

NARRATOR: GEORGE M. WAKIJI
INTERVIEWER: EVELYN TAYLOR
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ET: It's October 17, 2003, this is the oral history interview of Mr. George M. as in Mary, Wakiji, W-a-k-i-j-i of Camarillo, California. This interview will be regarding Mr. Wakiji's family history and time spent in an internment camp during World War II. So George, let's talk about your parents and their reasoning for coming to the United States. When was that?

GW: I can't think of the exact date, but I know that my father came before the turn of the century. I'm talking about before, before 1900, late 1900's, late, late 1800's, he came as a young man and he came to California unlike many Japanese who stopped off in Hawaii and maybe work there. But, he came directly from Japan to America and he took mainland to San Francisco. And then from there, from what little of the history that I know of him he took odd jobs. He worked. He told me that he had worked on the railroad and going to work in Nevada and he was loading coal cars and things of that nature. I think he said ten cents an hour, ten cents an hour maybe you know? It was some ridiculous figure.

From there he worked on a, worked on some farms in Northern California. I don't know too much about that. But then a short while later, he came down to Southern California. In fact, I think he ended up in South Pasadena, where he worked for a Mr. Bush who ran a nursery. And so, he learned by working at this nursery- he learned a trade and then shortly thereafter, he opened his own business. He took two partners, other two gentlemen from Japan also, people that he knew from his village in Japan and

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they started this business. But, the two other gentlemen, after a short while, after a year or so, decided they didn't want to stay here any longer and returned to Japan, so my father became the sole proprietor of the nursery in Pasadena.

ET: Now what prompted your father to come to America in the first place?

GW: Well you have to understand, he was the youngest son in the family. I don't know how many. I think they had three brothers. And in Japan, the only the oldest son gets everything from the family. And so, as a consequence, he knew that he would not get any inheritance in the family. So for economic opportunities, he left Japan to come to America like most immigrants do for economic opportunity.

ET: And so your grandparents on both sides of the family did not come with him. They remained in Japan.

GW: No, exactly.

ET: They remained in Japan.

GW: Right.

ET: And your father spoke a little English at that time?

GW: Well he, he learned as he, as he was coming here. At the job here, he learned on his job and so forth. And then as he started his own business. I think he became more proficient because he had to use it, that's the only way you learn a language.

ET: That was quite brave of him?

GW: Oh yeah. It's, it's very interesting.

ET: That's very courageous.

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GW: Most, it's interesting, the early Japanese-Americans, Japanese immigrants, you have to give them a lot of credit, because I don't think I could go to a foreign country without enough language and then make a living, you know.

ET: No, very impressive. Now, so then, your father was in the nursery business.

GW: Right.

ET: Okay, now when did he meet your mother? Well did he do anything significantly after the nursery business?

GW: No, that was his business. That was his life's business, yeah.

ET: Okay.

GW: In fact, my mother came later. See, she was from another village close by, so the families knew each other. So it was in a sense, probably an arranged marriage in a way. I don't know if my, I don't think my mother- there were many Japanese women who came to America as picture, what they called "picture brides". In other words, they sent their pictures to America to, to eligible bachelors and the interesting thing that I've heard stories about how some of the bachelors used to get a picture of a better looking friend and the woman would come to America and then find out this is not really the person that she thought it was.

ET: They do that today but it's on the internet (laughs).

GW: Right, but anyway, she came. It was probably in the early 1900's. I can't know exactly. But, she came and then they were married. And then, they settled in Pasadena- well, he was already there. So they settled there. And where my father, my father interestingly enough, was the second Japanese person to settle in Pasadena, California. There was a

man named Mr. Kawaii who was a, well it's disputed, it could have been either one of them who were the first. But, my father gave Mr. Kawaii the credit.

Where we used to live, when he first settled in Pasadena, it was just open area. I mean now, of course, Pasadena is a city that's already pretty well developed. And I mean developed completely so there's very little land there. But, he was able to acquire an acre of property in Pasadena, where he started his own nursery.

Now you have to understand, Japanese immigrants were not allowed to become citizens until 1952. So he was not, being a non-citizen- he was an alien. He was not able to own property. So what happened was the property was then put in the names of the American born children like my oldest sister, my older brother and so forth. And so, the property was in their names. But that's helping them, because otherwise you couldn't, you couldn't get property.

ET: Now you mentioned siblings. How many, how many brothers and sisters do you have?

GW: Okay, I had one, one brother and four sisters. My three, three of my sisters still are alive. I'm the youngest in the family. And one sister died when she was, I think, about thirteen. I, being the youngest, I had certain I think certain advantages. I didn't have to put up with a lot of the control that parents have over their children at the beginning. So, by the time I came along they, they were too tired I guess (laughs), couldn't care less.

ET: They also had the other, other children to occupy there, their time.

GW: Right, exactly.

ET: Now what happened or when World War II came about? We're going to jump ahead a little bit to World War II because that's really when you, your family really experienced a traumatic change.

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GW: Exactly.

ET: What, what were the influences that lead up to this or what happened?

GW: All right, well the—

ET: When did this happen?

GW: --this, well it all started in December of 1941 on December 7th when Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japan. And, I have to explain here the difficulty that most Americans have about differentiating between people of like myself who were born in America, American citizens who were lumped together as we became in the eyes of the government, the enemy. Anyway, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and the war was declared shortly thereafter, after by our President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

And because of the—leading up to this point, there had been a lot of anti-Asian prejudice in California. And basically in California, because that's where most of the Asians lived, the largest percentage.

ET: Where do you think this started or what caused this?

GW: Well....

ET: Or is it just long term prejudice from the beginning?

GW: Yeah, it was long term. It didn't start just with the war. I mean there was a feeling that—see what happened is the Japanese came to America and they started—they worked for people for a while, but then after a short while, they went off on their own and then they developed their own farms and so forth. Many were in a sense like sharecroppers, but they still were able to then save money and then buy their own, get their own property in the names of their children or whatever. But see, what the interesting thing was, was at the time of World War II in California, the Japanese, from what I understand, controlled

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probably about a third of the agricultural production. And so, people were very envious of this, including groups like the American Grange and different farms groups were very, I think the word is native-oriented.

ET: I know what you're saying.

GW: They didn't particularly appreciate the fact that—

ET: They're territorial?

GW: Yeah, yeah, exactly and they were interested in their own, you know, their own situations. And so, they were rather envious that the Japanese became successful. And so, this was an opportunity to maybe get, get them out of the way and this is what happened, because there were many people who were involved in this of course, not only agricultural groups, but there were groups like the American Legion and so forth, which is an interesting group. They are all veterans. That's why to this day, I have not joined the American Legion. I'm a veteran of the U.S. Army, but I would not join the American Legion. I just have my particular prejudice against them.

ET: Now what did they do?

GW: What did they do? Oh, they, they, they were, they were among the people that were saying that the Japanese should be removed from the West Coast and, and put into camps.

ET: Really?

GW: Oh yeah.

ET: Former veterans?

GW: Huh?

ET: Former veterans?

GW: Yeah, well members of the American Legion, yeah, World War I. And then, the groups like the Grange and the, I can't think of the other names but they are, they are all listed in a book called *American's Betrayed* by Morton Grodzins. He is one of the seminal studies at this time. He listed all the groups in there that pressured the government and the President to remove us from the West Coast. And so—

ET: So it wasn't that they truly believed that there was a danger and there was going to be a revolt and the Capitol was going down in California? It was simply because of their own selfish beliefs?

GW: I think so. And well, you have to jump ahead. Later on, in 1988, there was the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1988 and at that time, they determined after a study, that the Japanese were put in the camps, because of racial prejudice, political, the figure of the government and all. Well anyway, these were some of the things, the forces that they understood were responsible for our being incarcerated.

And so anyway, the media played a role in this. At that time, there was no television, but there was radio and the newspapers were very strong at that time. People like William Randolph Hearst of the *Hearst* newspapers, also the "Bee" newspapers were very influential. Like in the Central Valley, there's the *Fresno Bee*, *Sacramento Bee*, and so forth. I don't know who owned them, but they, they were also saying, "Oh...", and they published very negative stories.

And what the rationale they tried to use to put us, to incarcerate us or remove us from the West Coast, was that it was for our safety. To me, that's sort of a false argument because what, what is our, then what is our police force you know, what is our

security supposed to be doing, allowing people to attack people? I mean, that, that's what they said at that time.

