**Mayumi Iwai: Oral History Transcript**

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| **Metadata Field** | **Description** | **Data Entry** |
| Title | Title of Document |  Rebeca\_Salas\_With\_Mayumi\_Iwai\_080816 Complete  |
| Accession Number | Catalogue Number of the File | (Administrator Only) |
| Interviewee | Name of Interviewee (SURNAME, given name(s), middle initial) |  Mayumi Iwai |
| Interviewer  | Name of Interviewer (Surname, given name(s), middle initial) |  Rebeca Salas  |
| Interview Date  | YYYY/MM/DD |  2016/08/08  |
| Interview Date (non-preferred format) | Eg. November 13, 2014 orMM/DD/YY |  August 25, 2016  |
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| Series |  | (Administrator Only) |
| Summary | Brief summary of the interview session (Copy and paste from Form 13 – Session Summary) |  Mayumi’s interview begins in her birthplace, Yamagata City, Japan. A talented baseball player, she describes herself as an active and curious child. Mayumi then shares her experiences as a driven young woman, which often opposed the traditional wishes of her father. Still, Mayumi decided leave her job at a bank to travel and experience new things. With this adventurous spirit in tow, she talks about staying with host families during her studies in England and America, and starting a new career teaching Japanese to English-speaking teachers. Once settled with her husband in Vancouver, British Columbia, Mayumi describes experiences with post-secondary and their first important business. Mayumi found her way to Richmond in 1990 and, unsurprisingly, now dedicates her time to supporting international Japanese students in Richmond. Due to some special Canadian friends, Mayumi also shares her passion for sewing and sharing Japanese traditions, such as Hinamatsuri (Girl’s Day Ohina-sama, or Japanese Dolls). Over the course of the interview, Mayumi reflects upon her fondness of human connection. |
| Keywords | Keywords indicating interview subjects (Copy and Paste from “Keyword” section of Form 12 Interview Summary.) |  Sewing, Hardanger, Hinamatsuri, Immigration, Japan, Canada, Education, Business, Culture, Tradition, Family, Friends, English, Travel, Brother, Sister, Father, Mother, Mary Kitagawa, Import, Floral, JP, Husband, Children, Daughter, Origami, Bank, Typing, College, British Columbia, Vancouver, Richmond, Steveston, Japanese, Canadian, Host, Family, Bessy, Food, Sushi, Sweets, Softball |
| Subject | Subject headings applicable to the Interview. The OHC uses Library of Congress Subject Headings. |   |
| Duration | Length of Interview Session (if applicable) hh:mm:ss |  01:35:15 |
| Interview # |  Number of the interview (interviewees according to date) |  1  |
| Session # | Session # of the recording (X of all interviews in the session) |  1  |
| Location | Where the interview was conducted |  Richmond Museum and Cultural Center  |
| Media Type | Audio or Video |  Audio  |
| Restriction Type | Open (Open access)Restricted (Interview has some restrictions detailed below in “Restrictions”)Closed (Closed/No Access) |  Open [[1]](#footnote-1) |
| Restrictions | Details regarding any restrictions on the file’s use (as outlined in Form 6 –Consent) |  N/A  |
| Rights | Release Information regarding copyright and access through the repository (as outlined in the Release Agreement) |  All rights given to the interviewer (Rebeca Salas) and the Oral History Centre  |
| Funding | Information on how the project was funded. |  N/A  |
| Equipment | Equipment used to record the session. (Brand and model number of recorder.) |  H2N Zoom Recorder  |
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| Language | Language(s) of the Interview or Document |  English  |
| Type | Document Type. Eg: Oral History Interview, Conference Proceedings, Presentation, Sharing Circle, etc.  |  Oral History Interview  |
| Repository | Location where the project/collection will be stored. |  The Oral History Centre  |

**Transcription Legend:**

. . . = Ellipses used to indicate where an interviewee does not complete a thought.

[?] = Used to indicate indecipherable words or unknown spelling of words.

START OF TAPE PART ONE OF ONE

[00:00:00]

*REBECA*
Why don’t we start at the beginning. Where were you born?

*MAYUMI*
Okay, so I was born in Japan. Want me to say the city or the place or the location?

*REBECA*
Sure.

*MAYUMI*
So my home town is located up [in the] north part of Japan, maybe you remember there as an earthquake in Japan?

*REBECA*
Sure.

*MAYUMI*
That place actually only is one hundred kilometers from the nuclear plant that was exposed during an earthquake. So, that was maybe three hours up north from Tokyo.

*REBECA*
What was the name of the place?

*MAYUMI*
Yamagata city.

*REBECA*
Okay.

*MAYUMI*
That’s where I was born.

*REBECA*
Okay, which year was that?

*MAYUMI*
1962. I was born.

*REBECA*
Oh, okay! Could you tell me a little about what life was like for you growing up in Japan?

*MAYUMI*
Yamagata is a very small town, so reserved and very conservative. So when I was little, it was very typical because I was a girl. So I have to behave like a girl! Have to be more . . . shouldn’t be too active or very quiet, respect father and brother. Even though younger, of course, brother is always very important in the family because he’s the one who’s going to look after my father.
So I had a very good childhood. My parents, they were very nice and I think, how can I say? Even though at that time, you know it’s over fifty years ago . . . so my grandparents particularly, they went through the war (second) and my parents, too. So I was told, you know, nothing should be wasted. You don’t waste anything. And also they said you have to study hard, work hard, be nice to others. I think and my parents are disciplined, very disciplined, so very strict compared to North America. So that part was always very happy, but sometimes too strict and he really controlled. . .

*REBECA*
Your father?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah my father, he makes all the decisions.

*REBECA*
Right.

*MAYUMI*
I was little, growing up like elementary school or junior high or high school, he just make like a pass you have to be on this road, okay you have to go this way. So that was a bit difficult, to go like down the different direction because my father doesn’t like it so he’s going to fix it right away. So that part, right away, was a bit difficult when I was growing up, maybe especially like teenager.

*REBECA*
Right. What was your father’s name?

*MAYUMI*
My father’s name is Kayso.

*REBECA*
Okay. Yes, and your mother?

*MAYUMI*
Chioko.

*REBECA*
And your brother?

*MAYUMI*
Herouki.

*REBECA*
Can you tell me a little about your brother?

*MAYUMI*
My brother is extremely opposite. I have to say, it’s kind of ironic. I don’t know for maybe [our] parents . . . maybe kind of unfortunate because I was actually very active even though I have been more quiet. As a daughter, I have to be quiet. I was very active, very outgoing. But my brother was opposite. He likes to stay at home, do something at home, but I like to go out, do something always. So we’re a bit different. And I have to . . . my brother, he studied well, but compared to myself . . . wasn’t so good. So probably – I hope not – but, maybe he felt like he didn’t have confidence because I did pretty well. So of course my parents, especially father, he really praised me, but my brother was “so-so.” So maybe – I don’t know, I haven’t talked with him about our childhood, so I don’t know – but, if I ask him, maybe he’s going to say something you know? “Sister I…” I don’t know.

*REBECA*
Is he still in Japan?

*MAYUMI*
Oh, yes. My father has a business so now my brother took over his business. He still lives in Yamagata city and he runs the business.

*REBECA*
Oh? Great. Could you tell me a bit about what it was like as a child, maybe in school in Japan?

*MAYUMI*
Oh, about school in Japan?

*REBECA*
Yeah, as a child.

