

An Illegal Alien

"Alien" is a stronger term than "Foreigner". The heavy legal hand of the Canadian Government in the 1940s made sure that "Frank" and his family were branded. Although he was born a Canadian and lived his first 15 years in Vancouver, British Columbia, "Frank" became more than a foreigner in his own country. His allegiance was never questioned directly. On the contrary, it was assumed in the negative, without his say in the matter.

Fear and suspicion were creeping into the provinces and into all citizens of Vancouver, British Columbia, especially into the nation of Canada. The entire continent of North America was responding to the atrocities of war with political, cultural and systemic racism. Canada was grappling with a catastrophic event that had occurred kilometres across the Pacific, away in the tropical paradise of Oahu, Hawaii. Three times zones announced, from the judiciary of Canada, a declaration.

"It is the government's plan to get these people out of B.C. as fast as possible. It is my personal intention, as long as I remain in public life, to see they never come back here. Let our slogan be for British Columbia: No Japs from the Rockies to the seas." *Ian MacKenzie, the federal cabinet minister for BC announced to his fellow Canadians.*

The ripple effect into human lives was just as powerful as the actual physical destruction dropped on the naval base of Pearl Harbour. Japan's military muscle was fatefully exerted. The repercussions resounded in North America. Vancouver felt the shock wave also.

"B.C. is falling all over itself in the scramble to be the first to kick us out from jobs and homes ... it has just boiled down to race persecution, and signs have been posted on all highways ... JAPS ... KEEP OUT!" *Muriel Kitigawa wrote to her brother.*

That December in 1941 caused a tsunami of social change to wash away the intended wishes of an upcoming spiritual season, "peace and goodwill to all mankind". A Japanese bomb attack from an aggressive military regime convinced Canadians who the enemy really was. Judging a book by its cover became real. The cover of that historical book told the entire story; fearful minds of a brainwashed population were at war with itself. Anyone who looked like he or she had a racial origin of Japanese was assumed to have a questionable allegiance. No questions asked. The threat along the Pacific coast had a face. Vulnerability.

By March of 1942, "Frank" was that face. Along with his family of 2 younger sisters and his parents were forced to relocate within a 24-hour notice. With the assistance of rail transportation and military police, all the innocent internees were shuttled from the animal stalls of Hasting's Park to the shantytown camps of the Kootenays, in the depths of the Rocky Mountains. Here in the secluded interior of the province was a safe place. It was the only safe place dictated for the benefit of the other

Canadians who did not look like a foreign threat. The internment camps were far enough way to protect the coast from any internal uprising from direct Imperial Japanese sympathizers. The government had safely uprooted a class of Canadians, and had cleansed an area, now referred to as “ethnic genocide”. No cultural trace was allowed to remain of fishing fleets, commercial enterprises and residential roots. All Japanese-Canadian neighbourhoods were cleared within 24 hours, leaving BC Government to dispose of the remains of former lives that had existed from waves of settled generations and families born as Canadian citizens.

By late spring of '42, “Frank” was an able-bodied young man. He was offered government-influenced employment of supervised farm life and minimum-wage labour in the Okanagan. It was not until he signed his agricultural contract that he truly understood his designated status. There, beside his name, was his branded title. He was no longer a native-born Canadian. He was more than just a foreigner in his own land. Clearly his label was typed, “ILLEGAL ALIEN” -- Frank Shigeru Yoshioka. His foreign status took on a new reality and new significance. Fortunately, even with passing years, he has maintained his self-esteem. A token compensation package was given to his surviving family in 1988. It was intended as restitution. Frank has carried no resentment or ill-will towards his own country. 君にはなんの恨みもない I bear no grudge against you.”

His noble human nature remains intact, to this day, in spite of the personal circumstances of war and upheaval.

Wayne Power