

## **Interview with Reverend Wilbert Roy McWilliams**

The Rev W R McWilliams was uniquely qualified, having extensive experience as a missionary in Japan before the war, to interact with both the Japanese and the Caucasian community as a church and community leader in Tashme. This 1970 interview reveals a great deal about the relationships and social tensions among the various organizations and groups of people during the internment period. The transcript is from The United Church of Canada, BC Conference Archives. Heritage Alive Project fonds, box 1920, file 42.

TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW  
AT CRESCENT BEACH, B. C.,  
February, 1970.

Interviewer: Marilyn Harrison

Interviewee: Rev. W. R. McWilliams

This is an Interview with Rev. W. R. McWilliams - a Missionary to Japanese in Japan and Canada for the Methodist and United Church - by Marilyn Harrison, February 1970, AT his home at Crescent Beach, B. C.

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Marilyn: Perhaps to start with you could tell me a little bit about your background, your birthplace, your education, why you went to Japan, and how long you were there?

McWilliams: Well, I was born near Napanee in Ontario on a farm. I sometimes say I got religion at 19, and went into high school for a year; from there to Albert College; spent two years there, finished matriculation; went out on circuit - it's one of the hardest places on earth, a lot of foreigners - Bulgarians and so on working in Fordan.

Marilyn: Where would that be, Saskatchewan?

McWilliams: No, on the Bay of Quinte.

Marilyn: On the Bay of Quinte, and there were Bulgarians there?

McWilliams: I beg your pardon.

Marilyn: I never knew there was a Bulgarian settlement in there?

McWilliams: They're the men who worked in the cement works - there were two of them at that time and they were nearly all men who had been born in Central Europe.

Marilyn: Is that right?

McWilliams: Yes, some were not, the majority were. Went back for my senior matriculation, to Albert College, first year university, and at the same time I had another church out in Cattleton, and did those two things in one year - I don't know if that's a good idea or not. I don't recommend it but I worked hard. And from there I went to Victoria College, graduated in Arts in 1914, and in Theology I finished my B. D. in 1916, was married to the girl I had met in Albert College, and we went to Japan. We went to Japan and we were Methodists then and I've often thought since that, the atmosphere that we found in the church in Japan, so many of the men there had been educated or had contacts with the older men in the church with our church here and with our schools - many of them knew English and had been in Victoria College in Toronto - a number of the men and the warmth of the church between the minister, the older ministers and the missionaries particularly, I wouldn't say it was true of the younger men as to the older ones who had been here, more of the Anglo-Saxon mind, I suppose their strength...it's just like a Methodist group here in this country. There was a warmth in it and a convincing thing in the fellowship. You were glad to be in it. One could have never predicted from that moment that the church would take the toll in Japan that it did take. And it took that turn and it should have too. We spent two years in language study at a pretty poor language school in Tokyo. Went out on the field to work two years, and all of 12 in Konazaoa (?)

Marilyn: Now were you preaching?

McWilliams: We never were in schools, we never taught in the schools. We always were out to the grass roots place...that's where we preferred to be. I taught school in government school, taught as much as 36 hours a week in my later years, and made lots of good friends among the students. They write to me yet. Laughs) And then we had another two years in Kanazawa, and in Shizuoka another seven. Twenty-three years in Japan and we came home in '39 after living in the country in Japan we had seen and had contact with the schools, youth and so on. We had seen the war spirit, we had seen it deepened. We had seen it bristle, we had seen the people hurt by it. There again it comes back to what you spoke of a while ago - they didn't speak up, the people didn't. They would speak to me which, even some non-Christians would talk to me about it, but they said "We're going to have war, there's no question about it, there's no way of avoiding it - it's inevitable - it's too late now to do anything else". The people were saying that to each other if the police weren't around. And it was obvious to us that it couldn't be avoided unless there was a miracle and what that would mean, no one could say. But it came. I was preaching that Sunday morning in November, 1941 in New Westminster Japanese Church; finished the morning service and a man by the name of Walkinshaw called me on the telephone and told me that the war had broken out that day in Japan and Pearl Harbour, and I announced it to my group - it was a tragic thing, a fact you see. They had never believed that it would happen, the people here hadn't.

Marilyn: Well what was your work in Canada before the evacuation of the Japanese? Now you mentioned you came back here in 1939.

McWilliams: Well, we came back and we had come to Vancouver to live - I didn't know a thing about Vancouver. I had an uncle that lived here and his family were here. But that wasn't why we came. We came here because the Japanese were here, and so many of them were here and we wanted to see what their situation was for we couldn't know enough about it. All we knew was the Japanese in Japan, and then there was a course here of nursing for Public Health Nursing that our daughter wanted to take. It was one of the best in Canada. Here and in Western Canada they had these courses developed and she stayed here and did that work here and our son, both of them went through the university here. It was a convenient thing. We weren't here more than two months I guess. There was a young man by the name of Akagawa, who was minister of that church and inevitably it hadn't been a very easy church for ministers to live with. About once every year or every other year they left and one wondered if I would take the work. "Well, I said, I'll try it temporarily". And I went over and I think Percy Bunt was the Superintendent of Missions then.