And there are people who are still interestingly enough, there is a Congressman by the name of Coble from North Carolina, not too long ago-it was in the last six months-came out on a radio program, that they should incarcerate the Muslims and Arabs, because of this, you know the problems that we're having. And they said, "No" but he said that the reason why in World War II that they incarcerated the Japanese was because of this-was for their own safety. This was you know, foolish aside, foolish as argument for this.

But there was a lot of feeling, anti-...there was a man, a very influential man by the name of Walter Lippmann, who was a commentator and so forth. And he said that we've got to get rid of the Japanese. We've got to take them away from the West Coast and so forth.

Interestingly enough at that time, there was an Attorney General of California by the name of Earl Warren, who later became the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. He was one of those that, I must say at this point that Earl Warren later in a biography wrote, apologized for what he did at that time. I mean, he said it was not a polite thing to do. But you know, he was part of that group that—there was a mayor of Los Angeles by the name of Fletcher Bowron. Mr. Bowron was one of those that said, "Oh yeah, we just round them up and get them out of here." And so there was, there was a lot of pressure going on.

And what happened was, but interestingly enough there, the head of the FBI, Mr. Hoover, J. Edgar Hoover, said that the Japanese were not a risk to our country at that time. And there was, there was—

ET: That is completely opposite of what of his personality was. He was against everyone.

GW: Exactly, exactly.

ET: So that's amazing.

GW: But he did, from what the records say, that he said that it wasn't necessary. But he was—they overrode him, his opinion. And it got to—there were people that advised the President at that time, Roosevelt, and they told him that yes, let's do this. And so, then he—then President Roosevelt signed an Executive Order 9066, it was February 19, 1942. And this is the order that said, "Okay, we will remove all Japanese and, and Japanese-Americans living on the West Coast, that includes Washington, Oregon, California and just a small part of Arizona. And we're going to remove all these people and bring them inland into camps and different places

“ And so what they had to do they first, after this order was issued, they began rounding us up and putting us into what the term was Assembly Centers. And, they used fairgrounds. They used racetracks and mostly places like that, that had some standing facilities and we were taken there.

For example, our family was in a group that went to Santa Anita, which was located in Arcadia, California, which was actually very close to Pasadena. So, we went a very short trip to go to Santa Anita to Arcadia. But we were there from— we were told to go on, in May of 1942, and we were there until October of 1942.

Now the reason why they had these assembly centers was that, that the camps were, they were building in different places, in the most God awful places, in deserts and places that no one inhabited: Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Idaho, two of them in Arkansas and two in Arizona and there were two in California. So one, one place in California is a place called Manzanar, which was up near Bishop, just south of Bishop, California.

And so, they were building these camps. Now Manzanar was being built also at that time, so that there was a lot of people, they were earlier than us. There were people taken from a place called San Pedro. There was an area called Terminal Island, where there was a large group of Japanese fisherman there. And they were among the first runners up. And the interesting thing with those folks, they were only given two to three days' notice that they would be going to this camp.

So they had to sell their belongings or store them or do something with them. And, most people were taken advantage of by unscrupulous people who came and said, "Oh, I'll buy your new car for—." I don't know at that time in 1943 maybe a car cost five hundred dollars. So I'm going to offer them fifty dollars or something or a new, brand new refrigerator offers five dollars or ten dollars or some ridiculous price.

And, there was a story that I still remember hearing that one woman, a Japanese woman, became so angry at this. She had these expensive dishes that she just broke the dishes all up, rather than sell them or give them to anyone.

ET: Now how old were you when your family moved into to Santa Anita?

GW: Okay, when we left for the camp in Santa Anita at the racetrack, I was thirteen years old at that time. I had not finished, quite finished eighth grade at Marshal Junior High School in Pasadena.

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ET: That's what I was going to ask you was you were going to a public school?

GW: Oh yeah.

ET: And you were being, so you were being educated by the United States government. Now were your other, were other siblings, had they been also in public schools as well?

GW: Oh yeah. They went to, except for my oldest sister. As a young person, she was sent to Japan to be educated. She lived with my grandmother, my maternal grandmother. And so she spent, she spent the whole time until she was probably a high school senior and returned back from Japan. But, the rest of us were all educated in the school system in Pasadena.

ET: Now because you were born here, did they consider you then citizens?

GW: You mean when we, this business about incarcerating us?

ET: Uh-huh, I'm trying to create, yes, it's real confusing because did they incarcerate, they incarcerated citizens?

GW: Oh yes, in fact—

ET: You were considered a citizen? If you were born on American soil, you were considered a citizen?

GW: I was a citizen. But, but for the purposes of this exercise, we were put in camp. They gave us, what was the name they gave us? We were not aliens. That was our parents because they were not citizens, but they were called aliens. But they had another term for us. It escapes me at this time. But we were, when we went, it somehow got around that we were citizens, so that they wanted to mask that yeah. But then, then they, there were a hundred- they were abducting a hundred and twenty thousand Japanese-Americans that were taken from the West Coast and incarcerated.

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ET: Now what happened to your family's business?

GW: Well, what happened- my father's nursery business, what happened was in the short time that we had to, we had to get rid of it so or find somebody to take care of it. And so, we found a man by the name of Mr. Macluan, M-a-c-l-u-a-n, Macluan. And Mr. Macluan said, "Okay, I'll take it over." We had a house there on the property, nursery property. And he said that we signed an agreement with him you know, that he would take over the nursery stock and everything and would pay us a certain amount of money.

Well, six months into our going into the camps, we received word from him that he was no longer wanted to do it any longer. So he actually broke his contract. But we were, we were, there wasn't much we could do. We're sitting in a camp in Arizona. And we're trying to you know, we're, we're, what are we going to do? We can't hire a lawyer. We had no money then, by then, you know.

And so what happened, when we came back afterwards, in July of 1945, one of my brother-in-law's and myself came early from camp, before the rest of the family. We came back to the property in Pasadena and that's when we just, we learned that all the nursery stock was dead. I mean it probably went dead very soon, because it has to be watered at all times. Then the nursery portion, we had two glass houses and then, we had some area called lap houses- it has a wooden lap over it to shade the glass. And anything like that was all in disarray, I mean it was in shambles.

ET: Was the house a mess or it had been locked up?

GW: Well, the house, well, we had stuff stored in the basement in the cellar. But, the house was just empty. I think he did lock the house, but that wasn't damaged. But, no it was

not a happy time. I mean, see we had no recourse. What could we do? Could we complain to court? No. I mean, we just couldn't leave the camp anyway.

ET: Now did, was there a sense- do you remember in the Japanese-American community, that something was going down? I mean, did you kind of have a sense that this was going to happen, that your fate had been, sort of sealed, once we had Pearl Harbor? Did you feel that sort of a premonition- that something was going to happen? It was going to be directed towards the community here in the United States, particularly California?

GW: No, we really didn't.

ET: Did it just come as a surprise?

GW: Yeah, it was a surprise. We really didn't expect to be taken away and put in, essentially we were jailed, jailed, like birds. I mean, we were incarcerated in the camps and different places. So, after Santa Anita, then we were- by then, the camp was built up in the desert in Arizona. It was just about fifty miles south of Phoenix. It was on an Indian reservation. It took the government to go over on Indian property; the Pima Indians had lived there and they took over land there and then built our camps there, two camps there, out in the desert and that's where we were put.

ET: Now how did they transport you to the various places?

GW: By train. They used some very old trains that they had found somewhere and we were put in these trains and we were all the shades were drawn of course, so that people couldn't see us or we couldn't see anybody. And then, we had military guards. There was military police accompanying all the trains and so forth.

ET: Now I'm sure that while you were going through this experience, you must have or your family must have talked to other people who were going through the similar experience.

Did anybody have their property confiscated by the government or what did you do with the—what happened to the money that you had? Were you allowed to take any personal belongings with you?

GW: We were allowed to take only what we could carry which amounted to about two suitcases. And so, but as far as the money, now a lot of people were dependent- a lot of Japanese and Japanese-Americans had put their money in a Japanese bank in Los Angeles or up and down the coast of San Francisco. There was a bank I recall, called Sunitomo Bank. And what happened immediately is the government impounded the money, so that no one could even get the money, you know?

So the situations varied for different families. There were some families that lost everything. There was, there was I mean, when they came back, they had nothing. And now, there are stories like that here of the Takatsuki family here in Oxnard, who had a store. And what happened was they used to have some employees, Mexican employees, and the Mexican family said, “We will take care of your property and keep it.” And so, that’s what they did.