[00:05:59]

*MAYUMI*
Oh, it was very different compared to Canada. Everything is very structured. I don’t know, but here, because I didn’t go to school in Canada, it’s difficult to compare Japan. Okay, each subject you do, math for example, first thing in the morning, you just go. Next, you do Japanese or a science. But always the teacher will control everything . . . and there’s so many children, the average children in the classroom was probably around thirty, forty. That was average. And just one teacher. Maybe elementary school . . . thirty, thirty-five. And then there was a hot lunch, so the parents, they didn’t have to make lunch for the children because the school, they were providing it. So as the students, we also helped, you know, not making but setting the table. And then at the end of school, there was no . . . there was a custodian, but we had to clean up our classroom. Sweeping the floor, mopping and everything, we did. Yes, and what else in Japan . . . this is a bit different compared to Canada, each elementary school has their own swimming pool.

*REBECA*
Swimming pool?

*MAYUMI*
Swimming the swimming pool. So in PE, especially in summer time, if you like it or you don’t like it, doesn’t matter, everybody has to go outside. Take a swimming lesson.

*REBECA*
Do you have any special memories from school? Maybe friends that you remember as a child? Or even maybe from where you lived, do you have special memories of friends that you had?

*MAYUMI*
We have my neighbor children. Because my house, it’s very small. My father owned . . . how can I say? My parents owned an apartment or a boarding house. So we had quite a big property. So my father made a little playground in my backyard. We had a set of swings or a kind of monkey bars. So when I was a kid, after school, all our neighbor kids they come to my house. Me and my backyard. And we played sometimes baseball or we played . . . oh so many different things. Yeah, so that was my friend and we’re still in contact.

*REBECA*
Oh really?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah my friend. We do.

*REBECA*
Was it your childhood best friend?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, friend from when I was maybe six years old? Or maybe five years old?

*REBECA*
Was it a girl?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, a girl.

*REBECA*
What is her name?

*MAYUMI*
Oh her name was Yuri . . . Sometimes when I go to Japan, I see and if she’s available we meet.

*REBECA*
Oh, so sweet!

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, I think so yes.

*REBECA*
So what – the town which you grew up in – what was the landscape like? Was it more country? More urban? Or what do you remember about it?

*MAYUMI*
It’s surrounded by mountains. . . and a very, very hot very humid. And I think there was a record when I was… of course these days [it’s] different, but when I was a kid, my parent always used to say “now our hometown has a record of high temperatures, like thirty-nine degrees in the summertime.” It’s really hot. Thirty-six [degrees]. Yeah, it’s really hot!

[00:10:32]

Hot and very humid. But it’s beautiful, beautiful place because we’re kind of facing to more of Japan city, so we can get a very fresh . . . seafood. And because we have a mountain, we get lots of fruit and vegetables. Yeah, so a very nice environment, I think, compared to Tokyo. Yeah, because Tokyo, that was very polluted . . . But our home town is very clean. Very nice place.

*REBECA*
Sounds beautiful.

*MAYUMI*
Yeah.

*REBECA*
Maybe moving in time a little bit, when did you start thinking about moving away?

*MAYUMI*
Well I had an uncle, my mother’s brother. And he used to work for an American company in Tokyo. And because he speaks very good English, he used to be a translator as well. So he used to like travel in different countries, not only America, but Europe or Russia and different countries . . . So I really admired my uncle because, you know, he was traveling a lot. He’d go to different countries and he’d bring very unique souvenirs for me. So I thought “Wow, seems so interesting.” So even when I was child, maybe ten years old, I thought “There must be something outside, you know, a different world outside of Japan”. Because in Japan, it’s just a small island, right? Yeah and when I was little, I don’t think Japan, they didn’t accept foreigners. I don’t think so, no not very much. So for me, of course I didn’t know anything about, you know, outside of Japan – but, because of my uncle I felt there must be something, something going on outside of Japan. So that’s where I started thinking about, yeah . . . I wanted to see, you know, different countries!

*REBECA*
What was your uncle’s name?

*MAYUMI*
Okay, Ken, Ken.

*REBECA*
Okay, so he, with the souvenirs he brought back, he made you curious?

*MAYUMI*
Oh very curious. Especially . . . I still remember when I was maybe six years old, I got a beautiful doll. Brown hair. You know, and blue eyes. This doll was so cute and I’ve never seen that very cute doll before. I think I was maybe five years old at time and the dress was really beautiful. Of course, he bought it from America. But that time I was only five years old, and all my toys are made in Japan!

*REBECA*
Right.

*MAYUMI*
Yeah! I thought, “Wow, how come the colour hair is different? [The] hair must be black. How is it brown?” And eyes, because where I’d grown up in Japan, I didn’t ever met any foreigners before when was five or six years old, even on TV . . . No that time, yes, we had . . . TV, but only black and white, right? And of course I had a books, picture books. I mean, I can see a different colour, but still just books, it looked different [from] the way you had a doll, in your hand.

*REBECA*
So you had never seen somebody in person that looked different?

*MAYUMI*
No! Never! Never.

*REBECA*
So once you started to think about or get curious about the rest of the world and think, “One day I want to travel and see . . .” what were your first hopes and dreams about where you wanted to go and why you wanted to go?

[00:15:00]

*MAYUMI*
Oh that time? Probably in America, I think, yes.

*REBECA*
And what about America?

*MAYUMI*
Okay that’s interesting . . . I don’t know why, but it’s more like it was interesting. I don’t know why. . . then gradually after I got very interested in going to Europe, especially England. Maybe history? I don’t know.

*REBECA*
Maybe it was quite popular . . . England and America . . . to travel, maybe at that time?

*MAYUMI*
No, I don’t think so . . . but when I was kids my age . . . I don’t think so. It’s more America. I think it’s because of [the Second World War]. They made a lot of American military bases, like in Okenaya, or you know Yokohama, or you know Omoyausaki. They’re still lot of military bases in Japan. Yeah, so for me it’s probably more like reading picture books . . . maybe came from America? I don’t know.

*REBECA*
I see. Interesting. So how old were you when you started to seriously consider and actually start planning?

*MAYUMI*
Wasn’t that early. More really traveling was maybe when I was over twenty. . . I couldn’t, I said at the beginning my father really, you know, he really want to like keep me, you know?

*REBECA*
Close?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah! Yes. So he couldn’t imagine – probably – me going somewhere else. Maybe, I think, his plan was I graduated from school – and okay, this is an interesting thing – my grandparents always say to me, now I think this is really wrong, but that time . . . I remember my grandma said, because I was born as a girl, “You don’t need any good education, no you don’t, okay? You just, you know, finish high school and then you find a good husband and get married, and then your life will be guaranteed. You will have a great life. So you don’t need a higher education, because sometimes it really affects your life.” I was educated, then there was kids. So because I was educated it was wrong, but that time my grandma, she really believed it and . . . yeah, and probably my dad, too. And so that’s why they maybe want to protect me, they wanted to make all the decisions.

*REBECA*
I see.

*MAYUMI*
That part was really difficult. I still recall that part. So that’s why I had a lot of dreams [for] myself. But what [was] so difficult, because if I say something, my father said, “No, no, no! This is wrong, it’s not a good idea, no good for your future. So I think so you have to do this.” So everything was given for my father. So that’s why I couldn’t do anything until I get over twenty.

*REBECA*
So, you mentioned education . . .

*MAYUMI*
Mhmm.

