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## Chapter 1

# The End

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Our dark cloud of a half century dissipated  
The fairest day  
In Japanese-Canadian history  
Dawns.  
Our joy is unsurpassable.

— Tanka by Takeo Ujo Nakano to commemorate the  
Japanese Canadian redress settlement, September  
22, 1988. Translation by Leatrice Nakano Willson

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**I**N MID-SEPTEMBER 1988 I received a long-awaited phone call after weeks of feeling as though I'd been suspended from the ceiling by fish hooks. Even then I wasn't quite ready for what Art Miki said, in his calm, organized manner. "Maryka? Come to Ottawa for September twenty-second. It's still top secret, so don't breathe a word of this, but our deal has got the prime minister's go ahead."

I sat down on a kitchen chair, weak-kneed from a heady mixture of relief and excitement. Finally, Brian Mulroney had ratified an agreement that the National Association of Japanese Canadians had been pursuing for over four years.

We had been waiting for the green light from the prime minister since August 27, when the NAJC negotiators had wound up a successful hush-hush meeting at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Montreal. Three days earlier seven of us had been ushered into the hotel's fancy *Chambre de Conseil*: Art Miki, the NAJC's president and a Winnipeg school principal; Audrey Kobayashi, a Montreal professor; Cassandra Kobayashi, a Vancouver lawyer; Roy Miki, Art's brother and a Vancouver professor; Roger Obata, a retired businessman from Toronto; and myself, a Toronto lawyer. Don Rosenbloom, an NAJC legal advisor, was also with us.

For years, the NAJC's representatives had been running into roadblock after roadblock in our attempts to win redress for the wartime wrongs committed by the Canadian government against Japanese Canadians. In recent months we'd been negotiating with Gerry Weiner, the Minister of State for Multiculturalism and Citizenship – the latest in a long series of government representatives. But the talks had become stalled. On August 10, 1988, help came from an unlikely source. American President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, compensating Japanese Americans for their wartime loss of freedom. The U.S. action clearly placed more pressure on the Mulroney administration to settle one of its worst nagging headaches.

Unlike other politicians we'd dealt with, Weiner had been prepared to listen. Fiftyish, tall, and long-faced, Weiner brought a somewhat rumpled-looking presence to our meetings. He had invariably been sympathetic and genial in our committee's dealings with him. His stern features could change dramatically whenever the opportunity for a joke came up. A former small-town pharmacist turned mayor, and a self-proclaimed habitué of Montreal's St. Urbain Street, Weiner seemed a natural politician, full of Yiddish humour and charm. Encouraged by Mulroney to strike a deal with the NAJC, he had acted the part of fence-mender, anxious to keep all sides talking.

On August 24, in the Ritz-Carlton's *Chambre de Conseil*, we met the other governmental staffers: Rick Clippendale, adviser to the minister; Dennison Moore, Weiner's Chief of Staff; Anne Scotton, a Multiculturalism officer; and Alain Bisson, a lawyer from the Department of Justice. Surprisingly, Weiner also introduced us to a more senior cabinet colleague: Lucien Bouchard, the Secretary of State and one of Mulroney's closest friends – a clear sign that finally the government was taking our talks seriously. Bouchard had entered federal politics after a thirty-year association with Mulroney, and almost immediately he had become the prime minister's Quebec lieutenant. In May 1990 – by then the environment minister – he would desert the prime minister over the proposed Meech Lake accord, quitting the cabinet and by all reports leaving a devastated Mulroney.

But that was in the future. At the beginning of our final negotiation sessions in August 1988, Weiner leaned over and whispered – loud enough for all of us to hear – that Bouchard was one of the very few in Parliament who could pick up the phone and call Mulroney and say, "Brian, this is Lucien," and immediately get to talk to the P.M. Bouchard moved quickly to the business at hand. He said he had been given the authority to speak for the prime minister and that over the next few days we'd be having important discussions that could settle our claim for compensation once and for all. We perked up our ears and anxiously awaited the minister's pronouncement. For the first time in the long years of determined pressure it felt like we were on the verge of reaching an accord.