So when they came back, they were set. But, they were probably among the fortunate few. There were a few farmers who lost everything; they lost their equipment, they lost their property. And what happened was that a lot of families- they had stored their goods in their homes and some people went in, broke in there and stole things from them and, and so they lost everything, you know. But everybody had a different story.

Now we didn’t lose everything fortunately. When we came back, we lost the nursery, the stock and the situation with the physical aspects of the nursery. But, at least

when we got back, we had a house. We had to start over from scratch and that was a very difficult thing for most families.

Now, when we came back see we at least had a place to go. Many Japanese-Americans were not, didn't have a place to go so they ended up in places like, in Burbank they had a large trailer camp. But, a lot of churches came back, churches opened up again where the Japanese had used for services before. They opened them up again and they used them as like hostels, you know and they came back and they were able to stay there and work and then find jobs. And then, once they started making some money, then they went out and found a place to live, rent or whatever, and then they saved their money again and then—

ET: Re-established?

GW: --yeah established again and buy a home.

ET: So now, the government did not give you money, when they brought you back? We are jumping ahead a little bit. But, when you were allowed out of the camps, they did not supply anyone with money or funds or did they even take you back to your house?

GW: They gave you- they gave you either a train ticket or a bus ticket to leave the camp to return, plus twenty-five dollars per person. That's kind of interesting, because I think that's what they give people that were incarcerated in jail. They give you twenty-five dollars to live in a home, you know. But, I think even they still do that today. I mean, I'm not- not that I know anybody who's been in jail or something. It strikes me is that's what happened.

I had two older brothers-in-law's. They had businesses; they were involved in businesses. My one brother-in-law used to run a produce market; in fact, it was in

Glendale. And it- no, he was in San Pedro at that time. But then, my brother-in-law who is from San Diego, he and his father used to run a store, where they sell Japanese food and so forth. When they came back, they had nothing so what they had to do was they started out—and this is why so many Japanese became gardeners. Gardening was, you know, it is a person who takes care of your yard, you know? He cuts your lawn. He trims your bushes and so forth. You could do this very easily, because you could buy, find a cheap car someplace and then you buy, then you get a lawnmower and some equipment and that's how you started. And that's how these people start from scratch again.

I must give credit to these people, the older ones that came back. My father did the same thing. He was up in his age then. Is it going like what you want?

ET: Perfect. So now let's talk a little about, before we, before we deal with coming back, let's talk a little bit about Manzanar. Now Santa Anita- did they have, how did they separate the families out? Did you have any sort of privacy at all? Did you have cots? Did they give you food?

GW: Oh yes, okay.

ET: How was that?

GW: Well, in the camps now, Santa Anita was an unusual place. They had many people had to live in the horse stables. These were places where the racehorses were kept. So you can imagine what it smelled like, because isn't that, you can clean up these places, but there's still the smell of horse manure was there.

Fortunately, for us, we were among those that lived in the temporary erected barracks. They made wood barracks and each barrack had maybe, they divided it up into

four, plus four units. And a family would be in one unit. There would be maybe four families in one barrack. Sometimes they, even depending on the size of the family, generally they tried to give you four people in a unit.

We slept on, if I recall we had Army cots. I mean these, these metal with, well some people had, we, I remember I think we had the regular mattresses that they issue you know for the military or whatever. Some people in some certain situations, they were told, they were given large white sacks and told to go out and fill them with straw to make their own mattresses. And this happened in places like Heart Mountain and so forth in Wyoming and different places. I think it could have happened in Arizona also when we went there.

But oh, getting back to the food. Now there's no facilities in the barracks. It's, it's just a place to sleep. To go to the bathroom, you have to go to a toilet you know, they're erected. There's a building erected.

ET: An outhouse?

GW: Well, it was a little better than an outhouse, maybe you know. They had running water and so forth.

ET: Okay, and shower facilities?

GW: Yeah, they had shower facilities too. But these are very crude.

ET: Primitive?

GW: Yeah, primitive right, a good way to put it. And, what we had to do to go to eat our three meals. They had developed mess halls in different parts of the camp, depending on where you lived you're assigned and they called them by different colors. They called it the yellow mess, the blue mess, the red mess and so forth. I remember we were assigned

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to go to the blue mess. Yeah, if I recall it was built into the stands of the race course at Santa Anita. In other words, they just took over part of the stands and made it part of the kitchen there. And so that's where our, our mess hall was. That's where we ate our meals.

And, it was not easy because people we- there's nothing to do in the camps, so you just basically you're waiting in line all the time for meals, you know. So (laughs)—

ET: How long was a normal wait?

GW: For a meal? It could, depending on where you were in the line, but it could depend on anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour probably so.

ET: Now your father and your mother and you and all of your siblings went, except for your sister in Japan?

GW: Oh, she was back here.

ET: Okay, she came back, okay.

GW: So she, she was already married and had two children.

ET: Did they all come as well?

GW: Oh yeah.

ET: So it was everyone?

GW: Yeah.

ET: Now were you all able to, to stay together?

GW: Except my sister-in-law, my sister, older sister's husband and her father, her father-in-law. They were among the group that was picked up early by the FBI. There was a group of probably about two thousand.

ET: Oh by the FBI?

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GW: FBI.

ET: Over Hoover's objections?

GW: Oh yeah, but see, the government had thought that these people might be somebody who had, would do some, might do some harm for the government, I guess our government.

ET: Maybe spy?

GW: Yeah right, or do something, because of their allegiance. The only thing I can think of, what they did was they took people in that group that were martial arts instructors. I used to, when I was a kid, I used to study something called Kendo. It's fencing with a wooden pole. And our, my instructor, Mr. Hamasaki was taken away in that first group too. When the war broke out, the FBI came to homes, they had the names already and people like my brother-in-law. My brother-in-law and his father, they ran the store, the Japanese food store. So they naturally they had an association with Japan, because they had to get their products from Japan okay?

And so they, they were immediately rounded up and they ended up, my brother-in-law, ended up in a detention center in, right near Pasadena. It was near La Puente. He was held there for just a short time. A lot of them, from there, were sent to Montana to different kinds of camps. They were operated by the Justice Department, see, so they were considered to be not only people like my brother-in-law who had some association with Japan too, there were people who were considered community leaders, also Buddhist ministers, there were Japanese-language instructors who were also included in this group of people who were rounded up. They were mostly men. There were only about two thousand of them and they were taken away.

ET: Out of all of California?

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GW: Yeah, out of the whole group of a hundred and twenty thousand. There may have been a few from Washington, a few from Oregon. But, they were, they were considered suspect. But it's really kind of fascinating in that they found out later that there was no known case of sabotage or espionage performed by any Japanese or Japanese-American. It was anyway, they were released later. My brother-in-law and his father were released later and they came to Arizona to join us.

ET: Really?

GW: --my yeah, join my sister, her two kids and she was with her mother-in-law. Then, in the camp, also I had another older sister who was married and had two kids. They were, we all were able to stay in the same barrack in a different unit. My older brother was there and he had one child and I think one child was born in the camp there.

ET: Now, Arizona gets pretty hot. I can imagine that that camp could not have possibly been a paradise.

GW: No.

ET: Tell me a little bit about the camp, the simple structure?

GW: Well, these were wooden barracks of course and, and interestingly enough they were built by, I later learned, by Del Webb, this is how Mr. Webb became very wealthy. He got a government contract to build this camp out in the desert. Later, he had places in Las Vegas and he became part owner of the New York Yankee baseball team. But, anyway, Mr. Del Webb was the one who built our camp. And, when they built these camps, they used a lot of unseasoned wood.

What happened was, that the wood shrinks as it dries. And, when it's especially wet wood, you know when it's unseasoned wood. It get wets and so, in the desert, it's

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hot, so it starts drying. What happens is, in the floor, there would become spaces between the boards. So, dust was a problem in the camp.

ET: Separate?

GW: Yeah, dust storms were constant there. And during, during the summer months, it was just intolerable. The weather, the temperatures got up sometimes from what I remember, a hundred and twenty degrees there. And this is, this is hot. And so, you can't go out. One of the questions when I go out and speak to groups, high school groups and, and college group kids and I tell them about my experience. And they, they always want to know, "Did some people try to escape?" And I try to tell them you know when you're out in the desert, there's not too many places you can go. I mean, even if you wanted to go. I mean you know if you don't have water or equipment or whatever, you're not going to live very long. So there were not too many cases of people even trying. I'm sure there were a few cases you know of, of the thousands of people that were in these camps.