Marilyn: He had just started then, 1940, hadn't he?

McWilliams: Yes, and he thought it was a good thing I worked there. I worked there until the war broke and indeed 'til 19.... I think I was there from '39, '40, '41 until the beginning of '42, in that church, with both the older group, the Issei, and with the younger group, the Nisei. I worked with both groups.

Marilyn: Well now you started to tell me a little bit about this when you were mentioning the outbreak of the war, that Sunday that you had to announce to your congregation the fact that hadn't really believed it would happen. What was the feeling between the Japanese Canadians and the Anglo-Saxons before 1941, and before the war broke out?

McWilliams: It would be very difficult to explain it. It was volcanic. Held underneath it was dark and turbulent - it really was. You could hardly imagine - even after you had seen it, at least that's how it came to me. I recall coming out to Surrey here from New Westminster and meeting with a group of Nisei. There was a gulf between the Japanese people and between all the Anglo-Saxons that it took a more gifted man than I was to analyze it, to get to understand it. For instance, there was nothing like that between the Chinese and the Anglo-Saxons.

Marilyn: You mean there wasn't a gulf in the same way?

McWilliams: No, the Chinese were liked, they were liked, they were accepted. They weren't - they didn't live under the same kind of a cloud. Nobody in this country had been - the Japanese - had been naturalized after the year 1921. The fishing licences were impossible to get unless they had been obtained prior to that time, then they were continued from year to year. They weren't allowed to be members of the fishing unions, fishermen's unions; they were...take the men who worked in the mills in New Westminster, they were paid .10¢ an hour less for their work than the Anglo-Saxon's got for the same work. But they signed receipts for the full amount in order to hold their jobs. Now you only have to mention a thing like that and you see what it does to the people who employ them, and the people who are employed. That is a terrific thing. The Japanese had the word Mejuoxiti, "living on the fence between two countries". loyalty in two directions. They were not citizens of this country and couldn't be - that is the ones born in Japan. They wanted to be mind you, they wanted to be. The fishermen were, they had to be in order to get fishing licenses but that happened earlier. The younger men couldn't become fishermen at all, they had to do other things to make a living, and I remember saying to this young group of men in Surrey, many of them had never been near a Christian church, I don't suppose, but they came; they came and we talked together and I remember saying, "I hate to think of what would happen if a war were to break

out with the relationships that there are between yourselves and between the whites in this community". I said, "You don't know each other. There's mistrust, there's suspicion, you live here but you don't know your next door neighbour", and they don't know you". And I said, "How much better it would be that instead of working ten or twelve hours a day, if you knocked off after working about eight, go and sit on your neighbours doorstep and let your feet hang down and talk to him". Those were the words that I said, and one of the older men who was there, and I know him well, he said afterwards, he said "We don't want McWilliams to come back to this place anymore - we can keep him out of here, because if he comes our young men aren't going to be interested in working, they're going to be interested in something else. (Laugh). And then he became one of my best friends, that's why I mention him. And his son was married in this room, his youngest son was married here a few years ago and he arranged it so these things change, you know. So they did not understand each other. They didn't know what the future was, they had no certain abiding place in this country. They were just, many of them you know had sent their children to school, particularly the boys, to be educated in Japanese. They're the boys who came back to Canada after the war and built that Buddhist Temple over in Steveston.

Marilyn: Oh, I see.

McWilliams: And our church in Steveston didn't help them. They needed the English language and our church hadn't the guts (excuse me) or the devotion. I think they saw the problem for I had told them very clearly - ask Percy Bunt or Frank Runnals, they know, and they weren't equal to what they... they weren't going to undertake anything like that, so these men, they needed English but they just felt that if they, if the people care nothing more than that about us getting an English Night School, alright, our alternative will be we'll build a Buddhist Temple, we'll all be buddhists. It was a lack...a bad...a relation that might have been if it was encouraged, and it was never given an opportunity to flower. That's what happened in Steveston, and that's why that Temple is there. That wasn't the older people, no that was done by the younger people. So the war came.

Marilyn: And how did the Japanese react to the war, the declaration of war? You mentioned earlier where...

McWilliams: I think there were two reactions. Very, very, very distinct. The born in Japan Japanese (?) did very largely as you have suggested, they regarded evacuation - it was really depositing the men in internment camps - that's what they were called by that nice name, evacuation camps, and Tashme was notably an internment camp, police and all, and the older people were, well, resignation would be the word I think - "war, the situation, it's inevitable, we can do nothing but accept it". The States, we

we were following their example that we really did in almost everything but in the alienation of their property, they didn't do that in the States. They left them in possession of their property in the States. And years later after the war we were in California and it surprised me and I learned something by it, to see Japanese as old as I was then in homes that they had owned before the war, living in them again. Nobody ever did that in this country. The property was always sold. But the ones born in Canada, they had a different attitude; they couldn't believe it you see because they were Canadians, their births were registered in this country you see, and citizenship is an inalienable right to persons born in this country, and always has been, but here they were being denied it, they weren't consulted, it was against their will, and it was a shock of repudiation of everything they had believed about this country and a political sense and in a sense of freedom of citizenship, you see. This...they couldn't get over it, they couldn't believe it. That thing to be discriminated against as a citizen just shook the older Nisei. The younger ones of course....