*REBECA*
Did you end up doing any, I guess, post-secondary?

*MAYUMI*
No, in Japan I couldn’t because what happened was, I think I was quite a good student . . . I worked very hard, and not always studying. I played softball for six years. And when I was in junior high school, our team, we won to the region, the first place. So we . . .

*REBECA*
Win?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, we were really good. And then when I went to high school, still we went to the nationals. And I was always a member with the team. So I spent a lot of time, I got so involved with my softball for six years – but, still I wanted to go to university. So I had a plan. But then when I told my father he said, “Okay, if you want to go to university, here’s a university you can try.” And he gave me the most hardest university only. Because in Japan, there’s so many colleges and universities. You can go anywhere. I mean, you know, so many. So, if you want, you don’t need a good university, but you know, just . . . in, how can I say? Just a regular college for example . . .

[00:20:45]

You don’t have to study so hard. You can get in. But, my father didn’t let me go. So for example, he chose the top university in my prefecture or my region. In Tokyo there are some good universities, so he just chose one of them. But for me, it was so difficult because I wanted to study hard, but the same time I was playing sports and my team was so good, so strong. So it was too difficult to do both. Like participating in this sport and same time doing studying, together. So then when I was in, grade twelve I think, yeah, I told my father and he said, “If you,” I remember he said, “Okay, you have to be . . . okay, if you go to this university, you can be a pharmacist,” but, I’m not very interested in being pharmacist! Why do I have to? So he goes for that decision. “For this, you can go, you can try it,” and I said, “No. I don’t want to.” So I said to my father, “For this point, I’m not going to university ‘cause I’m not interested,” and then he said, “Okay, so then now you have to think about what . . . the job that you get.” So then he provided good jobs. So, I appreciate my dad, I think, because I decided to take my exams and I chose to go to the bank in Japan – a very good bank. So, I decided. I took an exam and interviewed, and I was accepted and I was able to work in a head office. I didn’t go to any small branch, the head office, and I worked in a very good environment. Probably, you know, my dad also helped. I’m not sure because it was not easy to go into that, you know, the headquarters. So maybe I think my dad helped. I’m not sure.

*REBECA*
You never asked?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, never asked . . . but of course, I took, you know, an exam and I had an interview. That I did by myself, of course, but after that, you know, usually the company will say, “Okay, this people for this branch, or this for this position,” right? But I was so lucky to get that position.

*REBECA*
I’m curious about which, going back a bit, what position you played when you were playing softball? What was your role?

*MAYUMI*
Oh my, the first one because I was pretty . . . I’m tall as Japanese [person], so my first position was first, you know . . .

*REBECA*
First?

*MAYUMI*
Yes first, short.

*REBECA*
Oh, okay!

*MAYUMI*
The idea is for the years when was in junior high school from grade seven, six, eight then when I went to high school I did center, you know center?

[*Mayumi describes the different positions to Rebeca and explains that she also played center outfield*]

*REBECA*
Okay, so before you got into school for the bank or before you applied for that position – thinking about university initially – what were your interests? So your father first suggested pharmacy . . .

*MAYUMI*
Pharmacy, yes.

*REBECA*
Yes, but what were your ideas at that time about school, that you would go to school for?

*MAYUMI*
You know, for me I’m sure it was . . . you know, you’re only eighteen, right? Some people, they don’t know what they’d like to be in the future. So, same as me. I liked studying English, but maybe I just want to continue, or at the time I didn’t . . . well no, actually, I had a dream that time already, yes. I wanted to be – like a lot of people think – a flight attendant.

*REBECA*
That makes sense!

[00:25:48]

*MAYUMI*
Right? I could speak English . . .

*REBECA*
And it makes sense . . . am I correct to assume with your curiosity about the world, it sort of makes sense? [*Mayumi nods*] Interesting. Well, maybe moving forward in time a little bit . . . maybe you can tell me a little bit about when you actually started to plan your journey and you started to leave Japan.

*MAYUMI*
Okay, so then I worked at the bank . . . until I was . . . twenty-five years old, I guess. But I was so lucky because I had a really good boss and he really supported my idea. So when I was twenty-four years old, during that time I was traveling, but whenever had a summer holiday I went to different countries. Oh yeah, I did America or Singapore or Guam just for the summer vacation – but, gradually I started thinking about, “I want to take some English courses, if I can.” But if I’m going to take an English course…at least the minimum of this course was only a month, but that time, I cannot ask my boss to take a month holiday because we were only allowed to take two weeks holiday. That was the maximum. So, there’s no way to ask for an extra two months. But my boss was very supporting, so I told my boss about my plan and I just show him, “Okay, this is the school I wanted to go,” and I just brought all the pamphlets and explained it to him. And he said, “Okay, I’m going to support [you], so maybe we can talk to other boss.” So, we went and talked to the top manager and they said, “Yes.” But that time, I was very unusual because nobody ever took like month holiday, right – at that department – but, I was the first one, and probably I was the only one.

*REBECA*
Wow.

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, right? So that’s why. . . because I also remember, even before that, I was so lucky I went to China and Korea [when] I was working with the bank because I was chosen to participate in this program when I was twenty-one, twenty-two years old. This is a unique program the City of Yamagata. They paid half of the course and my bank, they paid half of my course. And I got [an] extra bonus! Like cash that I can spend when I go there. So, I was able to participate in this very unique program. Of course, I have to do so many workshops while I was there. So, were in a big boat, we are sailing to China.

*REBECA*
I see.

*MAYUMI*
We didn’t fly, so we stayed in a big cruise ship for two weeks. That experience also sort of helped me because I had to write a long report of what I learned, of what I did, what I can contribute to this company. . . So, this time anyways I said, “I want to go to America, San Diego? Yes San Diego,” so they said, “Yes, you can go one month.” So that’s why I went to San Diego for one month and I just took an ESL course University at the San Diego campus, there was an ESL program. So I took an ESL program. That was the first time I went to a school outside of Japan. So I did homestay for just one month and came back, and that was a very good experience and then, gradually, I [was] getting more serious about going back to school. But I stayed at the bank for another two years, yeah, two more years. And then when I was twenty-six years old, I talked to my boss again about my plan. But that time, I wanted to quit my job because I wanted to go for one year.

[00:30:54]

For [this], there is no way – but, the funny thing was they said they want to keep a position for one year. I was so amazed myself. I think I worked so hard . . . because at that time I was already twenty-six years old. You know, in Japan, our generation at that time, you have to get married before twenty-five. You know, in Japanese, the expression of the Christmas cake? Have you ever heard this?

*REBECA*
No.

*MAYUMI*
Oh no?! You can’t be a Christmas cake because Christmas cake means it’s leftovers!

*REBECA*
Ohh.

*MAYUMI*
Twenty-six is leftovers. Twenty-five is a deadline you have to get [married]…. It’s so silly of course. So silly!

*REBECA*
Interesting though.

*MAYUMI*
When I was, you know, a kid I was told, “You have to get married before twenty-five because of the Christmas deadline. Don’t go over, because otherwise you will be leftovers! Nobody wants to get married to you!” This is wrong of course. So that’s where a lot of my coworkers, they got married of course! Before twenty-five! But I was only twenty-six at time. So, that time, I had to make a decision whether I wanted to stay in Japan. If I want to stay, well, I had an opportunity to take an exam so I can get a higher position. You know, going to more like manager or . . .

*REBECA*
Yeah, move up in the company.

