CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Japanese American Project

Sansei Experience

O.H. 1230

DR. CRAIG KEI IHARA

Interviewed

by

Betty E. Mitson

on

December 18, 1972

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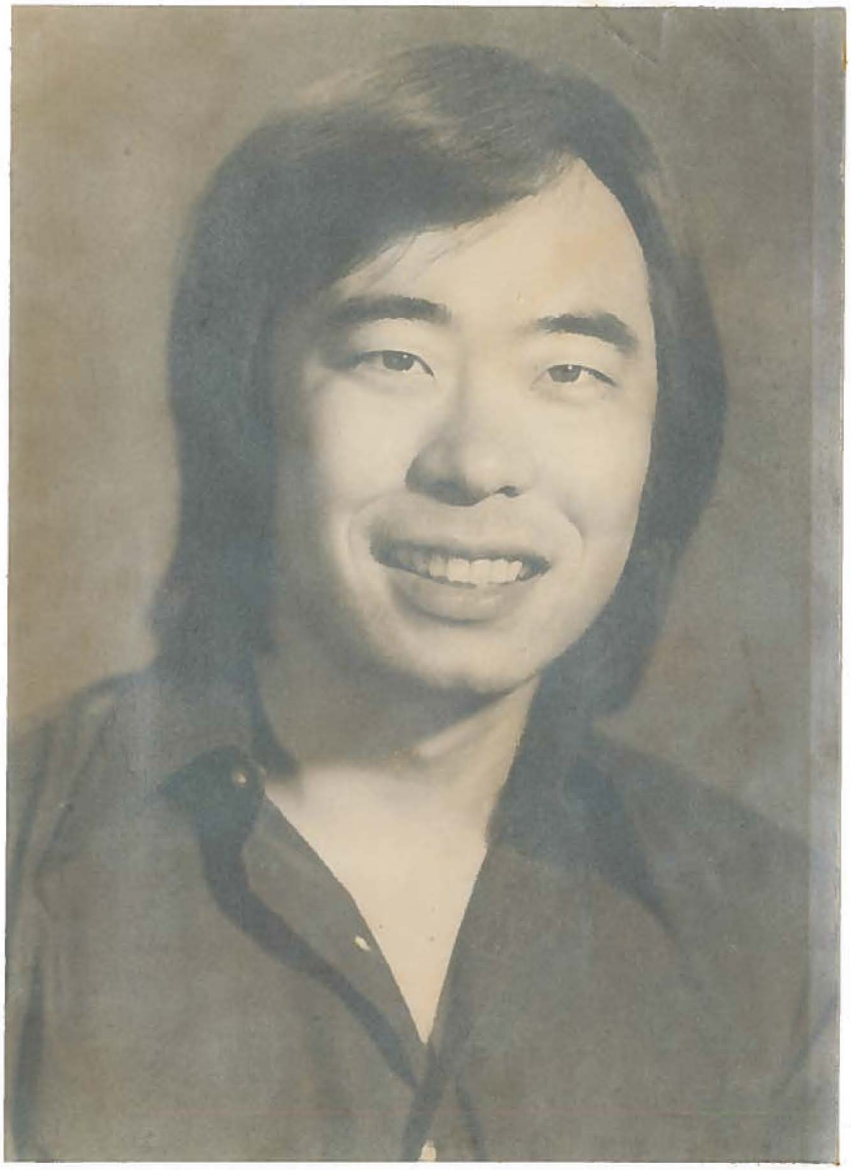

Craig Kei Ihara

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INTERVIEWEE: DR. CRAIG KEI IHARA

INTERVIEWER: Betty E. Mitson

SUBJECT: Sansei experience

DATE: December 18, 1972

M: This is an interview with Dr. Craig Kei Ihara in his home at [redacted] for the Japanese American Oral History Project at California State University, Fullerton. The date is December 18, 1972 at 1:30 p.m.

Dr. Ihara, would you tell me when and where you were born?

I: I was born [redacted], in Rohwer Relocation Center in Arkansas.

M: Then were both of your parents in the relocation camp in Arkansas during World War II?

I: That's right.

M: Would you tell me where they came from before they were sent there?

I: Well, my father was raised here in Los Angeles, very close to the Little Tokyo area. My mother was raised primarily in the San Pedro area, although her family did quite a bit of moving around while she was young, primarily in this Los Angeles community area.

M: Were both of your parents Nisei?