But, but anyway, we were in Arizona. We were sent to "Gila", it was called. The camp was called the Gila River Relocation Center and that's a euphemism for I say "concentration camp" and that's what it was, because we had barbed wire fences all around and then we had guard towers spaced periodically and there were soldiers there watching us all the time, and search, we had search lights going most of the time too you know to keep track of us. And where are we going to, where were we going to go you know? But they were there to watch, watch over us.

I was there from October of 1942 until July of 1945, so my time spent in camps including Santa Anita was over three years.

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ET: Did they have activities for the children?

GW: Oh yeah, we even had schools.

ET: Okay—

GW: See, I was in the eighth grade when I left. When I got to the camp, I would have been, I became a freshman in the ninth grade, tenth grade and eleventh. I went three years in the camp, camp schools. Now the schools were very sub-standard. I mean the facility. We had no, we, we seldom had books. I mean the books that we had were old books that somebody scrounged up some place.

The teachers, they're not very good. Some of the teachers were the evacuees—that's the term for people like us that were put in, evacuated to these camps. They were people, a few people, some who had graduated college and they were pressed into becoming teachers, so they really had no good experience as being teachers. But they, they did their best. And then, what happened, they also recruited Caucasian teachers from outside and these were people, unfortunately, most of them were people that probably couldn't make it outside in the regular system, so but they came and they did their best. There were some exceptional good ones. But, on average the education we got was I would say sub-standard.

And so, it put us at a very disadvantage. Now there were young people, the government to its credit tried to, there were a few thousand that were allowed to leave of college age and then go back East or to the Midwest and go to college and finish college. But it, it's interesting that not all colleges and universities would accept us. Some, some major universities said, "Oh no, we don't want any Japs coming to our school." You

know, we're the enemy kind of thing which is you know, totally fallacious, but that's, that's what they thought.

There were good schools that some of them accepted, accepted these young people and they went to college. Now one of my sisters, the youngest sister- she's older than I am, but she was a few years older. She was able to leave the camp after about a year. What happens is they gave these people, if you had an opportunity for a job, my sister went to New York City and to this day she still lives there. But, she first she went there and worked for a family taking care of kids. The term they used was "school girl". By allowing you to go to school, they provide for the housing and food and shelter, so you have to perform some duties. You likely take care of the kids, you cook, you do laundry or whatever. Many of the people went out and that's what they do.

My sister did that for a while and then she later finished her college education in New York at Hunter College. And then, she was able to get a job working for a health center. Later she worked for a bank and it's amazing. How old is she? She's eighty-four years old now and still working as the Vice-President of a bank at Amalgamated Bank in New York.

ET: Oh my, goodness!

GW: Yeah.

ET: Oh my, goodness!

GW: Yeah, but she's unusual.

ET: Now where did the- since you're out in the middle of nowhere- where did the other teachers that they brought out, where did they stay? Where, where did the guards live? Where did all the people that were watching you?

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GW: Oh okay, they had sections, near the camp or in the camp, but not with us. You know they were isolated from us. They had facilities built for them too, a lot better than what we had. For example, the teachers that came would be given places to stay and work. It was not fancy but it was a lot better than what we had. They had toilets in their own building. Another thing we should remember is that when we lived in these barracks, we had to leave, if you had to go to the bathroom or take a shower or go in and use the toilet, you had to leave your building and go to the center of the block. We lived in areas called “blocks”. And each block had all these buildings, okay, “barracks” we called it. And then, there were, there were something like fourteen barracks. Then there was a mess hall here at the end, where we had our meals. And then, we had here a washroom, a laundry room and we had a room for ironing or whatever, whatever we would do with ironing at that time. They had a women’s toilet and showers in the middle of this.

So we used to live over here at the end here, so if I had to go to the bathroom, I had to go out of the building, I’d walk this way and then I’d go to the entrance and the toilets were here you know.

ET: Did they segregate out the women and the men?

GW: You mean in the living quarters?

ET: Uh-huh.

GW: No, just in the toilets; there was a shower.

ET: Now what if you were a single person and you didn’t have a family or was that unusual, was that an unusual situation?

GW: Well—

ET: How did they lump you in?

GW: Okay, what they did was- we had some people like that in that situation. In the next barrack, they would put four, maybe four single men together and they would bunk together and live together.

ET: Now what did they do with your parents and people like your parents or even say older than that, as far as daily activities? Did they, did they give them any chores or just simply have them look after their own families?

GW: Well really, there were certain jobs became available in the camp. Now two of my older sisters, they worked at the mess hall as waitresses. My father had a job. He took care of the men's toilet here, you know, somebody had to clean it. So that was his job. And for doing this labor, that was the lowest paying job you would get, twelve dollars a month because that's considered unskilled or whatever.

Then the next one you got, I think the doctor, if you were a doctor and worked at the hospital for example, you got nineteen dollars a month. And then, there was an intermediate pay scale too.

ET: So in other words, they took what you call "professionals" as well and interned them. So it didn't have to do with business or skill or education; everybody went?

GW: Everybody, we were all equal in the camp. I mean, we had people who were business people living with us. And—

ET: Like you said professionals, doctors?

GW: --right, right and so, and a few lawyers were around. But these were people- everything was equal at that time. No one was better than so, I mean how do you? How can you be better than somebody else, when you have the same kind of living quarters? I mean, in

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our society, how you show your wealth is by having a bigger house, bigger property, bigger car, whatever. But you don't have cars, you don't—

ET: Everybody is reduced to the same.

GW: Right.

ET: Now did you, were you kept apprised of the situation with the war? Did you have any news services to come? Did anybody talk to you about what's happening?

GW: No, we could- there was a paper that we used, were able to get. It was called, the *Pacific Citizen*. And this was published and they moved it to Salt Lake City. It was a Japanese- it was for the Japanese-American Citizens League. And, they used to publish that and they'd send it to the camp and try to give us news that was going on as far as the war. It talked about the Japanese-Americans that served in the military and so forth.

But we, we weren't allowed to- I don't recall seeing outside newspapers or getting, even getting the Phoenix paper or whatever. So, and we, later on maybe a few people were able to get radios. But—

ET: Well, you earned money or your parents could earn money. What could they do with that money?

GW: Well, we had like a store in the camp. It was called a "co-op" and they sold things there. They sold candy, a few things, not a lot. Now—

ET: Clothing?

GW: Well, clothing- most of the clothing people got from the catalogs, Sears and Montgomery Ward catalogs. Now we were given- the government gave us while we were in the camp, each of us three- dollars a month clothing allowance. So what happened is, if somebody

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needed something, they pooled the money and somebody this month could buy something and then—

ET: What would three dollars get you?

GW: Not very much. I can't think of too many things that—

ET: Even then?

GW: Yeah, yeah.

ET: Now did in the commissary or the mess hall- the food worked pretty much the same as it did at Santa Anita? Did you have to stand in line for food or was it a little bit more open?

GW: Well, it was a little more organized, because there were less people. See, people were segregated into blocks.

ET: Okay, so-

GW: So each block had maybe two, a little over, around two hundred people. And so, you, and people, they opt their own rhythm. Some people went early and some people went later and sometimes you could wait a little longer yeah, five or ten minutes or something.

ET: Were you allowed to, what's the word I'm looking for- join or meet other people that weren't in your particular area in another block or in another community?

GW: Oh yeah.

ET: You were able to co-mingle?

GW: Yeah, yeah, in fact, within the confines of the camp, inside the barbed wire, we could go anywhere in the compound. And so, you could go visit friends in another part of the camp or whatever. Then they had some entertainment. We used to see old movies. Now in the desert where we were they built, we used to call it the "amphitheater". It was on the side of a hill. And what they did was on Saturday nights, they had a stage there and

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they had a screen and we would all go and take blankets and things and sit on the side, side of the mountain, small mountain there and, and view movies and things. That was part of the entertainment.

And so we didn't go crazy, we also played a lot of sports in camp because we, we made ball diamonds, baseball fields, softball fields. Most every block had a basketball court. And so, we played basketball on a dirt court of course. But—

ET: You talking this way, it makes me realize just how large in acreage this camp must have been.

GW: Oh yeah.

