

GEORGE MURAKAMI

(Tape No. 117:1)

February 5, 1992

Interview with Marilyn Clayton

Recorded at the Britannia Heritage Shipyard, Richmond, B.C.

Britannia Heritage Shipyard Project

EXCERPTS ONLY

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G. M. Peoples in those days (never knocked) the front door was open all the time as far as I remember around our area here. They never knocked either they just barged in, "Oiy are you home?" Pretty soon they're at it (the sake) oh they had a great time those people. But they worked hard they really worked hard.

DUCK HUNTING

G. M. Dad was an avid duck hunter. He used to use live ducks for decoys so we had tame ducks in a little ditch. There used to be a little ditch about 5 feet wide. Water was running all the time, clear water right inside the little dyke right by the little walk. And then when he goes duck hunting he catch these ducks, the wings were cut you know and then put a weight on the leg so they can't fly away or swim away.

G. M. And we had ducks and chickens and dog. It was great time I think when we were kids.

THE BOATWORKS

G. M. He leased the land from Phoenix Cannery or ABC in those days and I remember building that boat house ourself, the family, maybe 1929.

G. M. I was quite young, maybe 12 years old and I used to take Dad's boat with the little putt, putt engine in it, Easthope 6. He would let me drive the boat all the way up to Finn Slough and anchor there by the beach and then pick up all the fire wood and load the boat with fire wood for the steam box and then I'd do all the dirty work, like cleaning up and sanding. I was too young, he wouldn't let me do any fine work.

The boat works was on pilings too cause I used to go underneath and clear the sawdust and different things.

TAKAGAKI STORE

G. M. I don't think they sold Japanese food because they didn't have to. People came to sell on the, like Takeno came all the way from Steveston they used to sell tofu on a cart.

AS KIDS

G. M.: Usually we played more in the back on the other side of the railway track. There used to be a vegetable garden, lot of early potatoes. I remember when we were kids we used to sneak in there and snatch a few wee ones and then we'd get a jam can and put a wire on it and then Steveston Island was here somewhere. We'd get in a row boat, make a big bonfire and boil the potatoes. Dad had a duck punt.

G. M.: Henry Feiron, another friend of mine that we went to school together. We were really chummy, we used to go coligan fishing with a short net, with a duck punt and then we used to peddle them for 5c a dozen on the dyke way back on No. 2 Road. Well 5c was a big amount of money for us in those days you know. Buy these little sweet bear candies, chocolate coated. I still remember those bear candies.

ORCHARD

G. M.: This would be about September when the pears got ripe. We used to sneak in there and pick two or three to eat you know on the way to school. And one day I picked up a stick and there was a piece of steel on there and I threw it and cut my hand here. And I was too scared to tell my mother so I just held it tight and went to school just like that. Didn't even tell anybody and my scar is still there. It just healed.

BOATS

G. M.: The last boat my Dad built was "Chioko", that's our youngest daughter. I remember I wrote the name on it and that was only 1 year old when we had to move and left the boat. I guess they eventually sold it but I can't remember Dad getting any money for any of the stuff. Nets and everything was stored in there, machinery, lumber.

G. M.: We used to go to church, there used to be a United Church on, that would be No. 1 Street close to Lord Byng School.

M. C.: The two buildings are very close together. Is that the way they always were?

G. M.: Yah, that's right, that's right. I don't know what the idea was being so close. I guess it was space because on this side there was a walk before the building was made, there was a walk. There was a path way for Shimane's and Maeda's, everybody used to net house. Last time I was here they had #40 above the door, that was the house number. Its taken off now.

L M: Its 10 years ago.

G M: This used to be all just a little narrow walk and there was a ditch right here. We only had that back door and maybe one or two windows.

G M: There used to be a big ditch there too other side of the dyke, used to be ducks in there, wild ducks. I remember going in there, sneaking up with a sling shot trying to catch the ducks.

LONG HOUSE

G M: I always thought there was just one big door. There was just that one entrance.

BOATHOUSE

(Holding open small door to boat house, on side)

G M: I used to go in and out of here so often I still remember it now, my goodness. I bet you its the same door too, it could be. To bad the numbers gone, #40.