But there was still serious negotiating to do. Bouchard informed us that the NAJC's demand for individual compensation was "too high." He said the government wanted a "Canadian solution," which meant providing "a lower amount to individuals, but an immediate payout." This was an important concession: previous talks had stalled over the government's opposition to individual compensation. When we asked Bouchard what amount he had in mind, he said

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\$15,000 a survivor, with all monies to be dispensed within two years from the date of signing. Amazingly, the government had moved from a previous “high” offer of a \$12 million total payout to an offer that would in the end amount to some \$400 million.

After this pronouncement, Bouchard kept his cards close to his chest – perhaps a result of his background as a diplomat. He said little else and soon withdrew, promising we could get in touch with him at any time during the negotiations if we needed to. The rest of us got down to work, carefully going over the NAJC’s redress proposal point by point – stopping now and then to wolf down enormous corned beef sandwiches that Gerry Weiner ordered in from his favourite Montreal deli. We kept telling Weiner that if he kept plying us with such good food, we would never end the meetings. Three days later, after some seventeen hours of negotiations, we had hashed out a deal.

Among other things the settlement contained the following provisions: a government acknowledgement of the injustice done to Japanese Canadians during the Second World War; a \$21,000 payment to each survivor; \$12 million to the Japanese Canadian community, to be administered by the NAJC, for educational, social, and cultural activities and programs; and \$24 million for a jointly funded Canadian Race Relations Foundation to foster racial harmony and help fight racism. We hoped that the terms of our settlement would help to ensure that other groups in Canada would not have to relive our history.

When the draft agreement was signed on August 27, Weiner warned us not to get our hopes up too high, because the “whole thing could be called off.” There was a possibility that the deal might not go through. As if taking their cue from the minister, the other government negotiators at the table also drummed into us the warning that a leak from either their camp or ours could endanger the whole settlement. The bureaucrats wanted to make sure that as few government employees as possible were informed of the agreement. It was common knowledge that there was opposition to the idea of redress, particularly among war veterans. Weiner warned us that the government was concerned “about a backlash.”

From our side, we knew that given our community’s close-knit nature and the joy that news of the deal would bring, our negotiating team would simply have to keep its collective mouth shut. Otherwise the secret would spread along the country’s phone lines in a matter of a few hours – even if whispered, of course, in the strictest of confidence. During the following weeks our anxieties only increased as no word of the agreement came through. Instead the press seemed content with its endless speculation on when the prime minister would call the fall 1988 election. In the background, the clock was ticking loudly; this session of Parliament was almost over. Already, time constraints had eliminated the possibility of a

Japanese Canadian redress bill. New legislation required three readings in the House of Commons as well as passage through the Senate, so it seemed the democratic trimmings were becoming annoyingly time-consuming.

Life was not unfolding as it should. Ideally, from my perspective, ratification of our settlement would have included an all-party resolution acknowledging government wrongdoing – followed by a Japanese Canadian redress act that would stand as the law of the land. It may be my legalistic background, but I believe that laws can safeguard us from our politicians. As the days passed by, the options seemed to narrow. The government officials explained that once an election was called, all the M.P.s would head home to begin campaigning, and that life on the hill would grind to a halt. We would have to be satisfied with a cabinet decision, spelled out as an Order-in-Council. In the middle of September a government official confirmed that there would be no all-party resolution because Mulroney didn’t want to run the risk of having to renegotiate the agreement with the other parties. Later we were also told that he had been afraid of the opposition he would face within his own party – indeed, within his cabinet.

Meanwhile, for me the elusive prime minister began to take on mythical proportions. He would appear in my dreams, one time sitting alone in the corner booth of a neighbourhood Hungarian greasy spoon. He was finishing a plate of blintzes and sour cream. Another time he was talking at night in a telephone booth under my second-floor window. Invariably he’d be dressed to kill, no five o’clock shadow, all hairs in place. He was always surrounded by a mob of giants. I would try to fight my way through his cortege to get to the prime minister’s table or catch him before he hung up the phone, only to wake up breathless just as he slipped into a waiting limousine.