*MAYUMI*
Exactly, but I was not interested in going up to the position, rather, I want to quit. So, I told my boss my plan, “I want to leave for one year, so I think in this case I have to quit my job,” but, they said, “No, you know you can still work, like a foreign exchange department. So you could,” because at that time, I speak a little bit of English. So, they said, “Yeah, we can transfer you to this position so you can take one year away, and then you study English, and then you can come back!” Yeah, so that was a really good offer, but I didn’t want to take that offer because you don’t know about a year later. Because you are going, right, and then when you come back. I didn’t [know] whether I wanted to stay and work or not. And also, I didn’t want people think, “Okay, because you took a whole one year off, this is very unusual, nobody took that kind of, you know, holiday before, but you were the first one.” So, then maybe they expect me to work hard.

*REBECA*
I see.

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, or contribute to the company. So I wasn’t very sure that time. So that’s why I decided to quit. By that time, my parents, especially my father, I think he knew already I’m not going to be married [laughs], probably he maybe gave up, I don’t know [laughs]. I’m not sure. But my mother’s very supportive on the other hand. She was very different. She’d always say, “Okay, if you want to, just, you know, do whatever you want, because this is your life. I’ll support you.” So, she was very different. So that’s why I was still able to keep my dream. By that time, I was already twenty-six years old, but finally the time came. I had money already because I worked, right? So, I paid all my airfare and all the accommodations. Probably around that time was twenty . . . for sure, even that time, a long time ago, all the tuition fees and the staying in a host family cost more than the thousand, easy, even that time, right? But I paid everything by myself because this is my plan, I cannot ask my parents, so I did. I just bought a ticket and I went to England and I planned everything by myself. I don’t remember whether I used . . . probably I did use the agent, only at the beginning. That’s it. And just I went [laughs].

[00:35:19]

*REBECA*
My goodness. I’m curious, before you went to England, when you went to America for the first time for a month . . . thinking back to when you were a child, what were your first impressions compared to what you thought about America?

*MAYUMI*
Ah, America?

*REBECA*
Yes.

*MAYUMI*
Ok first of all, I thought people are very friendly, very friendly. But it’s maybe because when I when I was a kid in Japan I remember, you know, like that time I was only around fifteen years old when I went to Tokyo – this was a school trip – I met [an] American. That was the first time. I was so scared! Yeah, because he was so poor [laughs] and, you know, as a student we tried to speak like, “Hello!” You know, probably he didn’t understand, right [laughs]? He looked so scared and I said, “Wow, I couldn’t say anything. Even hello?” Nothing. I was so quiet. But, of course, when I went to America, oh, my host mother was very friendly. I think she was from Guam. Yes, very nice family – and the people, so good. I still remember when I went to America, I recall that I think I was so brave because I didn’t know anybody, right? I just arrived at San Diego Airport. Nobody was there, nobody welcomed me. And then I didn’t speak good English, so [laughs]. But, I got a taxi by myself and I went to the hotel and stayed overnight, just by myself, and the next day I went to the campus – but surprisingly, when I went to the campus there was big . . . they kind of mixed up my papers, they lost my papers.

*REBECA*
Oh, dear.

*MAYUMI*
So, when I went to the office, they said, “Who are you?” That means that I had no host family, nothing. So I stayed in office for over two hours. And that time I didn’t understand English very well, but I was able to feel something’s really going on, something’s wrong. So I know the lady, she kept phoning because she had to find host family, right? I waited over two hours, and finally a lady came and the office lady said, “Okay, Mayumi this is your host mother!” “Very nice to meet you.” And then I went to her house. . . more than two hours from the campus, and I had to change the bus three times. That was really difficult.

*REBECA*
Yes!

*MAYUMI*
Right? Because I don’t speak good English, and I just arrived, and they mixed up all my papers, they are lost. And then, now here I am and I went with some very strange people, I don’t have any papers for this lady, I don’t have no idea, no record nothing, right? But I had to trust this lady. And I went. So the next day, I had to go to school by myself. Wow! You have to walk twenty minutes to the bus stop, you take a bus first bus, get off, take second bus, get off, then a third bus, and then go to campus. You have to leave before seven o’clock. Otherwise, you cannot make it. So that was silly, but I think, “I’m just through the experience.” I learnt a lot and I became more brave. So, that’s when I went to England. I was, I think I was okay already.

*REBECA*
You were ready!

MAYUMI
Ready, yes! Right.

*REBECA*
What about your first impressions of England?

*MAYUMI*
England was the total opposite, very opposite. When I arrived in England – that was January – very dark, very gloomy weather. People very quiet, very reserve, not very friendly. That was my very first experience.

*REBECA*
Yeah. Was there anything that surprised you about England?

*MAYUMI*
Ah, England?

*REBECA*
Yeah.

*MAYUMI*
I thought actually the . . . how can I say? The people . . . were kind of as Japanese [people]. We had a very common, I found many . . . how can I say? People very, pretty reserved. They are not very friendly compared to America, right? So if you meet people on the road where you’re working you don’t say, “Hi! How are you?” You don’t talk with a stranger, right? But in America they just talk, right? So, England, it’s very different, but I thought, “This is very similar to Japanese!” You know very, very quiet, we just bow or just nod on the street. And also, the weather! Like in Japan, very similar, I thought. Winter is very cold and dark and yeah, the atmosphere is very similar.

[00:40:59]

*REBECA*
So, you were surprised that they actually weren’t very different, the two places?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, yeah.

*REBECA*
Interesting. Can you tell me a little bit more about your time in England? How long were you there?

*MAYUMI*
One year.

*REBECA*
Okay, and what sorts of things did you do when you were there?

*MAYUMI*
I was very serious, so I went to school for one year. And I set a plan. I wanted to take my exams, so I took, you know, in England . . . in Europe a lot of people, especially ESL people, they take a Cambridge exam. From beginner, you know, “intermediate” and “proficient”. So I decided to take that exam. But for the first six months, I kind of enjoyed my life just making friends, going out with my friends – but, the last half months I studied very hard. I didn’t go out, I always stay in, even in the weekend, seven days a week because . . .

*REBECA*
Oh my goodness!

*MAYUMI*
My English wasn’t so good, so I had to work very hard. Just to take an exam. So I finished, I took it and passed the exam and I came back to Japan. So one year. Very good experience.

*REBECA*
Do you have any – outside of school and work – do you have any special memories from England, and maybe some special people that you met?

*MAYUMI*
Special people, yes. The first host family, they are like a retired couple. Very nice, very good at cooking. And I remember there were quite a few students actually staying in the house, maybe five. They’re all from different country like Italy or Thailand, I remember, and Turkey or Germany. So it’s so nice to share, spend a time together in that house. And the host mother – because they were a retired couple – they were at home always. So I was able to talk, to practice my English. And from the house to school is only five minutes’ walk, very convenient.

*REBECA*
Great!

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, I went to Bristol. So it’s been . . . during that time I went to Shakespeare’s birth place. It’s not too far, only couple of hours by bus. I travelled a lot and spend a lot of time with host family, the first host family. And then moved to a different host family. So this family, I think she had . . . one, two, three, four, children. When I moved into this new host family, the youngest one was only three years old, very cute. And I’m still in contact with this host family – not the first one, the second one. Every year I still write at Christmas, we exchange Christmas cards! It is amazing because when I was staying at their house, Julia – I remember Julia, the daughter – now she is married and, of course, has children now, right? And Mathew and David, of course, they got married. And maybe David’s expecting, I don’t know, maybe a granddaughter. So it’s amazing myself because over twenty-five years ago I was in England, and I’m still in contact with this family and we still talk. The host mother, she writes about what children are doing or what they’re doing. So we exchange.