I'm going to send this to mother (photo of George on site). She never seen this house, you know since evacuation.

SHADY ISLAND

G M: The island used to be just low sand, nothing but sand.

GEORGE MURAKAMI

(Tape No. 116B:1)

February 9, 1992

Recorded at the Branscombe House, Richmond, B.C.

Interview with Marilyn Clayton

Britannia Heritage Shipyard Oral History Project

EXCERPTS ONLY

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HOUSE INTERIOR

The house had linoleum floors.

G.M. Well first it was rough shiplap you know, on the line side ways. And then to make it more smooth, to make a better base for the wall paper, we collected all kinds of old newspapers and glued it on. I think she (mother) made the glue out of ordinary flour and water. And then on went the wall paper. But I guess thats the way its all built in those days cause there was no such thing as insulation or any plywood at all. It was just shiplap and paper. Yah, that would keep the wind out a little bit too.

Some of the houses were two story, like Furya and other houses past our way. Our house was just one story and then Shimane's and Maeda, they were the same type of house, just like a bungalow. So I guess our house was an average home. But we had the most kids I think. Eight, no nine. Older brother was still living. So there were nine of us in that little house (plus parents). Imagine! We managed.

And then there was a window here (in the living room) that we could look into, not into but almost into Shimane's house, almost peak through there. They were that close about 12 feet apart.

STORAGE

G.M. Storage for wood and we even kept rice in a great big, like a wooden barrel. I think we got it from a store, I think one of the grocery stores. And it had a lid and that's where we kept the rice, a whole big pile of rice. Looked like at least a hundred pounds. Never went below, it was always half full cause big family I guess we ate the rice.

PLUM TREES

G.M. And then I remember when we were kids down by Winch Cannery or towards Great West, there was some wild plum tree, yellow right by the road. I used to pick them maybe they were half ripe and then they told us to put them in the rice and they will get ripe. So I used to shove a lot of these plums in there. Mother didn't even know it. I got them quite deep.

PARACHUTE WITH UMBRELLA

G. M.: And then on the garage roof we used our mother's umbrella for a parachute and for some reason it came so fast and there was a nail stuck in a board and I gouged myself here. I never told anybody I didn't go to the doctor. I must have been pretty healthy you know, (as a boy).

MAKING MONEY AS A CHILD

G. M.: 10 - 12 years old, we'd exchanged the flounders for vegetables. That's what I did and then we sold the suckers, their chubs. No body ate them except Chinese. And we used to go underneath the cannery where the fish heads and sometimes the guts spill over and the fish blood and it would be just slubbing with those fish. We'd catch a few and then take it to these people, Chinese and vegetable garden. Sometime we get 5c, or 10c, which was a lot of money, 10c.

G. M.: We sold the little lead weights to Mr. Tanino, Eddie's uncle. He was a caretaker for a cannery. So we took a handful and give it to him and he'd give us 10c at the most I think 10c or 15c. and then we went to Hong Wo's. That was a place where we always went for candy, you could buy 5c worth of cookies or candy.

G. M.: When we were small all we did was play. Summertime we did a lot of swimming jumping off the net rack or in those days it was clean (the river). Up river mostly, people also drank, it was clean water.

DUCKS

G. M.: And then as I grew older, 13, 14, 15, I had to help my Dad and my brother on the boat shop. So I was kept busy and then we played like after the boat was finished. Then I had more time to play with the kids. We used to go to this little ditch remember the ditch I described one time where the ducks, Dad kept the decoy ducks. Well that ditch went all the way up to No. 2 Road from No.1 Road. At first I didn't know where it went around to Ben Cannery but around there everything was planked so it was underneath.

We lived for awhile at Great West. I remember there was a big ditch and everybody that lived on the other side had along walk way and we used to play roller skates on there.

G. M.: Mother had a lunch ready right next door, right through this little door.

BOATBUILDING

G. M.: He put a lot of time in (Dad), he took long time now a days you know. You wouldn't make any money working that long hours and putting in such delicate work you know. Now a days its fast work and use power tools. Those days he'd go there in the evening and touch the wood all the work that he had done and admire it you know. He had a pride in making boats.