In my waking hours I mentally rehearsed the alternate pleas that I would have made if only I could talk to him: for the Irishman, a heart-rending story; for the lawyer, a glint of steel perhaps. I pondered the logistical problem that even if I did catch up, given our height difference (I’m five feet tall) I would have had to whisper my message into his chest and not in his ear. I wouldn’t have a box to stand on like they do in the Hollywood movies. In my mind I began planning agit prop theatre that involved trailing after Mulroney during the fall election campaign. I envisaged a saffron-robed monk carrying only a bedroll and ringing a small Buddhist gong, following the prime minister’s caravan across the country. The smell of the burning incense would linger, coating the clothes of the prime minister’s entourage and unforgettably stinging their nostrils. The monk would be accompanied by three Japanese Canadian women representing our different generations in this country: an *issei* (first generation), a *nisei* (second generation), and a *sansei* (third generation). All dressed in black, the women would sit at the back of Mul-

ronery's press conferences casting spells and muttering curses like Macbeth's witches. Or, like "Shy Monkey," a mythical Japanese heroine who had devised ingenious methods of eradicating her rivals, the crones would stick thin-skinned bamboo toothpicks into their gums and from blackened mouths they would invoke plagues upon the prime minister.

Needless to say, these scenarios remained figments of my imagination. By the second half of September our group had an inkling that something was in the wind. The Prime Minister's Office had been floating trial balloons in the media to gauge both the level of support and the amount of flack he would receive should he publicly ratify the agreement. On September 20 and 21, NAJC President Art Miki started getting phone calls from reporters about a possible settlement. Miki was walking on eggs. At first he feared a leak from our side, but he was reassured to learn that the callers had got the information from the PMO itself. Across the country the NAJC negotiators all breathed a collective sigh of relief. We had heard that this was the way Mulroney operated. His office routinely sent out feelers to test the waters, and if things looked safe he would proceed. Nonetheless, Miki buttoned his lips and revealed only that the NAJC was having continuing discussions with the government and that things were looking up.

A few days later we were again surprised when the press published new reports of a settlement. The prime minister had made his move. Having been reassured that the war veterans organizations would not openly oppose the redress agreement and that minority organizations in Canada would applaud him, Mulroney had apparently decided to announce this significant civil rights agreement on the eve of calling his second election.

Flying to Ottawa on September 21 with the other Toronto committee member, Roger Obata, I felt immensely relieved. Finally I could rid myself of this secret that like a tourniquet had been slowly tightening around my chest.

The whole experience of officially prescribed secrecy had made me feel like Mosaku, the apprentice woodcutter in an old Japanese fable about Yuki-Onna, the snow woman. According to the legend, on a winter's evening an old master woodcutter and his apprentice, Mosaku, sought refuge from a blizzard in a tiny, unheated hut. As they slept, a beautiful white snow queen spirit entered the cabin and blew her cold breath on the old master's body, turning it to ice. As the snow queen was stooping over Mosaku's face, about to do the same to him, she was struck by his youthful beauty and decided to let him live. When Mosaku awoke she warned him that if he ever told anyone about what he had seen, she would return to kill him.

A year later Mosaku chanced to meet a beautiful pale-skinned girl with the voice of a songbird. She was named O-Yuki (snow). Recently orphaned, O-Yuki was travelling alone on the road to Yedo to seek assistance from some of her rela-

tives. The young woodcutter, immediately entranced, persuaded the girl to delay her journey and rest a while with his family. Of course the young couple fell deeply in love. They married, prospered, and had numerous beautiful children. But even with the passage of many years, the woodcutter's wife, to the amazement of the other villagers, remained as young and fresh looking as the day she had first come to the hamlet.