*REBECA*
What is her name?

*MAYUMI*
Peter is the father and the mother is Sandra.

*REBECA*
Oh lovely.

*MAYUMI*
Yeah.

*REBECA*
So you seem to keep connections with people quite a bit.

*MAYUMI*
Oh, oh! Yeah! So one day I want to visit England for sure. Yeah, to see my host family.

[00:45:14]

*REBECA*
Oh, how lovely! So you were in England for one year?

*MAYUMI*
Yes.

*REBECA*
And you had these experiences with the host families, and then how long were you back in Japan before you came to Canada?

*MAYUMI*
Less than two years. I went back to Japan and then I worked in an English conversation school, very small school. Actually, I was a student before. But then I went back to work [there]. That time I was working [there].

*REBECA*
Okay, so were you kind of teaching?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, that time teaching, because when I was working at the bank, I used to take English conversational lessons at this school for a few years. So then, you know, I went to England, right? And when I came back, of course, I was looking for a job but I didn’t want to go back to the bank. So, luckily, this school, they were looking for a new teacher who could teach English for children, an assistant. Just an assistant. So I was perfect. So I got a job – part time job – and I worked in this school for over one year. But that was unique. I had a very unique experience when I was working there because – you know the JET teacher program? The JET teacher program is for people who graduate university in Canada, for example. They go to Japan and they teach English. It’s a program for JET teachers. So when I was working in this school, I saw there are quite a few JET teachers that came from this program. So at that school, they made a Japanese conversation class for these teachers who were visiting from America, or England, or Canada, to teach English for the Japanese children. So these teachers want to learn Japanese, right? So this school provides the Japanese class. So that time, there was a bunch of Japanese teachers who are teaching Japanese – but, she quit, so then they were looking for somebody who can take over the position. So someone, the school principal, he appointed me. So he said, “Did you want to try?” and I said, “Oh, Japanese, okay, so I teach Japanese to English speaking teachers? This is so unique. I don’t know how because I don’t know how to do it!” But he said, “Maybe you can try?” So I actually did, and I quite liked it. And I think I did over six months. It’s very basic in Japanese conversation, but yeah. I was teaching in Japanese to these teachers. That was interesting, very interesting experience.

*REBECA*
How old would you have been at that time?

*MAYUMI*
That time I was already twenty-eight – because I was in England when I was twenty-six, twenty-seven – so yes, twenty-eight, twenty-nine, around. Still not married [laughs].

*REBECA*
So then, so you did that for how long?

*MAYUMI*
For about less than two years.

*REBECA*
Okay, and then? And then you decided to try Canada? Or how did that come about?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, that time I met my husband – I mean, yes, well now my husband – but I met this guy and he was visiting Japan from Canada. That time he was already living in Canada, so he was visiting Japan to attend his friend’s wedding. We had a mutual friend so she introduced this guy and I met him and we…because you know what, I really enjoyed conversation with him. It’s because maybe he was already in Canada for some time, maybe two years now, and I was . . . I went to England and came back, so we kind of shared our experience and talked. And it was quite interesting to listen about what he’s doing in Canada or, you know, about the country of Canada. So, we started dating for over a year and that time I was close to thirty, twenty-nine. So I thought, “Well, maybe I want… I’d like to get a like a working holiday visit,” right? Because I can work while I’m here, but I think the deadline is thirty years old at that time. So then – by that time I was already dating this guy so – and then I had that kind of feeling we could get married maybe in a few years. But parent, my father said, “Okay if you are going to Canada, you cannot just go and stay, you have to make a decision. If you’re getting married to this person, yes, you allowed to go, but if you’re not, no you can’t go, alright?” Very particular. So my father met my husband and they talked and he quite liked him, you know, this guy. I met my husband’s parents, but the funny thing was I knew his parents before I met him.

*REBECA*
Really?

*MAYUMI*
Because my husband’s dad owned a business and he was a good client when I was working for the bank. So they used to come to bank. And that time I was bank teller, so his mom used to see me, but of course that time, I didn’t know.

*REBECA*
Ah! Funny!

*MAYUMI*
I know! So that’s why my husband when he said okay I want to introduce my parents, I went into his house and I said “Oh, oh! How are you?” I knew, I knew!

*REBECA*
So was your husband born in Japan close by?

*MAYUMI*
Yes yes, same hometown. Yamagata.

*REBECA*
Oh I see I see!

[00:52:39]

*MAYUMI*
Same city!

*REBECA*
Ah, I see.

*MAYUMI*
So that’s why we have so many mutual friends, even though he left. He left Yamagata when he was eighteen years because he went to university in Kyoto. So he left, he was eighteen, and then he came to Canada when he was twenty… I don’t know, twenty-five or six?

*REBECA*
And what is his name?

*MAYUMI*
His name? Aikunio.

*REBECA*
Aikunio, Okay. Great! And then so you flew to Canada together?

*MAYUMI*
Oh, no, no, no.

*REBECA*
Did you go on a ship?

*MAYUMI*
Oh, no, no. That time what we decided to get engaged because my father said I cannot go to Canada, right?

*REBECA*
Okay, right.

*MAYUMI*
So I got engaged. But you know we decided, “Why not?” But after, you couldn’t say, “Sorry, didn’t work.” Anyways, we got along. But this is very typical Japanese, okay? We [go to] a hotel, each of my parents or relatives, my auntie or uncle, my side, his side, dad, you know, father and mother and sister, brothers, and his aunt – like relatives, right? We all meet together. And our custom, of course, me and Aikunio, we have to be in with them, because they have to introduce each other. But my husband was busy working so he didn’t come, he did not attend. So I was only one. It so interesting.

*REBECA*
Yes!

*MAYUMI*
Yeah. I was just there and he did not attend. And we just introduce each other and we had lunch together and that’s it. Yeah, so after that I came to Canada, but that time we’re still just engaged. We’re not married.

*REBECA*
Okay. Okay, so then you came to Canada, what were your first impressions of Canada?

*MAYUMI*
Impressions of Canada? Not the first one…second time, actually, when I came because before I was married before I got engaged, came to Canada just for like two weeks…Just visiting. I did tourist, right? Yeah so anyway, the second time when I arrived Vancouver I thought, “You know, for me Canada has been like mountains, rocky mountains, lakes.” But when I arrived in Vancouver, it was more …. I thought, “Big city!” It’s not the, you know, I pictured it with more… maybe more water. That was my first thing thinking about. And of course, there’s so many, at that time, quite a few Asians. So not like America. Because when I was in America I didn’t see many Asians.

*REBECA*
Okay.

*MAYUMI*
No I don’t think so. But when I came to Canada it was 1990, December. So there was quite a few Japanese people and a Chinese, of course. Quite different when I started. I was surprised, yes.

*REBECA*
So the both times, the first time that you came to visit for two weeks and then the second time you came to stay…

*MAYUMI*
Right.

*REBECA*
Both times did you go to Vancouver?

*MAYUMI*
Yes.

*REBECA*
Okay. Okay, so you didn’t see any other places in Canada? Vancouver was your first impression?

*MAYUMI*
Yes, right.

*REBECA*
I see, I see. Okay, could you tell me a little bit about starting your life in Canada?