Marilyn: Were too young to understand...

McWilliams: They weren't old enough to sense the meaning of the thing and the sting of it, you see.

Marilyn: Did you notice any difference between the Christians and the non-Christians and their reaction to the war?

McWilliams: I don't believe that I could identify...and I don't so far as I know, being a Christian, should we expect it to make much difference in a situation?

Marilyn: I myself doubt if it would, but I just wondered.

McWilliams: Well, you go on doubting and if I were to say something else, I would expect you not to believe me because I spoke in churches where I had a chance during the war, and I was always honest and forthright; I didn't go out to antagonize anybody, but up and down this Fraser Valley the Christians stole Japanese chattels just as freely as the non-Christians did. They couldn't have cared less - they couldn't have hated better or more. The Japs were...they were just nobodys, they had no friends and you could do anything to them that you liked, nobody cared. That was the attitude really.

Marilyn: It was fair picking in their eyes?

McWilliams: Oh yes. It was just...really injustice...these people had no rights, that was all. What did you expect, they weren't human hardly. When England called Japanese Cherry trees Chinese - they changed the name you know.

Marilyn: Did they really?

McWilliams: Yes, they did. They quit because it didn't stick but for a while.

Marilyn: Could you describe a little bit...

McWilliams: Could I say just one more word? I found in our church though, I found in our church groups over here, particularly some of our officials, it was in the Home Missions group that met the same as the women met, the WMS group met, they thought that if we could have Christians in the different government committees and so on, you see, that that would make all the difference, you see, of humanizing these things and Christianizing them. They even came to me with the plan that half of my salary was to come from the B. C. Security Commission, you've never heard this before, you won't find that in those records down there. This is from the horse's mouth. They said half of it will come from the B. C. Security Commission and they had arranged it with the Commission, and the other half will come from the United Church Home Mission Board. And I looked at that group of men and I said, "I doubt it". "It isn't going to happen just like that". I said, "Why do you make that kind of suggestion, do you expect me to stand in those two positions and be a free man?" "If I accept that, I am a member of the B. C. Security Commission and my mouth will be closed and nobody is going to close my mouth if I work here". "If I go to work among these Japanese camps, I'm going as a member of the United Church of Canada, and whether they pay me or whether they don't, that's your business, and I shall not take money, not one cent from the B. C. Security Commission and you can't buy me with that money". And Dr. Dorey said "That's sound". I said, "No man can be a Christian and stand in that kind of a relationship, he can be split down the middle all the time on almost every issue! and I don't think I ever took a more justifiable or more sound position in my life than I did at that point. For if I hadn't done so, almost every move we made from that for four years would have...I'd have been embarrassed. And I warned them, I remember warning them - some of the WMS people can tell you - don't think because you put a Christian in at the head of some of these groups who are placing Japanese people in the East and so on, that everything - that you can unburden yourselves and you will feel you have done your duty. I said, "A man because he's a Christian in those positions isn't what you think, it's something else. He doesn't need to be a Christian doing those things, he can be quite different. He can be a Christian on Sunday and not during the week.

Marilyn: Could you tell me a little bit about what happened during the evacuation? Have you any memories of particular incidents which happened perhaps among some of the people at Steveston or some other congregation in New Westminster?

McWilliams: Well, you mention Steveston. The Steveston people went to Kaslo almost in a bunch. The Christian Church did.

Marilyn: Did they have the choice as to where they wanted to go?



McWilliams: Yes, they were asked. That is in the early stages. They were asked where they would prefer to go. The people from Stevenston and many of them from New Westminster went to Kaslo, and the people from Westminster wanted me to go to Kaslo with them. Of course I never consented. I never did give them any encouragement. I felt that that part of appointing the men was the business of the church, and they'd better do it and do it well. I said "no, no I can't do it, that's not in my preserve". Tashme, by the way, was the black sheep of all the camps.

Marilyn: And why did you go to Tashme?

McWilliams: Because nobody else would go.

Marilyn: Did the church send you or did you volunteer?

McWilliams: They sent me, at the last. I was the last one sent to one of the camps because they tried to station Shimizu at Tashme and he wouldn't go. They tried to station some of the other men there - they wouldn't go.

Marilyn: Why wouldn't Shimizu go?