I: That's right.

M: Then you are a Sansei?

I: Yes.

M: Do you have any bothers or sisters?

I: I have two younger brothers. Danny is five years younger than I am. He is twenty-five. My youngest brother is Richard; he is twenty.

M: Were your parents married before they went to the camp?

I: Yes, they were for a very short time.

M: Do you recall any unusual incidents that they may have told you about, either in connection with going to the camp or in the camp itself?

I: I'm not sure what you consider unusual. They have told me a fair amount about the time previous to going to camp. My grandfather on my father's side was summarily taken away by the FBI. That was one of the more traumatic occasions there before the war. Then their experiences in Santa Anita. They talk of that.

M: Where was your grandfather sent to?

I: I'm not sure of the exact location. It was someplace here in California.

M: Was it more of a detention camp than a relocation camp?

I: That's right. It was part of that initial roundup of prominent Japanese Americans, and they took mostly the male heads of the household, you know, the prime thirty to forty age group.

M: He was an immigrant, then, from Japan.

I: That's right.

M: Do you know if there was a specific reason why--other than the fact that he was an immigrant--that he was singled out to be taken away?

I: The only other reason, I believe, is that he was fairly prominent in the Japanese American community. He was part owner in one of the larger produce markets here and worked or served as accountant for this business. I guess he was one of the wealthier Issei people.

M: I see. He was considered a leader then, presumably, or perhaps a potential leader.

I: That's right. I'm not sure he was all that active in the Japanese-American community, but he had a certain amount of prestige there so, I guess, potentially.

M: Is he still living?

I: No, he died two years ago.

M: Do you know how long he had to spend in the detention camp?

I: I'm very vague about the exact amount of time. I believe it was a few months before they were all . . . before the rest of the family

was taken away. And then, I think, there was also a period of time before he was able to join them in the relocation camp.

M: He did come, then, to Arkansas?

I: That's right.

M: Then your grandmother went on with your parents while he was in the detention camp?

I: That's right. Both families were able to go to the same camp, and they had to work at it in order to do this. Since my mother and father were just married, my mother's family--my mother and my grandmother and grandfather--moved into the same house as my father and his parents' house.

M: Before they were relocated?

I: That's right, because apparently they knew that they would be relocated according to the housing setups. So by moving in together, that helped guarantee they would be sent to the same camp, I think.

M: Do you know what year they were married?

I: It was only about a year before I was born, so it was about 1942. In fact, as I recall, their anniversary is something like April 15, 1942.

M: Oh, so that was <u>just</u> before they left.

I: That's right, it was just before they left. I suppose they already had a good suspicion that something like this might happen.

M: So then your mother's parents were also able to go to Arkansas.

I: Yes, both families were able to stay together, which was nice.

M: Do you suppose they had to do quite a lot of appealing to the authorities in order to be able to arrange that?

I: No, I don't think they did any appealing. I think that just by moving in together they were able to make the probabilities pretty good that they would be sent to the same place.

M: Oh, I see. So both in-laws were living in the same household.

I: For this brief period. See, my grandfather, my father's father, had just recently purchased a very large house. It was certainly a large house for that time, and had just spent a lot of money furnishing it and decorating it, and things of that sort. It could easily accommodate both families.

M: Was that right down in Little Tokyo?

I: That's on Twenty-first Street. In fact, they still live there now--my grandmother, and my aunt and her husband. So one part of the family lives in that house. Of course, it's a very old house now. It was, even then, an old house, but it's very large. I think it is something like three or four bedrooms, two story.

M: Do you know how they managed to maintain that house while they were in the camp?

I: Yes, this is something I just learned recently. What they did was they rented it to some people. I think they said they were Jewish real estate people, and they rented it to them for fifty dollars a month, and apparently what happened was that they in turn rented out the rooms of the place because of the great wartime shortage in housing. They rented out the rooms for fifty dollars apiece, so they made an incredible killing on that deal. Besides which, the house was apparently in a shambles when they came back. Much of what they had put into it was gone. But even at that, they considered themselves lucky because so many people lost their homes. At least they were able to get it back.

M: Did they leave their furniture and things like that on the property, do you know?

I: I'm not too sure about that. Perhaps some of it, but I imagine they put away as much of it as they could. I'm not clear on that particular detail.

M: Do you know if your grandfather lost a great deal as far as his business was concerned, financially speaking?