*MAYUMI*
Oh, starting my life. Oh, well my husband, I said he was already in Canada for almost two years when I met him at that time. He rented an apartment downtown. So anyway, we stayed in this apartment for, oh, two years. And then, of course, my husband he already had a job and then for myself, I had to find a job, right? But at the beginning, wasn’t so easy because the biggest problem for me was, of course, I wanted to work in some like office somewhere, but I couldn’t type like English! Because when I was working, of course, I used to use a computer but it was everything that… even the program was made for the bank, so I only knew how to use a computer or type writer provided by the bank. So I couldn’t type English, right? So when I arrived to Vancouver, of course, I start looking for a job because I wanted to work. So I applied for a job. It was a Japanese company and then I had an interview. Interview part was okay, no problem, but I failed because I cannot type and they provide me a piece of, you know, a text and they asked me to type it, right? Just type. But it takes me one hour, it’s so silly. Of course, now, just ten minutes I can type everything. But at that time, it takes one hour and I’m sure the interviewer gets so mad or tired, right?

*REBECA*
Waiting [laughs].

*MAYUMI*
Yeah! What you’re doing, it’s like three lines or four lines. Anyways, so I decided, “Okay, I have to do…I have to learn typing, okay.” So I go and I buy a typewriter, so every night I started practice typing. Yeah, every day.

*REBECA*
Good for you. So how long did it take you to find a job?

*MAYUMI*
Different job? Ah, actually before I got a job in an office I got a – it’s still, you know, when you got to Vancouver and Georgia Street and just right next to four season hotel, there’s a Pacific Centre Mall. You know the Grand Fork, the first one?

*REBECA*
Yes.

*MAYUMI*
If you go in from the Georgia Street, to the left used to be a cafeteria at that time. Like a kind of Starbucks, very similar. There was cafeteria over there. So I got a job, that was really my first job in Canada, yes. So, I arrived in December and I found a job maybe…yeah, February. So I started working in the cafeteria for few months, but it was so difficult because I never worked in a cafeteria before, it’s not English, physically I’m getting so tired because you’re standing all day long for eight hours even though you have a few breaks. Very difficult. And so I probably stayed three months or so. But I wasn’t very happy and the people who were working in the cafeteria they were more like university students or high school students, right? They are taking up a part time job, they’re much younger than I am, even the manager was younger then I am, and we had a uniform, right? I liked it, but luckily I found a job. It was owned by Japanese Canadians, the company – an import-export business. So luckily I got a very good and quite a nice job.

*REBECA*
Office job?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, it was office job. The lady who was working for the company’s owner was taking maternity leave, so they were looking for somebody who can work for while she’s away. So yeah, I got a job.

[01:01:33]

*REBECA*
Would you say that finding employment was the biggest challenge about settling in Canada?

*MAYUMI*
Ah… at the beginning, no I don’t think so because that time, compared to now, they’re quite a few Japanese companies. It wasn’t so difficult for women, so that’s why I got a job and I worked for only eight years. So I was okay, maybe more my husband – for a man – was very difficult, I guess. Even though my husband had a job, that was kind of like a contract job. He worked in a bakery. And for five years I guess, right? And then, of course, when he was in university he started different courses. His major was not, of course, the baker, but different, more business that he studied in the university. But for him, it’s not easy to get a good job in Canada, so he had a contract job. So, he worked for two years in a bakery and he extended his visa. He worked in a bakery maybe five years or so. And then, even though he got a good education, it wasn’t easy to find a good job. So, after that he worked in the Japanese retail stores, the manager, for maybe five years or so. But he always wanted to start his own business. He always dreamed. So I knew it would take him a long time to start his own business. At that time, as a new immigrant, we don’t have any anybody who can write a good reference letter because we never work at a Canadian company before, right? So we never get a good reference letter. So that’s why wasn’t easy for him. It took him a long time to start his business. So I think that was what difficult for him. My case was different. Yes I got a job – quite lucky – but I wasn’t very satisfied with what I was working. I mean, it’s good . . . the working accommodation was good, the money was not too bad, everything was good – but, I thought like, “I’m in Canada right? But I’m working in a company that the majority of people are Japanese.” They were quite a few Canadians, but majority of people Japanese, and we speak Japanese all the time, of course, and only the document is English. Even the forms, most of the time is in Japanese and I thought, “Yes, now I am in Canada but it’s like I’m still in Japan. The same.” Only the place of the country has changed, but the environment is the same. At most is the same, so maybe at that work, I wasn’t very satisfied. So that’s why I decided to go back to school when I was working. I started attending night school, when I was working the full time. I went to Vancouver Community College to study just English. Grade twelve. I just decided, “Okay, you know, maybe I should take at least Grade twelve English.” That way maybe I can get some better job, I don’t know! That’s why I went back to school.

[01:05:45]

*REBECA*
So would you say you had new hopes and dreams for yourself?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, right!

*REBECA*
What sorts of ideas did you have about what your future in Canada might look like, once you started to get settled in with your husband?

*MAYUMI*
About a job?

*REBECA*
Just in general, once you were settled in and you started getting used to being in Canada, what did you see for your future?

*MAYUMI*
Ah my future. Of course, I am wanting to have a family, it’s important, a good family. And yeah, I’d like to find a job not owned by Japanese, more like a local Canadian [job]. That was a dream. And also, I knew my husband want to start his business, so one day, for sure, he’s going to start it. I’d like to support his business and this business has been connected with Japan. That’s what we always thought. Something connected with Japan, and actually, that’s how his business is. He imports dry food from Japan and he supplies to local restaurants. And now, his main product is Japanese rice, very fine rice. So we import and exchange goods from our home town, Yamagata, too. He imports seaweed or rice or, of course, more stuff. And then he supplies the Japanese restaurants. So we like to introduce very good quality of Japanese rice from our hometown. And he imports Japanese tea. . .

*REBECA*
So you maintain your home connection?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, yeah!

*REBECA*
Interesting.

*MAYUMI*
That’s – he and I wanted to support, for sure.

*REBECA*
I have a question, it’s an observation. So, throughout your journey to Vancouver, you were staying with many host families. You’re still involved with international students and host families and that sort of thing. Can you tell me a little bit more about that because it’s seemed to have stayed in your life a little bit.

*MAYUMI*
Ah about my job?

*REBECA*
Yes! Currently.

*MAYUMI*
My job, okay. I just want to say this part. About two years ago, I started my own business. Actually, before I started my business, this business, I was not working for a company, but I was getting students through a big Japanese agent. That was like more than like three years go. And I was looking after students. And then that time, I wasn’t very happy with what I’m doing because I wanted to help a lot students – but, I couldn’t do this because all the students came through a big agent. There were so many restrictions. I cannot make any decisions by myself. Even though I want to help, I can’t do that. Each time, I have to phone to the office and they give me instructions. So that was very difficult. So, that’s why I decided to start my own business. That was two years ago. So I applied to City of Richmond, I got a business license, and I have a partner and she lived in Japan. Okinawa. So we worked together. We named our company like “JP”, like Japan. So, for volunteer and community services, this is the name of our business. And what we did was… our objective is to provide many unique and affordable programs for Japanese people who are interested in visiting Canada, want to study English, for anybody, right? Oh, and also to learn about Canadian culture by connecting with local Canadians and citizens. That is our main objective purpose. The majority of our clients homestay in Richmond. And I always bring these students or people to Richmond Public Library, and the museum, and the community center. I like to show this community, right? And I like to give a lot when I introduce community programs, and much more information about this community’s events. In Richmond. For example, yesterday I took two students to Richmond Maritime Festival.