McWilliams: Well you see, Tashme was the black sheep among the camps from the beginning and they were putting in Tashme men who hadn't been interned in Angler. Men who were under suspicion. Men who were known to be not very sympathetic to Canada, in a political sense, in a national sense, in a citizenship way - they had every reason not to be. They were people really without a home - that is without a contact. And there were a lot of men in Tashme who were clever men. They were some of the most clever minds - politically minded, they loved argument and so on. They used to like as I remember the B. C. Security Commission - people would go up to meet them, you know, to discuss problems and so on. Those fellows could just argue these men all over the street you know. They could make a mess of them and they did it, and they would always present problems when they knew that the answer would be no. They did it! It was just that thorny business of just carrying on - aggravation. Making it just as mucky as they could make it - they had no hope of it being anything else and they decided they were going to Japan - they'd go back to Japan and get away from this country as far and as fast and as fervently as it would be possible. And that group did go to Japan, that group did go, and it created a lot of problems in the community too. And from Tashme they actually moved out, they had a kind of a plebiscite one time - earlier in the war, I forget the point, a little earlier than half way through. They moved a lot of the people who said they wanted to go back to Japan - they moved them from other camps to Tashme and took a lot of those who had elected to stay in the country and put them up in New Denver and other places on the outside. So they had the peaceful guys away on the Interior and they had these whistling guys here in Tashme. In a sense

it was a wise thing to do that because here, I was an Anglo-Saxon and working in that camp, they didn't involve me in those political manoeuvres that they carried on. Only the backlash - I got into that, inevitably because they came to me - the people who wanted a better solution, at least they thought so. The Tashme people didn't go to Japan as they had planned. They, most of them went east.

Marilyn: I see, they changed their minds in the end then, did they? What made them change their minds?

McWilliams: Time, time and I think part of it was the contacts with some of the others of us. You know the greatest thing that a minister ever does isn't in his pulpit - it's out on the hoof, you know. It's sitting down with people and listening to them. They ask you questions and at a time like that, they're bound to ask you questions, and if you can help them from that standpoint to see more clearly, dispassionately, more honourably, and more honestly, and more responsibly, you have done them a real service, however they may choose. If you can place the alternatives clearly and honestly, accurately before them you've done a great thing for them. I don't know, I found it hard to tell Christians and Buddhists apart up there. Now some of them were of course, it wasn't true, I knew a lot of them. A number of them who were going back to Japan were - they wouldn't have anything to do with the Christian church because the country had abused them in this way and it was natural. We expected them to respond, to react in this way and it was natural. Of course there were some who went back to Japan, but not all, but a number of them did. They went back. They couldn't care less and they carried that attitude with them until they landed in Yokahama and discovered that nobody there wanted them - that they weren't welcome, they were persona non grata, and that so far as the people of Japan were concerned they wished heartily that they had stayed where they were. They didn't want them at all - it was just like that. Then another group of them left and went back, they were a group that couldn't stand the teasing of the older group of some of the leaders, you see, who had - (most of them were women) - smart tongues and didn't mind using them and accused people of being Japanese and then not knowing whether they were Japanese or whether they were something else, you see. And quite a lot of people washed up on that shore and were afraid to stand in the camp and show their colours, you know. They really didn't want to go to Japan but they gave in - they couldn't take the criticism. Holding up to examination by this strong loyalist group who went back to Japan, and they were all men where life meant something.

Marilyn: What were the camps like, physically? Now they were there for four years; was there anything there before the camp was built?

McWilliams: At Tashme there the Trites farm. Have you ever been there?

Marilyn: No, I haven't.

McWilliams: Well, it might be worth your while to go there some day, and just see the place. Of course now, unless there's somebody that lived there during the time, you couldn't imagine what it was like, because all the marks are gone. But there were 3500 people in Tashme, old and young. On the whole healthwise, the camps were good. I remember the first year I was there, the winter of '42 was a bad winter - cold, snow. People weren't sick, they didn't have colds and yet ice underneath the beds froze a foot and a half thick under the beds, under the mattresses because the lumber that was in the buildings was green and their houses were heated with these little wood metal stoves. They had no other way, the heat went up, the cold went down and the cold came up from underneath too. The houses were small. Oh, there was one of the tragedies - they put two families in every house.

Marilyn: Well, they built individual houses then, did they?

McWilliams: Individual houses, yes. In some of the other camps they used old buildings that were there.

Marilyn: Yes, I knew that.

McWilliams: Yes, and that made quite a different set-up. But here they divided the houses - I can't give you the definite measurements of them now. I think they were 8' x 12' - three 8' x 12' rooms I think they were. And they divided it into three, and the centre one was the living room for the whole two families and the outside were the sleeping rooms for children and parents in the 8' x 12' place, and it was just trouble they had all the time. People too close on each other's necks, all the children, all the problems that aren't really big problems, yet they destroyed friendships.

Marilyn: Yes, I can see them living that close together over an extended period of time - all the individual family problems and your neighbours!

McWilliams: Well, where there were no problems, friends split up for an eternity - just that kind of thing happened. It wasn't human.

