

## GIFT

by Fiona Tinwei Lam

Dedicated to Bunjiro and Kimi Uyeda and family

*"1935-August... 1000 young cherry trees are donated to [the Parks] Board by Mr. and Mrs Uyeda. These are the first in the city and will be planted-out when more mature and funds available."*

-R. Mike Steele, *The First 100 Years: An Illustrated Celebration*

*"In April 1942, three months after the Uyeda family had been "removed" from Vancouver, seven hundred of their [1000] donated cherry trees were planted out ...." - Nina Shoroplova, A Legacy of Trees: Purposeful Wandering in Vancouver's Stanley Park*

I search among the most venerable,  
burly trunks, gnarled branches offering delicate  
pink and white profusions to the sky.

Does even one remain  
from your thousandfold gift?

No longer festooning Cambie Boulevard.  
No longer amid the sonnet of trees petalling  
Shakespeare's Garden into spring.

Not among grafted cultivars ornamenting  
park pathways toward the 'Ojochin's'

rivering arms, where the fluted pillar  
of the Japanese Canadian War Memorial rises high,  
its lantern's flame extinguished

in 1942: whole neighbourhoods gutted, erased--  
schools, churches, factories, farms.

Uprooted to an Exclusion Zone ghost town,  
your Dunbar home and downtown business seized,  
bolts of silk unraveling in others' hands,

you would never see Vancouver  
blossom with your thousand trees.

Pale pink petals flutter  
over palimpsests. Mirage of shimmering  
groves in a *could have been* city.

What survives?

Returns?

By the causeway, a quartet  
of 'Somei-yoshino,' ancient companions,  
moss-brocaded, scarred and scabbed,

anchored by their own deep roots,  
can still remember to bloom.

And decades later,  
a granddaughter—Sakura songs  
from a once-banished branch.

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NOTE:

The 'Ojochin' is a rare type of cherry tree donated by the Japanese Government in 1925 for the Japanese Canadian War memorial in Stanley Park. Like the 'Ojochin,' the four 'Somei-yoshino' trees planted in Stanley Park also grow from their own roots. The memorial was initially built to commemorate the 54 Japanese Canadians who died fighting with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Europe during World War I. 168 survived, only to fight again for the right to vote. Japanese Canadian soldiers who have fought since that time are also commemorated.

After being forcibly relocated to Kaslo, the Uyeda family moved to Montreal after the war. One of the Uyeda family's granddaughters, acclaimed composer, Leslie Uyeda, moved from Montreal to Vancouver to live and work. In 2012, she accepted degrees on behalf of her two aunts, Mariko Uyeda and Lily Yuriko Uyeda, at a special ceremony at UBC that recognized and honoured Japanese Canadian students whose education was disrupted in 1942 when they were exiled from the BC Coast.