One night, the sight of O-Yuki sitting peacefully sewing by the light of a paper lantern reminded Mosaku of that winter's evening long before when he had met another woman as beautiful and fair. He carelessly told O-Yuki the story. As soon as the fateful secret had been recounted, O-Yuki screamed out that she was the snow queen spirit and that only for the love of her children would she again spare the tattletale's life. O-Yuki's voice became like the crying of the wind, and she melted into a bright white mist that spiralled up the smoke-hole of the cottage, gone forever. For his indiscretion Mosaku was never again to know the comfort or company of her love.

Our committee's secret, with the heavy weight of the Canadian government behind it, seemed just as precious as Mosaku's, and the whole thing had made me anxious. Spontaneously I had nonetheless confided the news of our settlement to my husband. Then I chanced to ask Roger Obata how his wife Mary had reacted to our August agreement. To my surprise, Roger, a seventy-five-year-old nisei, a Canadian war veteran, and a successful engineer-businessman, said he had not told his wife about the deal, because of the oath of secrecy. I immediately felt guilty and began to wonder what Mosaku-like punishment was in store for me. Later I discovered that I wasn't alone: all of the other sansei or third generation members of the negotiating team had also confided this secret to their spouses, despite the security warnings.

Roger's taciturnity was surely another manifestation of nisei self-control and an indication of our generational differences. It was as though with each decade spent away from that chain of volcanic islands in the Pacific Ocean we were losing our ancestors' iron-like Japanese core. Irritatingly, Roger is also astonishingly energetic. After our NAJC Council meetings, which would often wind up in the early morning hours, Roger and the other nisei men, many over sixty, would head out to an all-night Chinese restaurant for a bowl of *soba* – buckwheat noodles in chicken broth. Coming back in time to catch a few hours of sleep before the sessions reconvened in the morning, their stamina easily surpassed the younger sansei.

Undoubtedly that strengthened the nisei's cultural prejudices against the sansei, whom they regarded to be as feckless as their children. Their agism was something fierce, as equally a virulent strain as their sexism. The NAJC Council, ninety per cent male with an average age in the early sixties, mirrored our community's traditionalism. Roger used to say that he

and Harold Hirose, a charming, respected seventy-six-year-old nisei, had both remained on as NAJC vice-president and treasurer respectively because Sisco, the seventy-seven-year-old mother of President Art Miki, had told them that the “kids,” namely her fifty-five-year-old son Art – now a grandfather himself – “needed their guidance.” Occasionally, when irritated by this seemingly impenetrable wall of tradition, I would let slip, “Even the Chinese Canadian National Council, for God’s sake, has had a woman president who was in her thirties.” Undoubtedly there would have been gasps as grey heads fainted dead away at even the thought of such a development.

When we got to Ottawa on September 21, Roger Obata and I found ourselves put up at a charming downtown bed and breakfast house. We soon discovered that the other members of the NAJC team were scattered around the city in similarly out of the way places. The Secretary of State staff said these arrangements were necessary because all the hotel rooms in Ottawa were solidly booked and they couldn’t manage to get us all rooms together. We accepted this explanation but soon came up with a theory of our own: the department wanted to maintain absolute control over this important media event. The bureaucrats were afraid that if the Ottawa press saw us all troop into the Chateau Laurier, the cat would have been let out of the bag. They reasoned that if we were separately tucked away in various spots that news hounds were unlikely to sniff out, a properly orchestrated story would only break out when the prime minister wanted it to: that is, when he began his speech the next day at eleven o’clock in the House of Commons.

After breakfast on September 22, Roger and I headed off across the river to Hull for a rushed morning meeting with the Secretary of State staff, followed by a second briefing in Gerry Weiner’s office back on Parliament Hill. Then uniformed guards led the NAJC negotiators through the back corridors of the Parliament building to the Visitors Gallery of the House of Commons. As we filed into seats high above the opposition benches, Prime Minister Mulroney briefly glanced up at us – looking every bit as good as he had in my dreams. I saw that seniors from the Ottawa Japanese Canadian community were seated on the other side of the House. Mulroney’s press aides had let slip that they wanted lots of grey-haired Japanese Canadians present for the “photo opportunities.”