Marilyn: Exactly what was your work in the camp?

McWilliams: Well, officially I was - in the Year Book my name was there as having been appointed a minister to, a United Church minister, to the church in Tashme. But I think my work was, as I look back on it as I saw it then, it was to be a friend to the people who didn't have any friends.

Marilyn: In other words, it wasn't necessarily to United Church people at all?

McWilliams: Oh, to anybody who was just a people. You know what I'm

talking about, yes. And I think that they looked at me in that way. I think they came to see it, they had their suspicions in the beginning. They didn't think that any Anglo-Saxon would ever be like that, but they were sure of it. But I tell you they're great people and under the stress and strains and tensions of that thing - my what came to life for good was wonderful, you know. It wasn't just in the sermons you know, nothing like that. Oh, no.

Marilyn: The men while they were in these camps, I understand they were doing road work, were they or what did they do to occupy their time?

McWilliams: Not the men in Tashme, no they didn't. Oh, wait a minute - hold on now...there were two or three gangs who worked out of the Tashme community, worked on the Hope-Princeton Highway. It was kind of a charade, a kind of doing something and doing nothing at the same time. .25¢ an hour for their work - that was the pay and 8 hours a day and \$4.00 a day and they were supposed to live on that. They had a store there, B. C. Security Commission in Tashme, and they were supposed to buy all their stuff from there - buy it on time, and then they'd deduct their purchases from their monthly income and so on. They had one group of men working raising pigs. They had another one running a sawmill - which if you go to see the men working, they're just dead men. They would have been just as far ahead as if the men who had taken a holiday and gone down the river fishing. You know, they produced nothing. The things all went bust, that is financially, they never paid their way and they were discontinued.

Marilyn: Were the men forced into these jobs or could they take their choice?

McWilliams: They were compelled to take them - yes, they had to do it unless they were ill, yes.

Marilyn: Did you have other people working with you in your church?

McWilliams: Yes. That's where I met my son-in-law. He was a C. O. from Toronto, they sent him out on Alternative Service, he came out here to Vancouver Island to plant forests or something - he with a number of others. We got some of those men released, four or five of them to come and teach school in the different centres and he was one of them. He came to Tashme.

Marilyn: Oh, I see. And so he was one of the teachers then?

McWilliams: And you know that, there was a thing. That was one of the greatest things that was done community-wise, was the school that they carried on...primary schools and all manned by people with dubious qualifications you know. They just picked them up out of the community and used them as best they could to run the primary schools, and then of course the people we got together. The WMS were a great group, our WMS really they were stalwarts.

Marilyn: Well the Japanese themselves organized the elementary schools then was it?

McWilliams: No, no. The B. C. Security Commission did that. They organized the primary schools, the elementary schools.

Marilyn: Oh, I see.

McWilliams: Yes, they did. They carried that on.

Marilyn: But then it was the secondary schools that the church...

McWilliams: The secondary schools - the church did it. but the church didn't do it, the WMS did it. The church did not do it. The church ran back and forth from Toronto to Ottawa on the trains telling the people in Ottawa that it was their business, their responsibility to provide the secondary education...the church wasn't going to do it. And they did it all through the war and never got anywhere, just fooling around. They all loved to fight and they carried it on. A kind of a vendetta, but the women, I take off my hat... they weren't engaged in any of that. No, there were interested in getting down to earth business. And this they did. They worked too.

Marilyn: Did you feel that the Japanese children were held back very long in their schooling? Did they lose maybe one or two years because of this setback?

McWilliams: A lot of them, their education was finished. A lot who were in secondary schools just went out to work, you know, and their education was finished. They never made the effort to rise above it. The opportunity was there but they weren't equal to it.

Marilyn: What about the elementary children?

McWilliams: Well, they did better. They did better. In Tashme they had the time of their lives. They thought that was one of the most wonderful places on the face of the earth. All gathered together in that community - the only life they knew, and it was wholesome in that sense, it was good.

Marilyn: When did the camp close and where did the people go when it closed? Did it close all of a sudden and they were dispersed, or did people just gradually move out of it?

McWilliams: Well you know if...there were things that the church could have been better doing, and there were things that the church could have done far better than any political group or just go down and pick up a number of business men in Vancouver, an automobile company - what the dickens was the name, their men were all given jobs on the Security Commission and they had no capacity for handling men, for living with men, for understanding them, you know. But they had authority. Of course, hindsight is so often better than foresight. If we had gone as a church to the B. C. Security Commission or to the government in Ottawa and said, "we'll take the responsibility for storing the chattels of the Japanese people, we'll put them in empty buildings, and we'll put a watchman on to take care of them, we'll insure them and so on," it would have avoided an awful lot of this waste of chattels. They sold the