[01:10:59]

*REBECA*
Ah yes.

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, we went. Actually, we went, five people together. Event last year, we volunteered. I try to bring the Japanese students to even like the Gulf of Georgia . . .

*REBECA*
Cannery, yes.

*MAYUMI*
Right! Yeah and the Britannia Shipyards, or the Murakami Family House. It’s history, right? In Steveston. And I believe it’s very important to tell history about the Japanese Canadians who worked very hard, you know, like Mary Kitagawa, to establish their life in Canada. I’m sure their life, that time, is so different compared to my case. So I really want to share and tell about the history of Japanese Canadian people, for these new Japanese people who come to Canada just visiting or studying English. I think my mission right now is to encourage Japanese students, especially who come to Canada to study English, to get involved with local community, and do some volunteer work. I’m sure they can do a lot of volunteer work even though their English is limited, I’m sure. And for the community, right? And then their experience would be a great way to improve their English, very practical English. And I’m sure their English skills will really improve if they experience a real Canadian way of life, which they’ll never learn attending school, I think. I’m sure if you go to school, their English will improve for sure, but the culture and the traditions, they wouldn’t have a chance to feel. And I really want the Japanese people to meet like Mary Kitagawa, for example. She’s an amazing lady. She made great effort and she contributed to the Canadian Japanese community in Vancouver and Canada. So that’s what I’m doing right now. I really enjoy doing this.

*REBECA*
I find it interesting that that part of your life stayed with you – all the way through to now, which is something that you actively do and now it is very important to you – helping with students and people who are learning about Canada and who are traveling and improving their education. Yeah, it’s interesting.

*MAYUMI*
Yeah it took me a long time even to finally start my own business, too, because like I said, I worked in a company for eight years, and at the same time, I was attending VCC [Vancouver Community College] and when I finished, I even went to Langara College. Just for a little bit, to continue. But then I had kids, so I couldn’t continue. Then, when I had children, I couldn’t work or I decided not to work because my husband is self-employed and we have no family here, right? So I cannot ask anybody to look after my children. And also, this is a new country for us so we thought, “Everywhere is different,” but we just thought, “We cannot take our kids to daycare or because we don’t really know.” So my husband said, “Better for our kids to just stay at home with me,” You know, just looking after the children and make sure they don’t get sick or something. You know, “You are the one! You have to take care of them”. Yeah, so I think that way, my husband, he was able to focus on his job. He didn’t have to worry about my family because I am at home, always, with my children. So that’s why I stayed at home for ten years. So that was a long time. That was also a very difficult decision to make. Before I had children, I worked in a Japanese company for eight years, but I quit my job that time because, like I said, I wasn’t really one hundred per cent very happy with what I’m doing. So I quit my job. And then when I quit my job, I knew that there’s no way for me to compete with Canadian people for a job in Canada. For example, even if I go for the job interview, I can type much faster, but still, you know the people, they’re much better. And, of course, same as English because I wasn’t educated in Canada, so my English is limited. So I thought, “Okay, what can I do?” So then I decided, “Okay, maybe I’ll get some skills.” So that’s why I went to school, to learn floral designing. I went to school and I learned floral designing and everything, and I finished school and I got all the certificates and everything, and then I was ready to look for a job because. . . business skill, right? The English doesn’t affect really. . .I can work anywhere I want. That’s what I thought, but it’s not easy. Same thing again, of course. No difference because I was new. Even though I finished school, got a certificate, it means I can do it, I’m good. So I volunteered in a flower shop for many months without being paid. Yeah, I did. But I thought I have to because I want to. But finally I was able to work in a like you know the shop, which was owned by Canadian people!

*REBECA*
Where was the shop?

*MAYUMI*
It’s gone now, but I don’t mention the name, but it was in a hotel in Richmond. Because I worked many different flower shops, in Ladner, Richmond, and Vancouver. But, they’re all Canadian people. I worked five years, but that was the time, I think, I felt really I was connected to the local Canadian people. Because before, I made a little bit of good money, but like I said, I felt I was still in Japan, but here. Not working in the flower shop, because we did so many weddings, we went to the synagogue, we went to the hotel, we do all of UBC, and decorate every single wedding, we make bouquets. So that five years, I really felt, you know, like I was really connected. . .I belonged to Canada! So that’s why when I decided, “No,” when I stop working again to raise my children, at the beginning I was really struggling myself because you know, finally, I felt I’m so connected. But now, I have children, so I’m going to quit. So then I quit so for I guess, ten years? During that time, ten years, I thought of course a few times, “Oh, I want to go back to work, I could,” but then on the other hand I thought, “Yeah, it’s not the right time”. So I waited and waited during that time. I went, “I would so like to,” because when I still worked, with eight years in the house, that time my children were almost about ten years old, so I thought maybe I can get a part time job. So I went to the counselor, like an employee office. So anyway, I was introduced by a counselor and we talked and she said, in my case, “Yes,” that I may be able to take a course. Everything’s free. And I could maybe go to Langara to continue education. It covered everything like computer skills, or accounting because I worked [on the papers] when I was in Japan. I had a bookkeeping certificate. I was working, too, in accounting and bookkeeping when I was working at the Japanese company. So the counselor said, “Maybe you can be like freshen up your computer skills again?” And luckily I was able to go back to school, and again for two months at a time, I reviewed everything, like bookkeeping and accounting. So then gradually I started looking for a job, even part time. But same thing again, this wasn’t easy because I stayed at home so long nobody that wanted to hire me. And my age too, right? So it was so difficult and about a couple, two years, I was fearing, “Hm, what should I do? My children are growing and I have to spend more time with my children, but at same time I’d like to work some part time as well – but, I cannot find it.”

[01:21:14]

*REBECA*
I see.

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, so that’s when gradually I decided maybe to do something by myself. Then I don’t have to worry about anything because I’m the boss myself!

*REBECA*
Yes! Great!

*MAYUMI*
Yeah so that’s how finally. . .

*REBECA*
You got your business?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, yeah. Right.

*REBECA*
One question I had was, when you first came to Canada – not to visit, but to stay – did you live in Vancouver first and then go to Richmond later?

*MAYUMI*
Yes, yes.

*REBECA*
So how long I guess which year did you move to Richmond?

*MAYUMI*
Richmond? I moved okay I first came to Vancouver in ’90 in December and then I moved to Richmond in September.

*REBECA*
Okay.

*MAYUMI*
Yes very quickly, yes because the Vancouver downtown is too busy.

*REBECA*
I see.

*MAYUMI*
Right. So I wanted to move to somewhere more quiet so that’s why we moved.

*REBECA*
And what were your first impressions of Richmond, opposed to just Canada, when you first arrived?

*MAYUMI*
Oh, it’s a perfect place for me! It’s like a little town. At the time, not very busy, only like three high rise buildings. Remember Garden City by the college, behind? Yeah, only three high rise buildings. That’s it, nothing. And just Richmond Centre. Very quiet, it’s nice! I thought, “Wow, it’s quiet.” You live in Vancouver, downtown is too busy for me because I came from a small home. So that’s why living in Richmond was very comfortable. Such a nice, small, very family oriented place.

*REBECA*
I see. Was there anything that surprised you when you first came to Richmond?