I: He did lose a fair amount, partly because there was so much growth potential in his business, and he had to sell out of that, of course. He lost his job, too, as an accountant. When he came back he was too old really to start over in that business, so he worked as a gardener until he retired, from when he came back in about 1948 to when he retired in something like 1962 or 1964. So certainly that side of the family lost a fair amount of money. The other side of the family never had very much, so as a consequence they didn't have very much to lose.

M: Do you recall your grandparents speaking to <u>you</u> about that time? Do you have any memories at all of them speaking to you of going into the camp or what they might have lost by that experience? Or did they not converse with you much about that?

I: Well, I talk to my mother's mother, that grandmother, fairly frequently on this. My father's mother, my grandmother on that side, speaks no English, so our communication is very limited. I talked a little bit to my grandfather before he died. They generally take a very philosophic attitude toward these occurrences in the past. They are not bitter about it, although they do talk about it as a period of considerable hardship and worry. I never heard my

grandfather say anything about what he lost financially, so I'm not sure exactly how hard that hit him.

M: Does your grandmother on your mother's side ever speak of that? They didn't lose as much, you say.

I: They didn't lose as much materially; they just didn't have very much. They speak mostly of the anxiety involved in not knowing where they would be going and of the hostility that was directed at them in this period before they were relocated and of the conditions in the camp.

But, again, they take a very philosophic attitude. Probably a more philosophic attitude than I would take if I were in that situation, because, since things have been good for them since the war, they feel that it was something of a blessing in disguise. Too often, I think, they tend to excuse the activities of the government on the grounds that it was a blessing in disguise but, of course, it was not intended to be that way.

M: No. Is your mother's father still living?

I: No, he died. He was a stepfather. He died when I was in junior high school. In fact, he was paralyzed and was actually in the hospital, in the rest home, for about two years. I have very fond memories of him. He was a very nice old man, but he passed away before I was of an age when I could really ask him very much.

M: You mentioned speaking to your grandfather but not to your grandmother. Do I understand correctly, then, that you speak only English?

I: I speak a little bit of Japanese but not enough to converse about serious matters. I speak enough to ask for more rice at the dinner table, things of that sort, but not enough to hold a really serious conversation. Especially since my father's mother really speaks no English at all, it's very difficult to communicate with her. My other grandmother speaks very good English and besides which, since I grew up with her, I can understand her Japanese much better than I can understand my other grandmother's Japanese which is slightly different, slightly more accented.

M: How did she learn English?

I: She had a pretty good education, actually, in Japan. She and her sisters went to some church missionary school. I don't know if it should be called a missionary school or not. It was a Christian organization from the United States.

M: Located in Japan?

I: Yes, it was in Japan. In fact, this was far away in northern Japan. She was raised in Hokkaido primarily, because her father,

my great-grandfather, was a mining engineer and was in charge of one of the mines.

M: What kind of mine?

I: Gold. She is very proud of him, because apparently at that time, of course, there were very few people with any kind of technical training. He was largely self-taught and apparently very well-educated generally. He was also a captain in the cavalry during the Sino-Japanese War.

Apparently, he sent her to this school, and she learned pretty good English there. When my wife and I visited Japan four years ago, we got to meet her sister. Even she remembered English, amazingly enough, never having to use it in all these years. We could still converse with her. It was pretty amazing.

M: Do you know how some of your grandparents happened to come to the United States?

I: My father's father was the youngest of a samurai family. And the eldest son was to inherit, I suppose, most of what they had and was to retain the position of prominence with the local lord; it was apparently still a kind of feudal system. Of course, their feudal system had been done away with, but they still had ties with certain groups. And the youngest brother, my grandfather, apparently didn't have, didn't feel he had, much in the way of opportunity there. So America you know, the land of opportunity; he decided to come.

M: Do you know if he was able to come in legally?

I: Yes, they all came in legally, as far as I know. They all came in before the period of the Alien Exclusion Act. It was 1925, or something like that.

M: Yes, 1924 I believe.

I: My grandmother, my mother's mother, came in <u>just</u> before that period. She came in 1924. My other grandfather was an orphan and never really knew his own parents, so apparently--I just infer this--apparently he too didn't have very much there in Japan. So he decided that, in terms of opportunity, he would be better off here in the United States. He came to the United States just after the San Francisco earthquake. He used to talk once in awhile about what conditions were like there. He wasn't there during the earthquake but during the period when they were rebuilding.