property you see, chattels and all, and if we had said to them "We will take over the movement of the people to placement centres in Ontario and to farms in Ontario or to work that's available in Ontario," we could have done that thing so much better than the B. C. Security Commission did. They moved the people like the army. You can't move women and children that way and you can't move families that way. They're afraid of it, they're scared. It's almost inhuman, you see. The people, they resisted in every way possible. They don't respond, they just move like dead ducks or something. That was the way they moved them. It isn't the way to treat people you know, you can't do that. Well a lot of the people went to Japan, a lot of them went to Japan. A lot of them took their own children there. I suppose that by and large the majority of those of the Issei staying here in Canada, stayed for the sake of their children. They said Japan is no country to take these children. These children were born here, this is their country - for their sakes we'll stay here. And that is a genuine parental, not only a responsibility, but a responsible response. They don't need to be ashamed of that. They did it. And most of them that I know did that. Then when the ones got back to Japan they wished they hadn't gone to Japan, and they couldn't come back. But their children could and the children came back, and later got them back on the children's shoulders. So that the thing has kind of evened out again. But the ones who went to Ontario went down to whatever kind of jobs they could get. Beets, well, beet fields in Ontario, any kind of a job they could get was that temporary at least to make a living and they gradually worked into situations. I suppose there are people from the Japanese in Toronto today who are poor, but by and large the people are better off in Toronto. Toronto is the mecca of the Japanese today.

Marilyn: Yes, is that right?

McWilliams: Yes, there are more Japanese in Toronto than there are in all the rest of Canada.

Marilyn: Oh, I didn't realize that.

McWilliams: And they, most of them, have good jobs. A lot of them are well-trained doctors, lawyers, dentists. Well-trained men and women.

Marilyn: Because there was at one stage during the war where Toronto refused to let any of them come in to find jobs. So this was after the war that gradually they came in?

McWilliams: Gradually you see, it gradually softened. There is a place here at that time calendar-wise, where another problem came in and where we, on the advice of Bob McMaster, the lawyer...

Marilyn: Yes, it was actually Bob McMaster who gave me your name.

McWilliams: Oh, he did eh? Well Bob McMaster, we went to him - I remember going, and he used to come in often and he helped us

in different ways that he could. And he said that at one point we get people, as many people as we could in the Christian churches to write the government in Ottawa. It was Mackenzie King then, protesting the compulsory shipping to Japan of people who had never seen the Japanese soil - who didn't belong there, who belonged here. And Bob McMaster said there's no use of sending these appeals out to the men, they'll throw them in the wastepaper basket, we'll never get to first base. Send them to the women who are members of the Women's Missionary Society, and we did it. In the Anglican church they sent out nearly 2,000, nearly 3,000. We got the Year Books of the two churches and we went to work and we wrote a letter and signed them, his name was on it, our names were on it, and we told them these are the facts and we want you to write, we appeal to you to write. And the letters poured in to Ottawa from the women. They're the ones that really saved this situation and saved hundreds of families from getting compulsorily sent to Japan. I think in fact, that was the turning point really. It was the thing that beat the government - beat their policy. And they were compelled then to allow the Japanese to go east in Canada.

Marilyn: Well this would be in 1944-45?

McWilliams: '45. I think it would be early in '45. Yes. About that time.

Marilyn: How would you evaluate the whole role of the church during this crisis?

McWilliams: Well, we had people in the church who, when they were with the B. C. Security Commission were B. C. Security Commission people and the same people when they were with Japanese, they were Japanese. But the Japanese knew that and that didn't go far with them. They were cute. But we had other people there who were loyal to the Japanese. Our experience in Japan had taught us that there's only one way that you can work with people as a missionary, that is you've got to be identified with them. You've got to sit where they sit, you've got to share their problems. If you don't, you might just as well go out of business, it won't take. And I think from that standpoint, that sense of comradeship, of belonging, colour or skins didn't quite match perhaps, but the colour of our hearts did, and that thing, I tell you, it lights fires that don't go out and they burn still in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Fraser Valley. They've never gone out - they won't. And that thing has created the church down here in this lower Fraser Valley too since, I think.

Marilyn: Do you feel that, now you said earlier back that there were a lot of people within the church, Christians, who were just as bad as everybody else - looting?

McWilliams: No difference, no dam difference. I think on Sundays they went to worship on Sundays, and then they went out and they were the same as the other people.

Marilyn: Do you feel then that there really was quite a split maybe within the United Church between the leaders, those who were concerned about the Japanese problem, and those who just paid lip service to it and just went to the pew on Sunday morning?

McWilliams: Well I think they put up with us - the people did. And probably felt that we were right. I think that that was true, but then numerically they had us licked. They outvoted us you know, if we came to an issue. I think that the people in the centre, we had some great men you know. We had some good men in our churches and then the Christian church is always a place you can go to as a rule,, you can go to and you can tell it its own sins, and they just simply can't run away. You can pretty well in many situations where we should be standing, and if we fail there we're out of business, no matter what we think and they'll listen to you. The Christian leaders will as a rule. I admire them for that, you know. That's a very good thing, it's a wonderful thing.

