



# O-bon in Chimunesu: A Community Remembered

*Catherine Lang*

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## **O-bon in Chimunesu: A Community Remembered** Catherine Lang

*O-Bon in Chimunesu: A Community Remembered* is a moving tribute to a community of Japanese-Canadians and the way they lived their lives.


Prior to the Second World War, when Canada's official policy of internment changed the lives of Japanese-Canadians forever, the Vancouver Island town of Chemainus ("Chimunesu") was home to a thriving Japanese-Canadian community, whose members struggled to adapt to the difficulties of life in a new country, while at the same time keeping their own traditions alive. During the war, Japanese-Canadians on the west coast were shunted off to internment camps in the British Columbia interior, and were not permitted to return until 1949. Most decided to take up new roots elsewhere, and what had been a significant community in Chemainus was relegated to memory.

Catherine Lang was a freelance reporter working on a story when she attended a 1991 reunion of Chemainus' former Japanese-Canadian community. The reunion occurred during O-bon, the annual Buddhist festival for the dead, in which burning candles light the way for the souls of ancestors. Lang couldn't resist such a meaningful encounter with living history.

*O-Bon in Chimunesu* consists of poignant personal narratives of former residents of Chemainus' Japanese-Canadian community. They include the stories of Shige Yoshida, who after being refused entry into the Boy Scouts, formed his own troop, made up entirely of Japanese boys; Matsue Taniwa, who moved to Chemainus after an arranged marriage to raise children and tend a store; and Kaname Izumi, who remembers as a boy throwing candy from his boat to the children at the Native residential school on Kuper Island.

Winner of the Hubert Evans Non-Fiction Prize

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