My other grandmother, my father's mother, was actually a picture bride. A picture bride--that's not exactly precise. It was an arranged marriage. My grandfather wanted a wife, so he had his older brother in Japan arrange a marriage for him. They did a very careful job of finding one with the appropriate skills and the

appropriate temperament. Because my grandfather had this terrible temper, they picked a woman for him that was very even-tempered. She's even-tempered to a fault, I'm afraid.

M: Did they send a picture of her over from Japan?

I: I think they probably did; I'm not sure. I imagine they did.

M: Do you have a family picture of their wedding in their native costume?

I: My mother does.

M: In their costume?

I: I think so, yes.

M: I've seen some of those types of pictures.

I: Yes, they're very nice little pictures. All my grandparents have very nice pictures. They all look very nice in their regalia.

M: Did your mother's mother come to the United States under the sponsorship of the church group that she was associated with?

I: No, she didn't. I'm not too sure of the details involved in that.

M: But they all came directly to the United States? Not to Hawaii first?

I: No, they didn't stop there at all.

M: And did they all come to the Southern California area first?

I: No, they all seem to have . . . Their point of entry seems to have been San Francisco. And they all seem to have spent a fair amount of time up there. Well, I'd say it was about a year, perhaps a little longer. They all seemed to drift down here eventually. I'm not quite sure why. But I know, when my grandfathers came, of course, they were very young men; perhaps not even into their twenties yet. They had all kinds of odd jobs, working in laundries, working on farms, ranches. So, I suppose, it was largely a matter of where the jobs were. I'm not sure of the economic conditions at that time, but perhaps there were more job opportunities down here in Southern California.

M: Do you know how your grandfather learned the skill of accounting?

I: I think he went to night school. This was after he had settled down here in Los Angeles. That's a detail I should clear up; I'm not exactly sure. He probably did have a fairly good education as a boy in Japan, because the family there was--I don't know if I should say fairly well-off--at least moderately well-off.

M: What are your brothers doing now?

I: Well, Danny is working off the second year of his C.O. work. He's a conscientious objector.

M: What is he doing as his alternate work?

I: He is helping out at this place called Redwood Workshop in Eureka, California where they teach handicapped and mentally retarded people a trade. They make redwood planters, primarily. At the moment it's largely government funded, but it's to go on its own, as a private enterprise and support this work force which is largely mentally retarded, some deaf, and a few crippled.

M: Is that under the State of California, do you know?

I: It's funded through the federal government. I don't think there are any connections with the state government, although I'm not sure about the details on that.

M: Do you know how long his period of required service is?

I: Well, it's a two-year period that's required. And he worked first of all for a nonprofit ecological publication at Berkeley for a few months. It wasn't successfully funded, so he moved up to Eureka and found this job. He has been at this job for about a year and a half now, so he should be done with that in about two months or three months.

M: Then am I correct in assuming that he had a certain leeway in the choice of things that he wished to do?

I: That's right. Apparently there were so many people applying for and receiving C.O. classifications that the federal government just didn't have the time or the manpower to find them all positions. So after waiting for something like six or eight months for an assignment from the government, he finally decided that the only thing to do was to go out and find a job himself. This is what he was told by other people that he knew that were C.O.'s. What they said is that you find the job and get hired at it, and then apply to have that approved as appropriate work. He was very lucky, actually. I mean, both jobs were fairly interesting, and this last job put him in an area that he likes very much, Eureka. He's married now, and they're planning to settle down in that Eureka area.

M: Oh, that's interesting. Did he find his wife up there?

I: He found his wife on the first job, in the ecological newspaper publication. She's a very nice girl from Connecticut. She's Caucasian. Oh, they're a very nice couple. They've been married not quite a year now; ten months they have been married.

M: Has he expressed any idea as to whether or not what he has been doing will lead on to what he wants to do when he finishes?

I: I doubt that it will tie in to a very great degree, because he has always been interested in writing. He has his English B.A. from Berkeley. He is even now, I think, trying to write things like short stories and things of that sort. So, I imagine, he will continue on in that direction, perhaps getting a teaching credential or something of that sort. His wife wants to go to New York for a brief period so that she can finish her master's degree. So they will probably do that this fall, and then come back to Eureka or wherever he may need . . . I don't know if Danny wants to get his Ph.D. or if he's just going to get a secondary credential, or what. But he is a very bright boy. He will know what to do. By the way, he spent his first three years of college at a place called Deep Springs. It's a very small college in central California, near the Nevada border. There are twenty students at this place. It was funded so that certain exceptional students would get a great all-around education in terms of practical experience, working and governing their own community. Educationally, it was a very interesting place that he was at.