Mrs. McWilliams: There a great many members in the church who are that kind too.

McWilliams: Yes, I think there are, particularly as Bob McMaster said, among the women, the mature women in the church.

Marilyn: Do you think maybe it took time for the enormous crisis to sort of sink in to the average person. Perhaps the average person didn't know any Japanese and didn't have any contact with them and that maybe it took several years for it to finally sink in the enormous thing that had happened to these people, and that it took until 1945 to sort of get them mobilized so that in asking the womrn to write the government, for instance, it took that long to be concerned enough that they would write a letter.

McWilliams: What settled British Columbia really was the fact that so many Japanese moved Esst.

Marilyn: And that was what you think aroused the lay people that some more justice had to occur?

McWilliams: Well they felt that it was distributing this problem across the country, that is that is the word they would use, this problem, you see. Yes. The Japanese were partly to blame for that too, you know. It takes two to make a quarrel, you know. The Japanese aren't like the Chinese. You can go out and give the Chinamen the old kick in the seat of the pants, and he'd turn around and just slug you one in the face.

Mrs. McWilliams: They're too polite to do that.

McWilliams: Yes, but they hate you. I think the Chinese are probably the same but they're more skilful, they've been in business longer.

Mrs. McWilliams: The principal trouble with the Japanese people is that they were under the Canadian people and they had to say yes, when they didn't feel like yes.

Marilyn: So they weren't allowed to express their real feelings to the Canadian people.

McWilliams: That was really true. Particularly in places like Steveston,



McWilliams: They were, they always said yes in community projects, and in appeals or anything of that kind, it was always yes. They presented no ideas of their own or anything. They were just there and supported them there.

Marilyn: Did you feel that the church's view changed after the war? Now you said something that B. C.'s view changed once the people started moving East and the problem was distributed throughout the country? Do you feel that the church too, their ideas changed after the war ended and the problem continued, that they suddenly realized that there had to be justice and that perhaps they needed to work a little bit harder at it? I got the feeling in reading Tad Mitsui's thesis that the church was rather slow getting mobilized too, and that as time went on they built up momentum and they got more and more people following them and they were able to raise the general public in demanding justice for the jobs, and asking for more justice in selling their property and stopping the deportation of a large number of them?

Mrs. McWilliams: I think that's right.

McWilliams: I think that it really did happen. It did happen. I think that the government took over the policy in opening up the doors for naturalization. They did and left the Japanese free to go and live the same as any others wherever they wanted to live. It was a thing that our people accepted. I don't believe they would have chosen it, not in British Columbia. I think Christians and non-Christians, they weren't happy about it, but once it was settled they accepted it because the majority of people had gone east, you see. And that means the majority of the people who stayed in Canada had gone east. And then another thing you know, the people in our Church, even to the Japanese Church, the question, they didn't know the Japanese people in the church. Our church leaders didn't know them, they just knew them in a kind of official way of greeting each other in an official way. If the church is, that big church in Vancouver, is a self-supporting church but our Presbytery here knew nothing about how much nationalism there was in the church or anything of the kind. If it's self-supporting and they do that, that's all we want of the church and they were satisfied with that. Now they venture into the thing in a more intricate way, more in depth. The thing is, we belonged together and we interact more; our operations affect each other. Yes. And we're given more freedom, it's amazing the freedom they've given the Japanese. They see the Japanese have a right to a church of their own. They're not the only minority groups that ask for that privilege, that expect it, and they enjoy it and are happy over it. I don't know how many generations it will take before the Japanese lose their identity but I feel, I hope that some of the things about them will persist. They'll have contributions to make into the future that we'll never know.

Marilyn: What do you feel about the long range results of the dispersion of the Japanese? Do you think it was the best for the

Canadian society as a whole, or do you think it would have been better if they'd been allowed to come back here to the coast?

McWilliams: Oh no, I think that thing, it was a kind of a bitter thing and not a nice thing, but I do think that under the circumstances there was hardly any other way, and that's why I said if our church, and I blame myself too, we'd never had an experience of this kind, and if we had taken - we were a great church, and if our leaders had been organized and gone to work on it, we could have taken these people East ourselves. The government would have paid for it, of course, but we could have moved them, and with us they would have gone willingly; they would have gone, they would have felt that we were their friends. But they didn't feel that the people who took them were their friends.

Marilyn: So in other words you feel the end result was fine, it was the way it was handled, that was bad.

McWilliams: So often that's the case though. The way that a thing is done isn't right but the thing that's done is justifiable.

Marilyn: In the end/

McWilliams: And this was. And you talk with the Japanese today, talk with the ones in Toronto, and I don't think you could get any other answer from them that that was a good thing. Both old and young, I've never heard anything else.

Marilyn: This is slightly turning the conversation. Do you think that there is a basic difference between the Japanese race and the Anglo-Saxon race? Or in their thoughts or in their behaviour or is it purely a difference of tradition and upbringing?