Mulroney began his prepared speech: “Nearly half a century ago, in the crisis of wartime, the Government of Canada wrongfully incarcerated, seized the property, and disenfranchised thousands of citizens of Japanese ancestry. We cannot change the past. But we must, as a nation, have the courage to face up to these historical facts.” Mulroney said that “words and laws” weren’t enough and that his colleague Gerry Weiner would soon be announcing the full details of the settlement. He added, “No amount of money can right the wrong, undo the harm, and heal the wounds. But it is symbolic of our

determination to address this issue, not only in the moral sense, but also in a tangible way.” He paused and looked up at us again, as he acknowledged the years of determined pressure that had brought the government to the settlement table. Tears were brimming in my eyes as I proudly witnessed the most gratifying event in our community’s history.

The irony in the situation escaped me at the time. Later we found out that when the prime minister made his announcement only four members of the government – Mulroney himself, Weiner, Bouchard, and Donald Mazankowski – knew the exact terms of the agreement. Even with the pivotal retirement in July 1988 of Veteran Affairs minister George Hees, a strong opponent of redress, it seems that Mulroney, knowing the opposition that he would face in cabinet, had made the decision virtually alone.

Although the precedent established by the settlement strengthened the democratic rights of all Canadians, the manner in which it was arrived at was disturbing. The Japanese Canadian community had lost its democratic rights in the 1940s through the cloak and dagger machinations of the Mackenzie King government. Now an “enlightened monarch,” acting autocratically without the full knowledge of Parliament, had corrected those wrongs. In both instances – the 1942 decision to intern the “enemy aliens” and the 1988 gesture to compensate the surviving victims – Canada, marionette-like, had followed the American lead. Less than two weeks after President Reagan had signed the Civil Rights Act, authorizing a \$1.25 billion payment to American Japanese, the NAJC’s negotiators were hammering out the agreement in Montreal.

After his speech Mulroney sat down to thunderous applause and a standing ovation. Ed Broadbent, leader of the New Democratic Party, seemed close to tears as he walked across the floor to congratulate the prime minister on the government’s actions. Later Broadbent spoke of his party’s historical support for the Japanese Canadian community. Broadbent’s first wife, a Japanese Canadian, had spent the war years at the same relocation camp as my own family. Sergio Marchi, the Liberal Party’s multiculturalism critic, also congratulated the prime minister, Art Miki, and the NAJC for closing “the chapter of what was a very sad and sensitive memory in our history.” Marchi was standing in for Liberal leader John Turner, who was already on the campaign trail in British Columbia. Although Marchi promised that Turner would make a statement of support later in the day, as far as I know Turner never did. This was not so surprising: the Liberal leader had always been, at best, lukewarm in his support for the NAJC redress package.

The parliamentary process was all over in what seemed like a matter of minutes. While most of the opposition members stood to applaud, I noticed pockets of Tories still rooted in their seats, arms folded firmly across their chests: a tangible sign of their firm opposition to redress. A few days after

the announcement I read the angry criticism by one Tory backbencher, Ron Stewart of Barrie, Ontario, as reported in *The Toronto Star*. Stewart said that the agreement was “just a windfall profit” for the Japanese Canadians. “I can’t be very sympathetic. I don’t know what was going through the Prime Minister’s mind.” About a dozen Conservative M.P.s – many of them war veterans – were reported to have “serious reservations about the compensation package.”<sup>1</sup>

The attitudes of these men reminded me of the historic “Conference on Japanese Problems” held in Ottawa on January 8–9, 1942 and chaired by the B.C. M.P. Ian Mackenzie, an acknowledged racist and the federal Minister of Pensions. Soon afterwards, on February 24, 1942, the B.C. politicians were successful in convincing cabinet to uproot the entire Japanese Canadian community. According to Escott Reid, a special assistant in the Department of External Affairs at the time, “They spoke of the Japanese Canadians in the way that the Nazis would have spoken about Jewish Germans. When they spoke, I felt in that committee room the physical presence of evil.” The comment was echoed by General Maurice Pope, who said, “I came away from that meeting feeling dirty all over.”<sup>2</sup> Sitting in the House of Commons, forty-six years later, I wondered if opinions in the Tory caucus had changed much since the days of Ian Mackenzie. Privately I thanked Brian Mulroney for “honouring his word” to us.