M: What about your other brother?

I: My youngest brother is, at the moment, going part time to Cerritos Junior College. He is the musician of the family.

M: Oh. What does he play?

I: He plays a number of things, actually, but primarily he plays the piano. He plays a bassoon and saxophone, and--I don't know. He just picks things up. He's very talented musically. He does his own composing and his own arranging, and he has been involved in a number of groups. Usually he'll lead a group and do their arranging, things of that sort. And he has done a fair amount of--I guess you could say--professional performances.

M: Is he a music major?

I: He's a music major, that's right. And he will probably go on performing, although his eventual idea, again, is to have a teaching credential to fall back on. But I would like to see him do some performing before he settles down into any kind of teaching role.

M: What kind of music is his favorite?

I: He's very interested in jazz, actually, but all forms of music. He is getting a very good background there at Cerritos JC. They have a good music department there, in terms of theory, in classical background, in technique. He's getting a good education. But his main interest is not classical, which is one of the reasons why I recommended that he not go to UCLA or University of California

campuses, because their interests are primarily classical. His main interest is in jazz, and I think some of the state colleges, places like San Fernando Valley State, or I guess it's Cal State Northridge now, has a very good program on jazz.

M: Does he have an income from this while he is going to school?

I: Well, he spends his money faster than he makes it, but he does have an income of sorts, depending on what kind of jobs he's at; if it's a regular job or just weekends. At the moment, I think, he's primarily just playing weekends, but he makes a fairly good income from that actually. And then, too, he's still living at home. He's the last brother to leave home. So he doesn't have room and board to worry about, and tuition at the junior college is nominal, so it's working out pretty well for him, I think.

M: You are married, too, aren't you?

I: That's right. I've been married for four years, six months.

M: What is your wife's name?

I: Claire Ayami. Her maiden name was Harada.

M: Is she working at the present time?

I: That's right. She works as, shall we say, a lab technician. It's a photo lab. She does the darkroom work for this small advertising company. The company makes advertising specialty items. They print advertisements on lighters and tapes and things of that sort, and they use this photographic silkscreen technique. She's an Art major and has an interest in photography. She works developing the film, and then touching it up and putting it on the silkscreen and things of that sort.

M: You say she is an Art major. Is she currently attending school?

I: No. She was an Art major at San Jose, in her last semester when we got married. And her education was cut short because we spent our first year of marriage in Hong Kong where I was studying for a year. Then when we came back, the financial necessities required that she go to work because, though I had a teaching assistantship one year and fellowships the other two, it was still not enough to support two people. She has been very good about it. She has been working for the last three and a half years.

M: Is she going part time, or has she just suspended it for the moment?

I: She just suspended it. It's a full time job, and with everything else it's pretty hard. Next year she is going to go back to school. I think she is going to be attending Cal State Fullerton. So she

will get a year off from work; a year to finish her degree. And then after that, we'll see what happens.

M: We haven't talked about your work at all. I know where you work, but would you tell about that for the tape.

I: Actually, I'm in my first semester teaching as assistant professor at Cal State Fullerton in the Philosophy Department. I'm enjoying it very much. It has been a lot of work, but I've been very happy with the students, and the department, and the school in general.

M: You have quite a long way to travel every day. How do you hold up under it?

I: Well, it hasn't been too easy, but hasn't been quite so bad either because one of the other members of the Philosophy Department lives in West Los Angeles, and twice a week we share a ride in to the campus. So it hasn't been quite as bad as it might be. Although on Tuesdays and Thursdays I'm supposed to be there at eight in the morning, which means I get up earlier than I'm used to. But the eight o'clock class is largely an outcome of the fact that I was hired after the schedule was worked out, and so I had no choice about what kind of schedule I would have for this fall semester. From here out, I will have a great deal of discretion as to when my hours will be, so it will be much better.

M: Have you made any plans to move closer to your work?

I: We're going to move out there next summer. That's what we plan to do. The main reason we stayed here this year is, in part, because I anticipated having to do a lot of work in UCLA on my dissertation, and because my wife had this job here in West Los Angeles. Also, we weren't really prepared to move this summer, since I was working on my dissertation so hard, to really relocate. We didn't feel that we were quite up to it while doing that.

