

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Very few of older Japanese from his village returned...
evacuation was not a bitter experience but we knew what was
going on...war caused a hysteria so great it was dangerous
for Japanese to walk around...a few incidents of mob attack...
remembers the dates of evacuation...it was orderly...there
was respect for the law...RCMP in his uniform no one would
dare challenge...200 to 1 RCMP but still majority of Japanese
obeyed the authority..."it can't happen today can it?"...
was hysteria...kept family radio back despite ruling.