



Joy Kogawa and her brother

Joy Kogawa was born on June 6, 1935, in Vancouver, British Columbia, to first-generation Japanese Canadians. The first years of her life were spent in a predominantly white, middle-class community.

On December 7, 1941 the Japanese attacked the United States base in Pearl Harbor. They also forced the surrender of the British garrison at Hong Kong, including two battalions of Canadians. These events increased fears of a Japanese invasion on the Pacific Coast. The RCMP arrested suspected Japanese operatives, impounded 1,200 fishing boats and shut down Japanese newspapers and schools.

One year later, on 24 February 1942, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King ordered that all persons of Japanese origin should be evacuated to "protective areas." All property that could not be carried would be taken "into custody." Joy and her family were part of the 20,881 Japanese Canadians who were treated in this way, of whom 13,309 were Canadian citizens by birth.

Special trains were organized to transport Japanese Canadians to Slocan, New Denver, and other ghost towns in the interior of BC. The conditions for the evacuees were primitive.

Joy Kogawa wrote *Obasan*, a semi-autobiographical novel based on her experiences of internment. *Obasan* has been named as one of the most important books in Canadian history by the *Literary Review of Canada* and was also listed by *The Toronto Star* in a "Best of Canada" feature.

As an adult Joy continued in her efforts to bring recognition of the injustice done to Japanese Canadians during World War II. *Obasan* played an important role in the successful campaign for Japanese Canadians to receive a formal apology from the Canadian government.

After years of campaigning, on September 22, 1986 Prime Minister Brian Mulroney formally apologized to Japanese Canadian survivors and their families. Art Miki, of the National Association of Japanese Canadians, called the apology and \$300 million compensation package "a settlement that heals."

In 1986, Kogawa was made a Member of the Order of Canada. In 2006, she was made a Member of the Order of British Columbia. In 2010, the Japanese government honored Kogawa with the Order of the Rising Sun "for her contribution to the understanding and preservation of Japanese Canadian history."