M: Would you tell me a little bit about yourself? Let's backtrack a bit. Do you recall anything at all about the camp experience, or were you too young?

I: I'm afraid not. I was not even two when we left Rohwer, Arkansas, and my earliest recollections are of Cleveland. I have a few of Chicago. We lived in Chicago and Cincinnati and then in Cleveland where we lived about three years. From the time I was four until the time I was seven, we were in Cleveland, and I remember those days fairly well, but certainly nothing of camp.

M: Were your folks resettled, out of the camp, before the war was over to Chicago?

I: There was a program on which they could leave the camp and try to find work. I'm not sure of the exact order in which this all

happened. But both my grandmother and my mother, at various times, left the camp toward the very end of the war to try to find a place to resettle.

M: When you say your grandmother and your mother, do you mean along with their husbands?

I: Yes, that's right.

M: But were the families split up?

I: The families were split up; they couldn't all leave at once. They had to get separate permission, is my understanding of how it worked, and they went out as individuals to try to find work. My grandmother, in fact, worked for a time on a ranch in Texas during the war, so she was gone for a certain period of time. I'm not sure when; the dates you would have to get from her.

M: The dates aren't terribly important, but she went out on a temporary work situation, apparently, and then came back to camp. This is your mother's mother?

I: That's right.

M: Then did both families go to Chicago, or just one side of the family?

I: Both families went to Chicago, and they were able to rent one large house where they lived together. My dad, actually, was in the Army at that time. He enlisted at the very end of the war and actually was in training when the war came to an end. My uncle was in some kind of translating corps for the Army.

M: Did he go to the South Pacific?

I: Yes, he was in the . . . Again, I don't know whether he was there before the war was over. He was there after the war, that much I know.

So my father didn't originally go with the families when they went to Chicago, because neither he nor my uncle were around. But from Chicago, the families split up somewhat--I'm not quite sure why--and went to Cincinnati for awhile, and then my mother's side of the family went to Cleveland.

M: You say you were about seven or so when you left Cleveland?

I: That's right. My grandparents on my father's side came back to Los Angeles a little while before we did. We came in--when I say "we," I mean my mother and her mother--we came back in 1949, and I guess they came back sometime in 1948.

M: Do you know what prompted them to leave Cleveland and come back to the West Coast?

I: Well, they never liked it back there. I mean, they never wanted, really, to go to the Midwest, but there was still so much animosity out in California. It was made very clear that Japanese were not welcome back in California. So it seemed, I think, the prudent thing to do, to stay in the Midwest. I'm not sure--you might check on this--whether there was actually some kind of legal restriction on coming back. I don't know--probably not, because I think Claire said that her parents came back in 1946, and that was very shortly after the war was over. But it did seem like the prudent course at that time, I think, to stay in the Midwest. I think other Japanese Americans went as far back as New York and New England to find work.

M: Did all of those, on both sides of your family, who went to the Midwest eventually find their way back to the West Coast?

I: That's right. The whole family came back. Nobody liked the cold winters and the poor living conditions. Of course, they didn't have very much money when they left camp. I mean, they were virtually turned out without anything, so the housing that we could find was certainly not the greatest. And the jobs that they could find were certainly not the greatest. My grandmother worked as a seamstress, and my father held various jobs when he got out of the Army--that was in Cleveland--none of them very profitable. My mother went to school and became a cosmetologist. But, of course, she was saddled with me and then later with my second brother, so she really didn't work very much back there.

M: When you came back to the coast again in 1949, do you recall, as a young boy, anything about the sort of attitudes that confronted you in the schools? Do you recall anything specific?

I: When I started kindergarten, there was a certain amount of overt prejudice. The kids--probably because they picked up attitudes from their parents--might refer to me as a Jap or make fun of the fact that I looked different.

M: Was this in Los Angeles?

I: This was in Gardena. When my mother and grandmother came back, we settled in Gardena. We first came back and spent some time with my father's side of the family. As I said, they moved back into their old house in Los Angeles, but I think we stayed there about three or four months before we moved out to Gardena. So when I started school out there, that's really when I started my schooling. I was in kindergarten in Cleveland, but I was sick so much of my kindergarten year that I really didn't go to school very much. I nearly flunked that grade, I think.