McWilliams: I don't know. Is there a difference in fact between the Russians, we'll say and ourselves. Is that basic something that's hard to grasp in the Russian nature, is it that, that makes them accept that oppressive type of government, you see? Is it that? What is it? They've shown us that they're just as Christian, probably more so. Look at Tolstoy and look at the author of Dr. Zivago. You see you take these men, terrific men, who suffered deeply from these things and yet are we the same as they were? We would never put up with some of those things. We might become Facists but we'd never accept that as they have through the years. Now, the Japanese do that back there. I don't know how under the sun you could manage a country in a small area like Japan, so many people where you haven't got quite a lot of authority. If you had every man out building his own little empire I tell you the thing would blow into the sea.

Marilyn: I'm just wondering if you have found, for instance, you say in Japan the people do accept authority and obviously the first generation Japanese here wanted authority, and they would say yes everything and they didn't come forth with ideas of their own. Now what about the young Japanese Canadians today that are perhaps third generation, second or third generation Canadian? Do you notice any difference between them and the Anglo-Saxon Canadian?

McWilliams: I think so.

Marilyn: Would it depend on perhaps the family, do you think?

Mrs. McWilliams: Yes, how well they know, how well they know the Japanese.

McWilliams: I think that some of them, it's a pretty hard thing to define. I remember Dr. Bell, he was a Classics Master in College. When we went to Japan he said "McWilliams I don't believe that you will ever be able to get behind that exterior of the Japanese people. They don't open up, you'll never get to know them". And I wasn't sure that he was wrong. And I wouldn't say anything because I didn't know. But you know we found out when we got to Japan that they don't understand each other.

Marilyn: I ran across something along that line in a book I was reading about the Christian Church in Japan, and the author said something to the effect that the Japanese never wears his heart on his sleeve.

McWilliams: He's an observer. The Japanese is superlatively an observer. He'll look at anything and he turns around and goes away and he has his own judgement, but he never gets involved really. he's on the surface. He examines it, he never gets into the centre of it - he's not an existentialist absolutely.

McWilliams: Now, there aren't very many existentialists in Canada.

Marilyn: No, I was going to say among any people.

Mrs. McWilliams: Many people don't understand.

McWilliams: I don't know. When it comes to intermarriage it kind of scares me a little you know. I've never got over it. I've married a lot of Anglo-Saxons to Nisei and some of them are very good. Mark you, traditions, customs, they're not just built in things, they're things that are structural. They seem to get into people's lives and yet Japanese people come to our house. Do you know I've many a time with Japanese people, I've looked into the mirror and saw myself, I didn't know that I wasn't a Japanese. I've looked in the mirror and seen that I had a white skin and I was sorry.

Mrs. McWilliams: And I'm the same.

McWilliams: You identify with people. You're their friend in a sense, not that you defend the things that are wrong about them. If you see something that's wrong you say so. That is if you want, if there's reason for it you should. I used to say in my sermons in Tashme, I knew there was criticism and there was ground for it, and being human it couldn't be otherwise. But I said, I understand and it's in me too, I'm a critic too. But I said, "Before we become absolute in our criticism, let us stop and ask ourselves, not our neighbour, but ourselves, and speak to ourselves, and say, now if you were on the outside as the whites are today, and the whites were on the inside here of this camp, would you treat them like they are treating you?" I said,

"before we judge, let's be honest. Let's not talk about Christianity or Buddhism or any of that stuff until we answer that question". And do you know they always listened to me. And Katherine Greenbank used to say, "Mr. Mac, I don't know how you get away with that kind of stuff". But you know, I didn't have to get away with it. They just said, "how true that is", "you should be saying that". The Japanese are like that. Our people, you see the Japanese of course in relation to the Koreans, they felt that they were a step higher up you see on the rung of the ladder. They did. They felt that the Koreans were more inferior, they did feel that. Our people feel that toward the Japanese. It's an awful thing you know. I remember missionaries saying to me in Japan, "I never could get over my feeling that they're not as good as we are".

Mrs. McWilliams: That's only a few say that.

McWilliams: Well, Bessie dear, but that few were honest enough to say it, to say the truth. I could name them to you and you know I always believed when I went to Japan I felt that way too. But I also believed, and I believe it now, that if I feel that way toward a man of another race, I don't care - I don't know the Chinese, the Arabs, I don't know the Israeli, and if I feel that toward any of them I'm not a Christian, I may just as well say so and settle that matter right now, and it isn't something to discuss, it's something we do or don't do, and so this is as I found it a long time ago and it's nice to live in a world where the atmosphere is so free. And then that isn't touching your problem. Your problem is, is there a basic difference? I feel that there is a suspicion, or a suggestion of it anyway there, and I don't know that they could name it - I don't think they can, I couldn't. But I have found that at the centre, if they trust you, they tell you the intimate things about their lives and they won't do it with each other in Japan, they won't tell their troubles to a policeman. Well, I wouldn't do it here sometimes.