ET: In order to have—

GW: You remember, in our camp there must have been maybe ten thousand people in Arizona. There were two camps there. One was Camp One, which was Canal Camp, camp Two was Butte Camp and our camp, Butte Camp- Camp Two was much larger. It probably had about ten thousand people. Camp One had about three thousand people.

ET: So you kept yourself occupied with sports?

GW: Yeah, yeah, as a young person, yeah.

ET: As a young child, did any of the people, the guards or any of the other workers who were there to look after you, did they ever talk to you or talk to you about plans or what was happening? Were they generally in a good mood or positive as opposed to being mean people?

GW: Well we, we had very little contact with them. I mean we might have- you might have limited contact if there was, if you had a teacher, you know? But I don't recall have too

much conversation with anybody. So especially with the military. They wouldn't even talk to you.

ET: Now, you were here for almost for three years. What happened when you found out that, or your parents found out and everybody found out that you could go home? How did that occur? Did they, did somebody come up and make a speech or how, how did that get known that they could go home?

GW: Well—

ET: What was the reaction?

GW: Yeah, well let's say this. There was some people looked forward to it. Some people had difficulties or had no place to return to. They weren't interested in leaving yet. And so, there were some people that stayed to the very end, until the government said, "You've got to leave." It was that kind of situation.

So, it varied according to families and about how they treated us news. How did we get the news? What happened was each block had, they had a person who was sort of the administrative leader. He was called the "block manager". And he's the one that, that you know, the camp authorities would deal with the block managers. In other words, they would attend meetings and get the information then, they'd bring it back to us. So that's how they communicated.

But in a camp situation where everybody is confined, news got around very quickly. I mean, so if somebody heard that they were going to be releasing us, that news came very fast. I mean I don't know what, what the term would be. But I know later on, when I worked in the South Pacific, they used to call it the "Coconut Wireless" (laughs). Maybe we would probably call it was, the "bamboo wireless" (laughs).

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ET: Now what did your parents think about all of this? Did you ever, I mean did they ever, did you hear them talking about their situation and their feelings on it and what they were going through emotionally?

GW: Now, I think for most of us, see our parents as I say, early on when I said this, they didn't speak much English. So it was, it was a difficult thing for them to communicate with us, who had very little knowledge of Japanese, although before I went to the camp, I had attended a Japanese school as a youngster. I went to a certain grade. I went, well, I went to the time that we left for the camp. And so, I had a basic working knowledge of Japanese speaking. But not much, you don't have a vocabulary. You don't—

ET: Now where did you learn and your siblings learn to speak English, so well if your parents only spoke primarily Japanese?

GW: We went to American school.

ET: My goodness, you were smart.

GW: Well we went when I was growing up. I went to an elementary school in Pasadena called Jefferson Elementary School. And that's where I learned my English. And then, when I finished there, I went to junior high school and then I learned more stuff there.

ET: Now did you speak Japanese at home with your parents?

GW: Yeah, a little, a little you know?

ET: Did you ever feel that was going to be a barrier or it kind of would have been nice if, if you were able to—

GW: Oh yeah, yeah, it was always a barrier. I mean let's say for example, that something went on at the school and you know how parents come for different events? Well, I felt kind of- almost ashamed to have them come, because they couldn't communicate well. And

so no, we were in a sense not deprived, but, we were really deficient in a lot of things.

And so, it made things difficult later on in life, you know as you go on and you go to college and so forth.

ET: Now I know there's a point in time where the United States would take a lot of Native American children and put them into schools in Phoenix, so to take away from their their own members and require them only to speak English. Did you find that problem when you were attending school? Was there pressure for you to only speak English?

GW: No, no.

ET: Okay.

GW: No.

ET: Okay, so it was kind of hard for you then to- well I would see it was a distressing time. Did your parents seem... were they the kind of people that just coped?

GW: Yeah.

ET: And that was just what they did and they would move on?

GW: You just, you just made the best of the situation. The Japanese are very philosophical that way. They have a word that describes this, this situation. It's called "Shikata ga nai". I mean, really you can't do anything about it. So what, you just make the best of it kind of situation. So they, they just coped as best they could. And you know I, I wish I could have spoken to them or them or they communicated with me. But, since we had that barrier in a sense, I didn't. And this is true for most people like myself growing up in America, you know, is that when you have immigrant parents who are not fluent in a language then you, you learn to cope otherwise, you know? You go to school and you

practice your English. Then, other times you have to use your Japanese as best you can to communicate with them.

ET: Then you heard when the community heard that the war was over. I'm assuming when the war was over, that was when you were released?

GW: Well, the war hadn't officially ended, I don't think when they started releasing people. But, we always knew that we'd go back to California, because that's where home is, that's where we had a place. And so, it was just the timing for us, our family. Now there were other people who had lost everything and they had no home to come back to. Well, they- a lot of people were very reluctant to leave the camps, because you know, where are they going to go?

So you come back and you meet people who are not too happy to have you there and I can recall coming back to Pasadena for my senior high school year. What we did, there was a bunch of us that went to Pasadena High School and what we did is we kind of segregated ourselves, because you know, we didn't know how the others were going to treat us or whatever.

ET: So you and your friends who had been in the camps segregated yourself from your former high school mates?

GW: Right, right, because well, my friends that I had gone through junior high school with you know, you lose a lot—

ET: Uncomfortable?

GW: Huh?

ET: Uncomfortable?

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GW: Yeah, we didn't know how they were going to treat us or how they felt about us or whatever. So it took a lot of adjustment. There was an adjustment period. I remember for at least a year or so, all we did is we would hang together you know. There were a number of us so that we had our own little group, but we were all the people had left the camps and returned.

ET: How do the people treat you when you went back to school?

GW: Well, it was kind of, they didn't treat us badly, but they didn't treat us wrongly either. It was kind of a—

ET: They didn't- didn't know what to make of you?

GW: Yeah probably, they didn't know what we were about, you know. Although we had some good friends, I don't recall really getting back together with any of the people I went to junior high school with until, which is interesting, up until I went much later- I guess they had a 50th anniversary or something at this junior high school that I was supposed to have attended. Oh no, actually it was a 55th anniversary of my eighth grade class that I went to. They held it in a place called Monrovia, which was near the camp. When I got there, they asked me to speak and I said, "You know, it's really interesting that I'm only a few miles away from the camp...." Santa Anita was just right down the road a few miles. "And I went to this camp in Santa Anita and that's where we parted company and I hadn't seen you folks for so many years." Now it's over fifty years.

ET: Yeah, wow. Now, how did the community treat your family coming back in? Was there just a sense of adjustment or was there a little hostility or was everybody kind of sheepish or—

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GW: I'll say this for the people of Pasadena. There are several people and for the most part, I think there was no hostile people there. But they didn't manifest it and try to hurt us, you know? Like in some cases like in Central California there, there are people that came by to report the Japanese had returned to their farm home and they would shoot at them. The Nightriders would come by with their guns and fire at them, you know and try and kill them.

So I mean, so we were fortunate in that respect that we were among civil people in Pasadena. So I attribute that to the kind of people that live there.

ET: Now your father came back and well, you actually mentioned that you and your brother came back early?

GW: Brother-in-law.

ET: Brother-in-law came back early. Now what did you do? You came home and—

GW: Well, well, we had to clean up the house. In other words, and try and make it livable again, so that when the family came a few months later, I think they were another three months or so after us. So they came. We left in July, August, September, so they might have returned in October or so, a few months later. So by then, my brother-in-law had a car. He picked up an old Chevrolet some place and then, he started to work again as a gardener. And so, he made a little money. And so, we were able to get started again. And then, my father came back and after a little while we started working on the nursery again, you know.

ET: And was he able to build that up?

GW: Yeah again, to a certain point. He was getting too old later, so my- I had an older brother who was a fisherman, a commercial fisherman who lived on these fishing boats. But

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then, the fishing business went bad. So he left that and in the fifties after we left the camp and came back and then he took over the commercial business for my father.

ET: So now you came back, went to high school, graduated high school.

GW: Right.

ET: Then what happened? When was this when you graduated?

GW: I graduated high school in 1946, Pasadena High School. And then, what I did was, well, a bunch of us then continued on for our education. We went to Pasadena City College, which is a community college there. I went there and got what they call an Associate of Arts Degree and then, my plan was to go to, you know, continue again.