Seconds after the speeches were over, the House moved onto other business. I was surprised. I don’t know what I expected, but I had thought that after we had spent years of our lives to get those premium seats in the House of Commons, somehow the victorious moment would have lasted more than a few minutes and taken up more than several lines on the government’s order paper. It was all so cut and dried. I found myself wanting more than speeches: perhaps a public bloodletting. Minimally Ian Mackenzie brought back and made to eat his tartan; for William Lyon Mackenzie King, a steady diet of tap water and stacks of the dry War Measures Act Order-in-Council papers.

As if reading my mind, guards quickly ushered us out and government aides herded us through a maze of drafty, cold marble corridors into the stately Confederation Room, which was filled with dozens of photographers and reporters. At the front of the room, cordoned off from the press, was a long table covered with piles of gold, red, and blue state documents, some in English and some in French. Those of us on the negotiating team, along with Lucien Bouchard and Gerry Weiner, were led to seats directly behind where Art Miki and the prime minister were to sit, all of us facing the hot floodlit cameras. Minutes later there was a round of applause

when the two men entered the room and shook hands. As the cameras clicked and rolled Mulroney and Miki signed the official documents that meant so much in so many ways to our Japanese Canadian community. Incredibly, with a simple stroke of the pen, the prime minister had imperiously returned honour and dignity to an entire community.

Afterwards Mulroney got up and came and shook hands with each one of us – I finally got to meet the man in my dreams, face to face, to see him at close range. I’d have something to tell my mother, who was always asking me, “What’s he like?” Mostly I remember noticing his pale, beautiful, long curly eyelashes. He had nothing in particular to say except, “Congratulations on a job well done.” Given the intensity of the moment, I’m not sure how coherent any of us would have been if he had tried to engage us in more than small talk.

Then, as quickly as he had come, he left. The camera lights went off, the air chilled instantly, and the room slowly cleared as the reporters gathered up their bags and equipment – some of them would be going to cover the press conference on the settlement that was scheduled to start soon just across the street. Our own group also left the Parliament buildings, crossed Wellington Street, and made its way to the National Press Building. A seated guard half-heartedly tried to keep us out by telling us that only members of the Press Gallery were being allowed in. But there was no way that, having come so far, we were going to miss this next event. We filed in and grabbed the few empty chairs left near the back of the crowded room in time to hear Gerry Weiner, seated at a table at the front, read out the terms of the agreement. Then Weiner and Art Miki responded to questions from the reporters.

The mood was friendly. Still, the previous four years had been a trial by ordeal for Art Miki, who had earned his stripes after years of being our public spokesman. His square face with the childhood scar jaggedly running across the left cheek and his school principal’s penchant for lengthy, earnest speeches may not have been the first choice of a movie casting director. He lacked the flamboyance of scientist-journalist David Suzuki or the eloquence of the author of *Obasan*, Joy Kogawa, but in so many ways he exemplified us, the everyday Japanese Canadian: honest, stubborn, a consensus builder, a devoted family person, a community supporter. Art’s sheer doggedness had maintained us through those years and the community will be forever in his debt. Although at times we may have wished for a more charismatic public persona, perhaps in the end it was his straightforward nature that helped make the media and the Canadian people sympathetic.

Looking down on the country’s press, who were sandwiched between Miki, Weiner, and the spectator gallery, I was struck by their youth and energy. Drawn to the hot lights, plugged into thick electric sockets, they were gathered together in a shimmering swarm. This group of reporters, the country’s fifth estate, seemed almost oblivious to the power

1 *The Toronto Star*, September 24, 1988, p.A3.

