



We Are Living in the History

The story of the Murakami family reflects the path taken by many Japanese immigrants who came to Canada in the late 1800s hoping for a new life. Their lives unfolded within policies designed to build British Columbia as a White frontier, yet through perseverance and hard work they carried their lives forward.

***They were prepared to do the work
no-one else was prepared to do.***

Don Cunningham

It was not until 1949 that Ottawa lifted wartime restrictions, including freedom of movement, allowing Japanese Canadians to return to the west coast. Katsuyori Murakami, his wife Kimiko, and their five children—Violet, Mary, Rose, Richard, and Bruce—were finally able to return to Salt Spring Island.

After saving enough money, the family left Cardston, Alberta. The island they returned to was not welcoming. Despite hostility and discrimination, the Murakamis chose to remain—Salt Spring was their home.

Rather than accepting circumstances through *shikata ga nai*—the quiet resignation that ‘it cannot be helped’—the Murakami family spoke out, sharing their experiences whenever possible. They remained present in the community with perseverance, integrity, and generosity.



***My dad always taught us to speak up.
If you see anybody being bullied or
mistreated, don't just sit there and be a
bystander, go and advocate for them.***

Mary Murakami Kitagawa

Katsuyori and Kimiko Murakami's
60th wedding anniversary in 1986.

Over time, the political environment changed, and redress was achieved. Attitudes on the island also gradually shifted as the community became more aware of the systemic injustices Japanese Canadians faced. These changes were made possible through decades of activism by Japanese Canadians and their allies.

Today, new generations of Japanese families have made Salt Spring their home. The Murakami story reminds us that change is shaped by the courage of those who stand up and speak out. History lives on in people, and by remembering and sharing these stories, we help ensure such injustices—against any group—are never repeated.

On September 22, 1988, the Canadian Government officially acknowledged and apologized for the wrongs it committed against Japanese Canadians during the Second World War.



Marching for Redress on Parliament Hill, Ottawa.
Photo: Cheng Yu Tung East Asian Library, University of Toronto; Shirley Yamada fonds

The Annual Blossom Picnic at Heiwa Garden in Peace Park,
sponsored by the Japanese Canadian community
and Japanese Garden Society of Salt Spring Island.

Photo: Brian Smallshaw



The Murakami family in Roseberry internment camp.

**“Sometimes a small thing you do
can mean everything
in another person's life.”**

Richard had this quote pinned on the wall of his Rainbow Road garage.

Richard Murakami

After graduating from the University of British Columbia, Richard returned to Salt Spring, opened an auto repair shop, and helped out his parents. His garage became a community hub where people stopped by not only for repairs but also just to see Richard. Many remember his generosity—he often repaired cars for little or no cost for those in need.



Together with his sister Rose, he donated property worth \$1.2 million to build Murakami Gardens, the island's first major social housing complex, and in 2010 was honoured with the BC Community Achievement Award.

***My mom really admired the Murakamis for
having the courage to come back and start
over after the way they were treated, losing
their farms and everything. And oh, she used
to talk about how brave that was.*** Nancy Wigen

Rose Murakami

After returning to Salt Spring Island in 1954, Rose Murakami pursued nursing at the University of British Columbia and completed graduate studies at McGill and Boston University. She later taught at UBC's School of Nursing, where she trained generations of nurses and was known for her support and high standards. In later years, she returned to Salt Spring Island and became an important voice in sharing her family's history. Through community gatherings and school visits, she spoke about the experiences of Japanese Canadians and the importance of remembering them. She often said her strong sense of justice came from her parents.



Mary Murakami Kitagawa

Mary Murakami (later Mary Kitagawa) built a life in Vancouver as a teacher and human rights advocate. She became a strong voice for preserving Japanese Canadian history and speaking out against injustice, alongside her husband, Tosh Kitagawa. She helped lead a campaign to prevent a federal building from being named after a politician who supported wartime uprooting, which was later renamed the Douglas Jung Building. Mary also worked to have the University of British Columbia acknowledge the expulsion of Japanese Canadian students in 1942; in 2012, the university awarded honorary degrees to seventy-six affected students. Through public talks, advocacy, and community work, she has helped ensure these histories are remembered.