But what happened was in 1950, the Korean War broke out. And I was draft age, so I got drafted. I was up going to near Monterey, California for my basic training. Then after about a year there, I was shipped overseas to Korea, the war was going on.

ET: And what was your specialty in Korea?

GW: Well, I was in the infantry. I was assigned- when I first got there, I was assigned to the 1st Calvary Division, 5th Infantry, 5th Calvary Regiment of the 1st Calvary Division. And then what happened was, a few months later, they were replaced by the 45th Division, which was the Oklahoma National Guard, which had been in Northern Japan. And, they just kind of switched positions. Since I had not spent enough time there, they just transferred me to the 45th Division of the Oklahoma National Guard Unit and I served with them the rest of my time there.

ET: Now and it was here that you were able to go to Japan and visit your grandma?

GW: Yeah, during that time, we were in Korea for a while. They gave us what they call “R and R” (Rest and Recuperation), so they shipped us off and we could take a flight to Japan for

five days. So I would leave- I, I got to Osaka and then, I had to take a train. And, in those days, the trains weren't so fast. It took me about, I think, about eight hours to get to where my grandmother lived and my cousins and uncles and aunts. I spent a few days with them. I think I even got to Tokyo at that time, during the last couple days and then, I had to go back to Korea again.

It's similar to what happened in Vietnam. In fact, I was just reading about in the paper that during this war that's going on now, the war's over but it's still going on. The people in Iraq there, they're shipping them, giving them leaves to either go to Germany or even come home, if they want to pay their way back. But see, they are allowed to go to Germany and they set up some sort of rest area for them and then, they can go to cities or whatever and get some good food or whatever.

ET: Have some fun?

GW: Right.

ET: Now, you were in Korea for how long? You were actually in Korea, South Korea?

GW: Oh yeah, well you know, the last year I was in the 38th Parallel with my unit. We were above the, we were in an area called Chorwoan, C-h-o-r-w-o-a-n and we were above the 38th Parallel.

ET: So you saw some heavy duty fighting, then?

GW: Well we saw- we were always in a situation fighting area- we didn't see a lot, but we did see some action around there.

ET: How long were you in Korea or _____?

GW: Well, I served, see when you're overseas and in a combat zone, you get points for each one, if you're up front, you get four points a month. And so, you add these points up. I

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was there, I think, I had to get thirty-six points to return home. I was there nine months and all the time I was in the front area. In nine months, I was able to return home. So, it was more than half, but a little less, than a year I was there. Then I came back. And then, what did I do? Then I--

ET: Came back to California?

GW: Yeah, came back to Pasadena.

ET: And you received an honorable discharge?

GW: Yes.

ET: What was your rank?

GW: I ended up with corporal, which is not too good. You know, so then I worked for a while. My intention was to go back to college and enrolled at UCLA.

ET: And when was this?

GW: This was in 1953. I got my degree in '57.

ET: And what was your major?

GW: I was. I was in a field called Pre-Social Welfare. It was my idea was to become possibly a social worker. But after I got into my study, I saw the people that were doing the social work and I said, "I don't think I want to do social work." (Laughs.) So I changed. Later I went back to school again. I went back to Cal State Los Angeles and then got a another Bachelor's degree in Journalism.

ET: And now, where did that take you?

GW: Well, that took me, after I finished my degree, I was looking for work in public relations. What I did was, I was working, while I was going to school. I worked for the airlines. I worked for TWA, which is now defunct; no longer exists.

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ET: What did you do?

GW: Well, I did many things. I was basically a reservations sales agent. When the people call in and you know, make their reservations and plan their itineraries and so forth. I worked for TWA in Los Angeles for about three years I guess. My plan was to go to New York and then try to get involved with TWA in public relations in New York.

So I did an interview with the vice-president of TWA Public Relations, with a man by the name of Gordon Gilmore. But in those days, we don't have the strict rules about discrimination. Now when I went to see Mr. Gilmore he said, "Well George." He said, "I think you didn't attend the right school and you're not the right." He didn't say the right color. But I wasn't Irish, see, all the people I noticed.

ET: Notre Dame?

GW: No, no Boston College, so you had to be from Boston College and so forth and be Irish and all that. And so, I gave that up. I left shortly thereafter. I worked in sales training in New York, too at the airport at Kennedy Airport for TWA. Then, a friend of mine who lived in Chicago had some businesses, asked me if I would like to come to Chicago and work in public relations work. And I said, "Why not?" So, I went there and got started with that. And, I worked with group for a while.

And then, in 1952, no 1950, I was in New York. I was there until '63 and then in '63, I went to Chicago and I worked, sixty....it gets a little fuzzy here. But I was there. I worked in public relations for a while.

Then I worked for a job working for the government. A friend of mine was a recruiter for the government. So he said there was an opportunity to work in Chicago. I worked for an agency called Action, which was the federal volunteer agency. It had the

“Vista” (Volunteering Service to America), the Foster Grandparent Program, RSVP.... I became a regional public information officer. My job was to cover six Midwestern states. I covered Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Ohio and Indiana, which is a big, big area.

ET: You ended up becoming a social worker after all.

GW: (Laughs)

ET: In a way. Now when did you meet your wife?

GW: In Chicago.

ET: When did you marry?

GW: Oh, if I go back further- this is the wife that I mentioned, New York- I got married.

ET: Okay.

GW: And then, I had a child. Then we moved to Chicago and then, we got a divorce there. And then shortly thereafter, I met my current wife.

ET: Your current wife?

GW: Yeah.

ET: So now you're in Chicago. How long were you with the government?

GW: Let's see. I joined in 1960- I joined the government in 1972. And then, in 1975, an opportunity came for me to, a promotion, so I applied for a job in Washington D.C. for the same agency. My boss later told me that I had been one of a hundred and twenty-five applicants for this job. It was like the press officer for this agency. So I, I lucked out.

But the good thing was that I, when I was in Chicago, I worked in contact with my later boss in Washington. So he knew me. And he said that the other candidate that he was considering, was man who was- he said he had a lot of pressure- pressure from-

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he was the Speaker of the House. Anyway, it was his nephew. And so, he said that since he knew me, that he chose me and I went to Washington. Then I worked in Washington from 1975 and I was there until the year 2000.

ET: Now did you and your current wife have any children?

GW: No.

ET: But I didn't ask you- How did you meet her?

GW: Oh, well, I ended up meeting her in a Japanese language course in Chicago. But I did have- I have a daughter from my first marriage who is works in Detroit. She's a sports reporter, which is kind of unusual for a woman.

ET: For television?

GW: No, she's a writer. She covers—

ET: Wow!

GW: --all the Detroit teams. She works—

ET: Good for her.

GW: --the Red Wings, the Lions, the Pistons.

ET: Tigers, yeah. Now, so now you were in Washington D.C. up, until 2000?

GW: Yeah.

ET: And then you retired?

GW: Yes, and then I came here.

ET: Now what brought you back to California? It's funny how you come back around?

GW: Yeah, well I, we decided- w knew we would come west because you know, weather conditions are a lot different back there. In the wintertime, you get snow. And, you get tired of shoveling snow and putting up with these climatic changes all the time.

I came out here early, while we were living there. I came out here and did my tour. I did a search here. I knew I wouldn't want to live in Pasadena, because Pasadena is too hot. I had a friend in Oxnard that I had met in the camp. We were in the same class in camp. I got reacquainted with him and then, I asked him, "Show me around, tell me about this area." He showed me Camarillo and he explained how the weather is here. You know in the afternoon, you get the winds from the ocean and all that, and they were cooling winds. So I said, "Gee, that's pretty good."

I also looked at San Luis Obispo. San Luis Obispo is a little louder, slower thing you know. It's kind of country. It's country here too, but it's—

ET: Not so much. We're so close to LA.

GW: Right and then, I looked at Orange County. I looked at all the freeways and I said, "Oh no, I don't want to get involved in that." I talked to one of my friends who lives in Santa Barbara and I said, "What about the freeways there?" And he said, "Well, three years-well, it's not as bad as you know in LA, but in ten or fifteen years, it's going to get to be like that. It's getting to be like that, but it's still- you know, it's still manageable yet."

ET: You still had ten years, still think about five more years.

GW: Yeah.

ET: Now one thing I didn't ask you, I just thought about this. In your last position, what exactly were your duties?

GW: What, in working where?

ET: When you were working in Washington D.C.?

GW: Oh, I was a public information officer.

ET: What did that entitle?