G. M.: He'd build two in a year and that took a full time, all winter. Take orders like a year a head because during the summer he would fish. He had his own model, like Kishi's and Yamanaka's, they had their own typical model you know. You could tell who made which boat but Dad had his own way of making it and his was the length would be anywhere from 26 feet to 29 feet or 30 feet would be the biggest boat and that's tiny compared with today's standard gillnetting.

BOATS

G. M.: People like Frank Yamazaki, they were the first to go into, like my brother-in-law too, Tona Ohara. I think he was one of the first to put the gas engine in, car engine in, high speed. The rest had putt, putt, 5 Easthope, or 6 Easthope. And they were progressive young fishermen in those days you know. And then I think Frank Yamazaki was one of the first to build a bigger boat and everybody thought it was huge, but he went ahead because he knew. He was going to use it for different type of fishing besides salmon like dog fishing or whatever it was that needed a bigger boat. They were young in those days but they were real aggressive and ahead of time you know.

HOUSE

G. M.: The whole house had wall paper and I think we didn't even take the old one off. Every so often Mother wanted a new one, we would put it right on top.

M. C.: Where would you buy wallpaper?

G. M.: I think down in Steveston. I think it was Wakita General Store. We did a lot of business there. Takeno's had a Tofu company and they used to come with a push cart all the way, all the way and we used to eat tofu often, maybe twice a week at least.

G. M.: Mother, oh yah, she worked in the cannery and then picking berries and beans for Hong Wo, a Chinese farmer.

G. M.: Grace (sister) lived for a while with us until she got married early, she married early so until then Mother didn't cook. I guess Grace did all the work, looked after us, older sister.

DUCK HUNTING

G. M.: (Dad) hunted with a shot gun. He used to love hunting.

M. C.: Where did he go?

G. M.: He went to Ladner Slough with a fishing boat. Its not too far, just across from Winch Cannery.

M. C.: He had his own decoys?

G. M.: Yes, real ducks, live ducks. He put a string on and the weights and the wings were cut so and they were tame, they didn't try to get away. We had a dog, two different times we had a dog, we used to call it Chou, it was a terrier but I think it came from China originally. White with brown backing, big spots.

WINTER FUEL

G. M.: Oh sure, I took the boat out when I was only about 12 years old. I was allowed to, used to take the fishing boat way up to Finn Slough which is about three miles up river I guess and fill the boat with wood for winter and the steam box.

M. C.: How big was the boat that you took out?

G. M.: About 28 feet.

G. M.: In fact we did a lot of things. He (Dad) let me, I think I was at least 12 years old, first time he let me shoot with a shot gun. You know on New Years day they say if you make a lot of noise to chase the Devils away, its a saying you know. Our family used to shoot shot gun and make lots of noise. So he told me to go ahead and try to shoot. I shot alright and landed on my seat. I was so young yet you know. I think he laughed.

FURO JAPANESE BATH

G. M.: This is made out of a cedar planking, I think its about two inches thick and I think Dad used the very best of wood so there was not even a knot in it and maybe 8 inches wide and roughly I think it was about 6 feet long and 6 feet wide, something like that and it would be roughly about 4 feet high and its always real hot you know. So here is a plank stepped up planking about 18 inches off a platform about 18 inches high where you wash. Soap yourself real clean before you jump in here. Wash yourself off real good and then you go in there and soak yourself in the hot water and this was a big, maybe 18 inches diameter. Steel like a hot water tank, like a drum inside the water. We had a board over it so we could sit on there like a seat. And then here is the opening for the wood stove and we'd put wood in there and this is always hot and naturally you had to have this water tight so water doesn't go into the wood pile. Well when Dad made it nothing leaked out. And we would soak in there and almost swim you know when you're small you could almost swim it was so big. (Chimney) I think this was right close to the wall. This drum where you have the fire in here and the chimney went straight up and through the wall and up, smoke.