2 Escott Reid, “The Conscience of the Diplomat,” *Queen’s Quarterly*, quoted in Ann Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1981), p.33. Pope is also quoted in Sunahara, p.33.

they wielded. Daily it was their words and images that shaped our sense of the world. Over the years, they had impressed me with their profound sense of justice – and also with their ignorance of the issue, and their almost adolescent laziness. They knew nothing of our culture and history, and they were willing to rely on hackneyed stereotypes. In their training they been taught that balanced impartial reporting meant describing at least two of the many sides of every story. But we had relied on their intelligence and fairness. We had met with many of them to explain our struggle and to try to influence their coverage. Without exception they were convinced by indisputable documentation and hard facts. In the end they did turn out to be on our side, which gives me hope for our country. Privately, after the press conference was over, several reporters came over to me with congratulations. Some of them had mistaken me for the author Joy Kogawa. One of them told me that the National Press Gallery had been profoundly affected by only two stories: the free vote against the reinstatement of the death penalty, and the government’s decision “to do the right thing” on Japanese Canadian redress.



Courtesy author's collection

Omatsu family in group photo with members of the McGillivray Falls, B. C. self-supporting community, 1943.

After the room had emptied, we were guided back across the street to the Confederation Room for a reception. Politicians and the press, various community leaders, and local Ottawa Japanese Canadians were present and nibbling. As I circulated about the room, chatting with well-wishers and long-time supporters, I felt pleasantly unconnected to reality – by then the day had taken on its own dream-like quality. It seemed as though we were actors playing out the closing scene of an epic drama that fortunately had a happy ending.

Afterwards, we went up to Weiner’s office where his aide, Dennison Moore, broke open two bottles of champagne. Heartily we drank toasts to each other’s health, then we were crowded into several cars and rushed to the Ottawa airport. Our day of celebration wasn’t over yet: the Minister’s office had organized a large reception and celebration back in Toronto. We were scheduled to get there minutes before the event was to begin.

The Sutton Place Hotel’s banquet-hall was packed with

Metro Toronto’s “multicultural” establishment, who were being wooed for the upcoming fall election. I avoided the jaundiced regulars, who were whispering cynically about the implications of the redress settlement. Wanting to savour our success and enjoy our victory, I found myself sticking to my own. For once in our one-hundred-and-ten-year history in this country, Japanese Canadians had reason to be proud and to celebrate. During the next few hours I must have embraced at least half of the several hundred Japanese Canadian supporters in the room. I gladly welcomed congratulations from some of our “foes” in the Japanese Canadian community – those people who had opposed the NAJC’s leadership because they, unlike the NAJC, had been willing to accept whatever small crumbs the government was willing to offer.

By seven o’clock the crowd was beginning to thin out as the celebrants began to make their way home in the late rush-hour traffic. Although there was a fine drizzle, the evening was still warm as we crowded into cars and cabs for a celebratory dinner. According to ritual, some of us headed straight for a Chinese restaurant. We had ended countless late-night meetings with the friendly communal sharing of honey garlic ribs and steamed fresh pickerel in black bean sauce, while squeezed tightly around large formica tables. Surrounded by friends and co-workers, I could feel the day’s tension and stress begin to dissipate into the steam above our endless cups of green tea.

Immediately following Toronto’s multicultural event, Gerry Weiner had flown straight to Vancouver. By contrast, Vancouver’s announcement was a Japanese Canadian affair. That evening, the entire community turned out to meet the minister at the Japanese language school in old Japantown. Afterwards Weiner and a large mob invaded a Japanese restaurant on Powell Street whose owner Aki, a longtime redress supporter, had closed his restaurant to other customers, and cooked up a storm. Consuming large quantities of sushi, grilled chicken, and beer, the party lasted until the early morning rays of the sun began to pierce through the *shoji* screens.

That evening and on the following day, the settlement dominated the front pages of the daily newspapers and the news broadcasts. Across the country, in throng-filled halls and around kitchen tables, Japanese Canadians celebrated the return of their dignity. The community had regained its honour at last. Going home that night in the quiet darkness of the car, with three of us pressed together in the back seat, I thought of my mother, brother, and sister, all in Hamilton. They would have heard the news, and I wished I was there with them. It was a time to be near those we loved – the people who had gone through the painful years and who daily still bore the scars.