

Soyokaze

In Search of a Lost Boat

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Fishing Boats Seized at Annieville Dike

In 1942, nearly 1,200 Japanese Canadian owned fishing boats were confiscated by the Canadian Navy and brought to the Annieville Dike on Fraser River. **Credit:** BCA C-07293

Being a cod fisherman means long days at sea. Unlike the short salmon fishing season, the cod season in British Columbia traditionally ran for 10 months from March 1 to December 31. Although cod live in a wide variety of habitats, they are often found in deep oceans with strong currents, requiring fishermen to be skillful navigators to catch cod.

There were few cod fishermen at Quathiaski Cove on Quadra Island, where Shigekazu “Smiley” Matsunaga fished on his boat *Soyokaze* (“Gentle Wind” in Japanese). In the 1930s, Quathiaski Cove was a multi-ethnic community made up of Japanese Canadian, Chinese Canadian and Indigenous fishermen who worked for the Quathiaski Canning Company. These fishermen shared bait

ponds and waved to one another as they passed each other at sea.

The Matsunaga family’s lives changed drastically in December 1941 when Japanese Canadians living on the BC coast were forcibly relocated to internment camps in the interior. The Canadian Navy confiscated a total of 1,137 Japanese Canadian-owned fishing boats, which were brought to Annieville Dike on the Fraser River and tied in flotillas. The boats, including Matsunaga’s beloved *Soyokaze*, was sold by the Japanese Fishing Vessel Disposal Committee for rock bottom prices, and the money made from the sale of personal possessions was used to pay for their owners’ detention.

When Japanese Canadians were finally allowed to return to the coast in 1949, the Matsunaga family came back to Quathiaski Cove to rebuild their lives. The search for *Soyokaze* was not an easy task, as there was no paper trail for the sale of the boat. It was only when Matsunaga’s friend recognized the handmade structure of his boat (renamed *North Star II*) in Sidney that was he able to negotiate a resale with the owner. After a 15-year search for his boat, Matsunaga finally reunited with the *Soyokaze*. This was likely the only boat that was reclaimed by its original owner.

When Matsunaga retired from fishing, the family donated the *Soyokaze* to the Campbell River Museum. After a two-year restoration project involving the former Quathiaski Cove community, *Soyokaze* was successfully installed as an outdoor exhibit. Today, *Soyokaze* lives on as both a memorial to past injustices and evidence of how a community can come together to heal.



Soyokaze at the Campbell River Museum

The *Soyokaze* was restored and installed at the Campbell River Museum in 2001. Shigekazu died in 1995, but his wife, Toshiko Matsunaga, celebrated the completion of the project by pouring sake on the boat. **Photo credit:** Andrew MacDonald