LIVING ROOM

G. M.: (Living Room Chimney) This one must have went right through the roof, big round wood. In fact that's what heated the whole (house). Some years I remember the ditch would freeze and we used to skate. Not, we didn't have ice skates, but we used to play on the ice. Must have been pretty cold at night. But I don't remember suffering. No insulation, no heat, imagine the only stove was here and my bed was right here and the door (bedroom) was closed at night, so we had no heat.

KITCHEN

G. M.: Kitchen was separate, that was just for cooking, its a wood stove. In those days all the wood stove had a compartment on the right for water to keep warm so the heat was served, you know it served to heat the water. It didn't get hot but it was warm enough to do the dishes.

DOWN COVERS / WOOL BLANKETS

G. M.: I don't remember being cold though. Oh I know why. We had good bedding. You know Dad shot so many ducks, I remember some New Years he'd come back with 24 ducks. I don't know, I guess there was no limit in those days now its 8 a day. Anyway all these down feathers we saved them. I come to think of it (Mother made them) into pillows and quilts. No wonder we were warm.

G. M.: This is boat house and we had this great big steam box you know for bending the planks and underneath here was a big drum, a 45 barrel drum always burning when you wanted the steam. And there was an opening her with a pipe and it went into this box. This was about 18x14 or something like that.

M. C.: And that steam box went right out the back?

G. M.: Yes, outside and then there was a door here and then when the plank was heated up and softened up we used to drag it out and then put it on the boat frame right away so it would bend easy. Oh yah, that's where we steamed the feathers to get rid of the bugs.

M. C.: What would you put the feathers in?

G. M.: Oh little cotton bags, cotton rice bags.

And I remember still another thing we used to do. Mother and Dad used to like in Westham Island before I came along. First when they got married they lived on Westham Island. And there's a big sheep farm there you know. I guess it was a farming island too. And that's where you used to buy raw wool off the sheep, big bunches. Remember and it was dirty too when you buy it and then steam them too and then they had a rake with a bunch of hooks and you scrape it, comb it. I remember doing that and make it clean and then straight and loose and she would make comforter out of that too. So we had thick real wool comforter and downs and no wonder we were warm.

BOATWORKS

G. M.: This steam box was a hole. Sure we had a big window here so you could kind of peak out and then right here we had a big wide door. That's still there, must be 4 feet wide cause a lot of times you had to bring stuff in at least maybe three feet through.

DOOR AT FRONT

G. M.: This was almost right across the building in two, so the boat had to side out.

We had a little room here blocked off (back area of boatworks) and this where we kept all the nails and some paints and stuff like that. It was storage, closed off.

G. M.: One boat at a time. See we had a work bench here, you know when you're a carpenter you've got to have a bench to work. This is a work bench all the way up and then the tools were hung on the wall, all the saws and chisels and stuff and we had power machine too, table saw, band saw. It was brand new when we left and we had a big band saw. We needed that for cutting curves. Those were the only machinery we had.

SAKE

G. M.: Just before left he (Otokichi) had quite a few bottles of sake that wasn't ready to drink yet but it would be just perfect one year after. So hid them all in this place, boarded. Put ship lap solid you know. I remember I did that, closing it up. And when he came to see me he came to visit me in '53, and I was living on the boat anyway first thing he did was go there and took a look to see if his sake was still there. Somebody had ripped it open and finished the drink, nothing left. I mean you had to like it to drink it and they drunk it hot.

G. M.: You know this round stove here (in living room). An ordinary stainless steel kettle fit perfectly there. Used the Heinz ketchup bottle put the sake in there and had about three in here always, was always there in the hot water.

So Mr. Nakane or somebody came, he just barged in without knocking, sit down and have a drink.

G. M.: Our kids could have drink but we never touched it. It was always there. He never told us not to drink. Didn't interest me so I didn't drink.

TAKAGAKI STORE

G. M.: You could buy bread and cookies and biscuits. We didn't drink milk. I love milk so that's why every time I get 10c I go to a dairy and buy it straight off the dairy. A little short glass pint, 10c I got a pint of fresh milk.

(Whistle, bottles of orange pop from Takigaki store)

G. M.: An orange flavour, bottle was like a lady's shape, regular 10 oz and this glass was cris cross fine diamond shape.