WAKIJI

GW: Oh well, dealing with the media.

ET: Okay.

GW: When reporters call and they want to talk to someone or get information about a program.

See, I must tell you, that also when I was in Washington, I worked with the Peace Corps.

And, I went overseas and I worked in the South Pacific for three years as a country director for Peace Corps.

ET: What countries did you deal with?

GW: I served in a country called Tonga, it's a Polynesian country. And so, that was interesting, the three years that we were there.

ET: You and your wife?

GW: Yeah.

ET: Wow!

GW: Then we came back and I worked for the Peace Corps for a little while longer. We came back in 1990. Yeah, you don't work forever for the Peace Corps. You just work a certain time. And so, my time was just about up. So I had to leave. And then, I looked for a job. And that was a time when there was a-

ET: Recession?

GW: Yeah, recession and so anyway I lived for a year on severance pay and then unemployment for a while. Then, I found a job working for the Department of Labor in public information again. I worked for them for about three years. Then, I got another job. I was asked to join this foundation in Washington D.C. to help build a memorial for Japanese-Americans. I worked there two years. Then I left and came out here.

ET: Now is the memorial up now that they have created?

WAKIJI

GW: Yeah, it's been created. My successor is going to finish the job.

ET: That's quite an honor that you had a part in this?

GW: Oh yeah, yeah.

ET: How impressive. So now you moved to California. Now tell me a little bit about the JACL?

GW: Okay, the Japanese American Citizens League is the oldest actually Asian American Civil Rights Organization. They have been around since 1929. And what they do, they have chapters all over the country, a little over a hundred chapters in different cities. They have chapters all over this area. We are the chapter for Ventura County. And we, are members are from all the cities of Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, Oxnard, Ventura County. And so what we do, we try to support the national organization, which is based in San Francisco.

But, we run our own program here. So we try to get involved with the community like we got involved with Channel Islands. And, try to do things that interest our, the people who are our members. See some groups who have their chapters like in Honolulu and in Washington D.C. or maybe Chicago, they get more involved in politics. We tend not to do that because the interest of our membership is a little different. Where they are more, that's not their primary—

ET: Community-oriented maybe?

GW: Yeah, yeah, right. They are more interested in community kind of things.

ET: And, and—

GW: Local community.

ET: --and the local community, not just the Japanese-American community?

WAKIJI

GW: No, well, for example, let's just on last Sunday, we had a Cultural Festival at Camarillo, the Community Center. And, it was called the Japanese Cultural Culture Day and it was opened to the community. So we want to let other Americans know about our heritage. We expose them to Japanese entertainment, Japanese dancing, martial arts, music and so forth and also, food available for purchase and so forth.

ET: So I would imagine you had a big turn-out?

GW: Yeah, it was not, we had a fairly size lot and we estimated it to be four to five hundred. Last year we had a big one. We had over seven hundred.

ET: Maybe we should have, we should publish it next year more on campus?

GW: Yeah, yeah.

ET: Because I don't remember seeing anything about it on campus.

GW: Okay, next year we will.

ET: We need to really promote that, especially when we get freshman on campus, because they need things to do. So now, what do you do now during your days?

GW: My days? Sometimes I —

ET: I know you are such a busy man.

GW: I also do some part-time work. I work for Pepperdine Law School. I'm the proctor, when they their finals. I have two weeks of finals, usually just before summer and in December. So I go to Malibu and give kids their final exams. I'm one of the small group, corps of people that do that.

ET: That will keep you busy for a little while right?

GW: Yeah, it's Pepperdine, you know, it's thirty-four miles from here.

ET: The location is great.

GW: Yeah, it's, I do that. And I used to do, I don't do it anymore, but I used to do some writing for a Japanese-American newspaper. And then, I do other things. I get involved with the JACL activities. I go to speaking engagements. And next, in fact, next Tuesday, I will go to Thousand Oaks High School and speak to two history classes. And, in November, the 11th or 13th, I have to decide which day, I'm going to Cal Lutheran University to speak to some students there.

ET: Now, how do these people know to contact you?

GW: Well, the JACL, we have a membership person who puts out a letter and sends it to high school and college history teachers and says that we have this person that when you're studying about American History at that time, we have this speaker available.

ET: How did you become acquainted with Cal State Channel Islands?

GW: Well, let's see. Oh, the way we did was, the JACL every year, we have an installation luncheon there. And when, so for that event, we find a speaker. So one day, I remember I had, I read the paper. I read about Channel Islands. In fact, I have a file on Channel Islands. And then, I saw that there was a professor there by the name of Dennis Muraoka. And Muroka, that's a Japanese name. So, one day I called him and I just had a conversation with him. And I got to know him a little bit.

And then, when our time- every year we have to find a speaker for the event- so I suggested to the group, I said, "Well, we have a Japanese, half Japanese-American professor at Cal State University Channel Islands, would you like to have him as a speaker?" So, they said, "Okay." I called him and he said, "Fine." We set it up for our installation in early February. He came and spoke to us and told the whole group about Channel Islands and what it offers and so forth and so we learned about that.

And then, through that exposure, I mentioned to him one time, I said, “Geez, you know I have some books that maybe I’d like to donate.” And so he said, “Well I’ll put you in touch with, let me talk to the librarian.” So he talked to Paul.

ET: Adalian?

GW: Yeah and then he called and told me and said, “Yeah, we’re interested.” I still have other books that I’m going to give you know on Japan that I have to sort out. And, by the way, I have found another lady in Santa Barbara that wants to donate some books, Japanese-American. Has she contacted you yet?

ET: Not that I know of, but she might have contacted Paul.

GW: Okay, so that’s how our association. And then, he offered to let us use the facilities for the meeting one time, so we went there. And just the other day, he invited me to come to a meeting of, for a history project there. They want to do a project- in 1903- here in Oxnard, there was a strike. What happened was, that Japanese farmworkers and Mexican farmworkers got together and they went against the management and they won. So there, they want to do a documentary about that, a video thing, on CD’s or whatever and then make it available for schools.

So, I went to that meeting, but Paul didn’t explain it too well to me. He- I thought it was just students- but it turned out to be all the biggies were there. You know, Barbara Thorpe and Frank Barajas, Marty...

ET: Marty de los Cobos?

GW: Yeah and then Marti, there was another Marti there (DelaO). She’s going to do the writing with Frank-

ET: Oh okay.

WAKIJI

GW: And then there was a lady from the publisher of the *Broadcaster Magazine*, so she was there. And then, George Sandoval was there.

ET: I have to meet him. He is down as one of my contacts for Oxnard history. Yes, very knowledgeable.

GW: Yeah, so that's how the thing is going. And so, and then I remember Paul asking about, he mentioned you were doing a history, oral history, so I've been supplying names to you. And so, that's the situation.

ET: Now, going back to the JACL, how many members do you have now currently?

GW: We have approximately two hundred in this area.

ET: That's pretty impressive.

GW: Yeah.

ET: And is there a particular age group or is it sort of spread around?

GW: No, it's a particular age group. They're older. I would say most of the members are forty and up and there may be a few younger, but not too many. The majority are probably in their sixties and seventies.

ET: Is there a reason why you think that is? Just older people tend to want to congregate more than younger people?

GW: See, the younger people have other interests now and this is not a prime thing for them. But it's very interesting that they should be aware of what goes on. Here, this is our publication for Japanese-American citizens. And here, I know this young man. He lives in New Jersey and he wants to run for City Council there in Summit, New Jersey. He got this hate mail saying- part of the letter said, "People like you sneak into the United States knowing how to speak two words of English, Political Asylum. Your political agenda is

fabricated, just like your personal facade. Underneath is an Asian, broken-English among peers. Kindly return to your Asian nation to seek leadership. Your people need you.” So, it’s interesting. It’s even a problem here. JoAnn Van Reenan is a member of our chapter.

ET: Oxnard Library.

GW: Yeah. She got a letter, a hate letter. Well not [quite] a hate letter and a phone call from some man who said he’s from the Pearl Harbor Survivors. And the point I was trying to make is that most, many Americans cannot distinguish between us who are Americans born and raised here, educated here as opposed to the people that are from Japan, you know. I mean we, we look like the enemy, so that’s how we got involved in this whole thing about being incarcerated.