*MAYUMI*
Richmond, no, not really. I don’t think anything, because at that time, for example, there are many Japanese the community and the Japanese people living in the Steveston area. And also I was able to get some Japanese food if I want to, just go to the store. So yeah, very comfortable.

*REBECA*
Very comfortable. Lovely. So you’ve been here now since 1990, is there anything that you miss about home back in Japan?

*MAYUMI*
Miss?

*REBECA*
Yeah, you seem very comfortable here, and maybe a little familiar. You were involved with your husband’s job and your own job. Is there anything from back home, when you were growing up, that you miss?

*MAYUMI*
I miss, of course, the food. Food always better. And of course, my family, you know, my friends My family or my relatives. Yeah that part.

*REBECA*
What kinds of food do you really wish you could have in Richmond that you can get in Japan?

*MAYUMI*
Oh, the Japanese sweets. For example, I know a lot of the Japanese Canadian people they like homemade. . . they make Japanese sweets, but it’s very different. So even, yes, sushi for example. Yes, so many Japanese restaurants and good sushi, but still very different.

*REBECA*
The sushi is very different?

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, very different. You get more . . . very fresh. And the biggest thing is of course eating fish. Like here, always, of course, you cannot get black cod. Very expensive. Maybe just salmon, right? Salmon is the main fish, I think. But in my home town there’s so many kinds. I cannot count, just so many different kinds of fish we can eat! I never eat salmon every day.

*REBECA*
Right.

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, that part, really.

*REBECA*
Reminds you of home?

*MAYUMI*
Yes.

[01:25:53]

*REBECA*
Do you go back to Japan very often?

*MAYUMI*
Ah, me yes, my children maybe every two years?

*REBECA*
Oh okay!

*MAYUMI*
I try, right.

*REBECA*
Alright, maybe you can tell me a little bit about the items that you brought today, so we have some origami and then some…

*MAYUMI*
Pardon?

*REBECA*
So maybe you can explain . . . you were telling me before about who made them and where they came from. So, maybe you could talk about that?

*MAYUMI*
Alright, so what we call this Japanese doll is Ohina-sama and we celebrate especially for Girls Day, March third. And we display this kind doll and, of course, we wish for the children’s happiness and prosperity. That’s why we pray to this doll. Because if you bring this whole set to Canada it’s very expensive and if you buy maybe five thousand, or ten, it just depends. I know it’s very expensive, the real one, but this just a miniature small one. So my husband’s sister, she made them. They’re all hand made. She made it just because we have children, two daughters. That’s why she made them for us. And this is very small so we can display it anytime we want, but usually, you know, I just display this Ohina-sama once in a year. Then I can talk to my children about why we celebrate, you know, what it is or we talk about – not only about Ohina-sama – but, other different traditions, Children’s Festival, or. . . That’s why I quite like it and I really appreciate my husband’s sister.

*REBECA*
So each piece is representing a doll or a person?

*MAYUMI*
A person, yeah! More the queen and king at the top.

*REBECA*
I see!

*MAYUMI*
[Points to bottom row] It’s more like a servant, kind of.

*REBECA*
Okay okay. And sorry, what time of year do you bring it out?

*MAYUMI*
March third.

*REBECA*
March third, right. Okay.

*MAYUMI*
So during that time.

*REBECA*
Interesting, that’s beautiful.

*MAYUMI*
These people, you can see, all the instruments they perform. They are playing all different instruments.

*REBECA*
Beautiful, wow. And these items here, the material pieces?

*MAYUMI*
These are from what we call hardanger. I don’t know about the origin but it was introduced my friend Bessy. She’s a friend of Mary Kitagawa. When I met Bessy, she was already eighty years old. I was lucky because when I moved to Richmond I didn’t know anybody, so I had no friends – but, I was so lucky because I was able to go attend a knitting and sewing club. I joined this very small group, it’s more a gathering. So we get together once in a week and we just bring our own project. So some people may be cross stitching, or knitting or sewing – but, this lady Bessy, she was doing these beautiful embroidery so I thought, “Wow this is so unique!” I never seen this before, so I asked her how to make it and then she started teaching me. And so and I got all the material and we went shopping. And yup, I started making this. So every, once in a week, I attended this knitting club, but the different time I went to Bessy’s house to learn this embroidery. And, I think, you can see this embroidery is probably from some Norwegian . . .

*REBECA*
The pattern looks like, yes.

*MAYUMI*
Yes, right.

*REBECA*
Interesting. And you knew her, would that have been almost ten years right? Bessy?

*MAYUMI*
Oh no, no more. I first met Bessy . . . it’s such a unique connection, because Bessy’s daughter Raika, she’s my actually my best Canadian friend. Yes, she is wonderful. And so I met – actually, my husband first met Raika when he came to Canada and then I never met Raika before, but when we moved to Richmond, we had a telephone call from the lady. And we thought, “This is so strange,” because nobody knew our phone number. We thought. Anyway, the lady called and that was Bessy’s daughter, Raika! Yeah, so it is so interesting and somehow she found our phone number and I said, “Oh, well we moved to Richmond and I have no friends and , you know, so lonely,” and then she said, “Oh, you want to join the knitting club? We have a group of people and we get together, you want to come? Enter as my friend.” And that’s how I got into this group. I think we did that for over ten years, we did this knitting group. That was fantastic because during that like I met so many nice Canadian people. We used to get together, just chatting sometimes, we were baking, or, of course, sewing. It was great, really great opportunity for me, and because I met Raika she is such a nice lady. And of course Bessy, the mother, was fantastic. So they introduced their cousins or extended families, or Raika’s sister, Shirley, who lives in our tower. Everyone treated us like we were a part of their family. Before we had kids, we used to like celebrate Christmas together or Thanksgiving, everything.

*REBECA*
Oh, so nice!

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, so I learned about the traditions of Canada. It’s amazing. But of course, Bessy, she’s now passed away. But Bessy and Raika and Mary Kitagawa have known each other since 1962. So all of maybe forty-three years…

*REBECA*
Oh my goodness!

*MAYUMI*
It’s amazing, yes. So this is a special memory for me. It’s always reminded me of Bessy.

*REBECA*
Oh I see. Did you start doing this before or after you had children?

*MAYUMI*
Before, yeah.

*REBECA*
Before when you were settling in probably? Okay, I see. Okay, well I think that’s all the questions I have, but is there anything else you would like to say about your journey here to Richmond?

*MAYUMI*
No, I don’t think so. But maybe at the end I have to say, I think we are so lucky. Because even compared to my friends who immigrated to Canada during the same time, I was so lucky because I’ve known so many of the nice local people. A lot of my friends, they still like to get together with Japanese people, you know, together. They don’t have many Canadian friends, but for me I really feel now I belong to this community, Richmond. And I’ve known so many people, right? That’s why, probably, I don’t miss going back to Japan.

*REBECA*
I see.

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, because for me, here is more like my home. Whenever I go to Japan for trips and when I come back to Vancouver airport I feel, “Oh I’m home now!” That’s what I think for the last twenty-five years. It’s been over twenty-five years, right? So I just feel this is my home in Richmond.

*REBECA*
That’s great, that’s great.

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, I’m so happy, yes.

*REBECA*
We’re happy that you shared your story with us. I want to say thank you very much. Wonderful to talk to you!

*MAYUMI*
Yeah, thank you.

*REBECA*
Okay. Thank you!

END OF TAPE PART ONE OF ONE

[01:35:15]

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)