And so, it’s not a pleasant thing sometimes. And she said, “Gee, I didn’t realize things like this still go on, you know.” But see, that didn’t surprise me one bit. She called me after it happened and I said, “No, look JoAnn, there is always going to be people that don’t particularly like people for whatever reason. They have their own reasons.” But, you just have to be on guard. I mean, when I go any place, especially if I go into the South, my antenna goes up very quickly. I am more aware of people or how they’re behaving because they, more Japanese from Japan get into problems in the South than any place else.

Do you remember this case where a young boy was here [US] as a student? At Halloween time, he got involved with some of his friends going, you know, around the neighborhood and trick or treating or whatever. He went to a neighborhood, in where was it, it was in Baton Rouge or some place. And, the man had a gun and I guess he was

upset at these kids coming around doing things. And he told the kid, "Freeze." And, the kid didn't understand it the slang and just kept going forward and the guy just killed him.

And so there, you know, there's a lot of people here and there are a lot of people in this area who I would consider "red neck" types. And, I would not be too- I would be very careful around them, because you don't know how they're going to react. See- if I were to do something- I can generally tell by what they're saying or what's going on. I always try to figure out what's going on in the environment around me, otherwise you get into situations, where you get hurt.

ET: You learn that as a youngster?

GW: Yeah, see, we learned that very quickly here growing up in California. It's interesting- I would like, I should talk about- a little bit about the Hawaiian Japanese. See they weren't incarcerated.

ET: Oh!

GW: Well, the reason is that the people that were in charge in Hawaii were a little smarter. They realized that if they were to take the hundred and forty thousand Japanese and put, and where are you going to ship them? Are you going to ship them to the mainland? The whole economy would have collapsed there. And so, they said, "Oh no, we're not going to you know put these people in a camp." They did take a few, less than two thousand people and brought them here. And, remember when the FBI went around at the beginning here? The same situation there.

Well now, the rest of them were just left alone. There was martial law there during the war, but they agreed, they realized that- well people- interestingly enough, the man who later became governor of Hawaii named John Burns was a detective on the

Honolulu Police Force at that time and he lived with the Japanese. He lived in their community. And, he spoke up and he said, “Look, these, these are my friends. They’re not going to do anything you know.” And so, they listened to people like him.

Well see, on the mainland here, people didn’t listen. And, they just went ahead and Roosevelt just said, “Okay, we’re going to— “ and he had a general. His name was DeWitt and DeWitt just relished in this idea and his famous line was, “A Jap is a Jap.” The kind of thing you know, in other words, we’re all just like them. And, he fell into the same trap of making that assumption. He was gung ho about putting us in a camp. So, he became the head guy to do this.

ET: Now did anybody- and this is a little bit out of the area of internment- but, did anybody that you were aware of defect and go back to Japan?

GW: Yeah. There were people, a small number of them, they were given an option of going back to Japan. They were sent to this camp in California, Northern California, the Oregon border called, Tule Lake. And some people worked, the young kids went with their parents. They didn’t want, to probably want to go. But, they were forced to go, because their parents decided, “Well we’re going to go.” I think there were a few thousands of those kind of folks.

And that’s not unusual. There was even a group in the camp- many of the people, young males that were draftees served in the military.

ET: That’s something that I wanted to ask you, that you had mentioned earlier. So they had to be interned, but if they were of age, they were used in the military?

GW: Right. Well they—

ET: It sort of seems to be a double-edged sword?

WAKIJI

GW: Oh yeah, yeah, well that's—

ET: It's like, "Oh well, then give them a gun."

GW: Yeah, yeah.

ET: If they're such a danger....

GW: Exactly, that's the irony.

ET: Give them the opportunity of really performing sabotage, if that's what you think. That makes really—

GW: Well then, one of the things that helped change the opinion of many of American's tour guys was the fact that the Japanese-Americans from Hawaii and the mainland from the camps served overseas in a segregated unit. It was called the 442nd Regiment Combat Team [Heart Mountain]. And, they were outstanding. They were so good that the generals asked for them.

In other words, there was a famous story- the Lost Battalion of the Texas 34th Division. It was trapped in- they were being surrounded by Germans. And so, this general [American] said, "Let's get the 442nd", which they did. There were two hundred soldiers in this force- this area was being bombarded and surrounded. And so, they sent the 442nd Regimental Combat Team into rescue them. And to save two hundred, the 442nd suffered more than eight hundred casualties. In other words, that doesn't mean all of them killed, but they're all wounded; some either wounded or killed to rescue these two hundred.

So what happened was, that the Texans were very grateful, naturally. So they said that the 442nd were honorary Texans, you know... they were outstanding. And, they were such a cohesive unit. They were the most decorated unit of its size in World War

II. In other words, they had thousands of Purple Hearts. You know, [usually] they only got one Purple Heart; some of them got three or more.

Some guys from Hawaii came up with the expression- you see it in the vernacular now, because they said, "Go for broke." Which means shoot the works. That was their slogan. They would go out there and even if their buddies were getting killed, they would, they went ahead and took their objective. And so, they were given a lot of acclamation. Because of that, people said, "Oh, well they can't be bad Americans," you know.

But there was a group, a small group in one of the camps in Heart Mountain, they were asked to go join the Army, after they were taken away. And they said, "No, I don't think so unless you release us, you release our parents. We don't think we want to go." It was a small number. I mean less than a hundred. But they said no, we won't go. They went to serve their time in jail [the Fair Play Committee became the only organized resistance by draft-age Nisei.]. They had their principals. So, that was one of the things in our community that some people got very upset about; some of these guys are traitors. I think if that's the way you feel and you're willing to serve prison time for that, that's okay with me, you know. I mean that's, that's allowed, you know. Why condemn them? I think they were pretty brave to do that. I doubt if I would have done that. But that's, you know, each individual's choice. That's the way it goes.

ET: Now, how many people were in this, this league, this small military battalion?

GW: Uh—

ET: You said they lost eight hundred. It must have been a pretty good size?

WAKIJI

GW: Oh well, a regiment at that time- see, in a division, at that time they had three regiments.

And, a division could be from fifteen to twenty thousand men. And so, a regiment could be up, at least five thousand men or more, plus supporting units. They have what they call an “artillery battalion” that’s attached. They have an engineering group that’s attached, a medical unit that’s attached. And so, that beefs it up. There are probably about eight thousand people involved in this thing.

ET: That’s quite huge.

GW: And it’s interesting. One of the things is that a unit of the 442, the field artillery battalion, they were among the group that rescued the Jewish from Dachau. And—

ET: Oh really?

GW: Oh- maybe it was in another one [it is acknowledged that the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion of the 442nd assisted with the liberation of Dachau], but, there’s a man actually from this area, Mr. Fujisaki, that was in that group and there were five hundred and twenty-second killed, killing at that time of the 422nd Infantry Regiment.

ET: Now did they ever send the regiment to Japan to do these things?

GW: They didn’t send the regiment...

ET: To Europe?

GW: --but, there was a group of six thousand other Japanese-American soldiers who served in the military intelligence, Military Intelligence Service, MIS. By the way, there is going to be, JoAnn is showing a movie this coming November 9th at the library about the exploits of this group.

ET: Oh, I’ll talk to her.

GW: It’s called *Uncommon Courage*. It’s going to be at two o’clock on November 9th.

WAKIJI

ET: Okay, okay.

GW: But see what happens is, in the fight against Japan, they needed people who understood the language. So what they did was- there were a number of Japanese-American males who had been sent to Japan, like my sister for example, to learn Japanese. One of the reasons that they went though, was because of the pledges of those here; they couldn't go to certain schools or whatever. So, their parents said, "Well if that's the case, then we'll send them to an education over in Japan."

Well these people, while they were there, they learned the language. They became fluent. And so, the Army said, "Oh wow, we can use these guys." And so, what they did was, they set up military language schools for the people and they were trained then and they were sent overseas with combat units, who were assigned to the Marine Corps, they were assigned to the Army and they served as interpreters, translators. And so, the man- who was in General MacArthur's command over there- I can't remember his name now- but, he said that the fact that these people- the military intelligence people- were involved, shortened the war by two years at least, he said.

ET: Really?

GW: World War II, yeah, a famous general. Well, I don't know how famous he is, but a general that served under MacArthur said that [Major General Charles Willoughby]. And, it's documented. It is interesting, that movie that we're going to see, we're going to go. I've seen it before, but I'll see it again.

ET: This concludes the oral history interview with Mr. George Wakiji of the Japanese-American League.

END OF INTERVIEW