I do recall a few cases of prejudice in the grammar school, but it wasn't too serious. It wasn't as if I was bearing the whole brunt of the burden, because there was already a fair-sized Japanese population there. I was far from being the only Japanese student

in the school. Of course, at that time I really didn't understand what it was all about. I didn't know what the camp was about. I knew that we had been away, and I knew that somehow or other the war affected us to a much greater degree than anyone else. And I wasn't quite sure whether I was the enemy or not. But at that time in life I didn't take it very seriously.

M: Do you have any idea how early it was that you realized that you were a distinct type who was being singled out, perhaps consciously or unconsciously?

I: I don't recall any one occasion, of course, but I think that it was during grammar school, probably in the third or fourth grade. At least, I came to recognize that we were a distinct minority group, and I came to understand something of the wartime situation.

But I had many, many Caucasian friends, so I didn't really associate exclusively with Japanese for the most part. So that realization really didn't have much of an effect on me at that time.

M: In other words, it wasn't such that you feel it would have warped your personality, or anything of that sort.

I: No, I don't think so. No. I felt pretty much like one of the boys. Probably more then than I do now. (chuckle by both)

M: Do you recall what influence there was in your home, as far as the traditions of a Japanese family are concerned, or a Japanese religion? What kind of religious situation was there?

I: Well, probably not very traditional at all, since both of my grandmothers were raised as Christians.

You know, it never really occurred to me to ask them this, but I just wonder--perhaps not with them--but certainly there must have been a certain amount of motivation on the part of Japanese who were Christian to come to the United States rather than stay in Japan. At any rate, they were both Christian; my father's father was also Christian. My mother's stepfather was nominally a Buddhist, but as far as I know, he never went to church. So as far as the religious background goes, it was exclusively Christian. I knew absolutely nothing about Buddhism until very late in life, until I got to college.

M: Do you know if the fact that they were Christian, predated their immigration?

I: That's right. They were both Christian before they came.

M: You did mention the one, but I wasn't sure about the other. All those who were Issei who immigrated were Christian before, with the exception of the one who was Buddhist?

I: Well, I'm sure of my two grandmothers, but I'm not quite sure of my father's father, whether he was Christian before he came or not. But if he wasn't, he converted here. I imagine that with my mother's mother that it was the influence of this church school that she went to which converted her, because I know that my great-grandfather was not a Christian.

M: Since they were Christian, did you have a regular Christian situation in the home? In other words, did you attend Sunday school regularly?

I: Yes, I did. It wasn't a very strongly religious atmosphere within the home. But I did go regularly to church on Sundays, from the earliest time I can remember. I was a very regular churchgoer until I was about fourteen years old.

M: Was this a church that had other Japanese Americans attending?

I: It was an exclusively Japanese-American church.

M: In Gardena, you are speaking of?

I: The name of the church is Gardena Valley Baptist Church. There is a very interesting occasion that sticks out in my mind. I guess, I was something like in the seventh grade. One of the few times that I remember being struck with the fact that we were regarded as so different. At that time, the youth group was interested in establishing relations with other churches in the area, which meant other churches which were white. We went to a service--I can't remember now which denomination it was, but the youth group went. We were sitting there, and as the minister came up front, he thought he would, I suppose, recognize our presence. He introduced us as the Gardena Japanese Church, which was not our name.

M: Oh! That must have been a shock.

I: People looked around. We looked at each other. "He must mean us." So we all stood up. But it was a very embarrassing moment, and something that sticks out in my mind.

M: I guess it would!

I: I'm sure the minister was very well-intentioned, but it was this very subconscious thing.

M: That's an interesting insight into a little poignant situation. Did your church have Christmas pageants?

I: Oh, yes.

M: And you'd go through the story of the manger scene?

I: Oh, that's right, the whole bit.

M: Did you ever participate in those things? Have to say little pieces?

I: Oh, I think I probably did. I can't remember. Maybe I'm repressing them. I can't remember anything big that I did. I may have done a few small bits. But at that age, I was a very somber child, and I did not like taking part in kinds of masquerade. I never went on Hallowe'en because, for some reason, I didn't like to make myself up in a costume. So I remember every Hallowe'en in the grammar school, everyone would come in a costume, and I wouldn't come in a costume. That was the most rebellious thing, I think, I ever did in grammar school. And sometimes I would have to walk around without a costume; other times I'd just stand and watch.

M: This is just kind of a quirk that you don't have an explanation for? You don't know why?

I: I'm not quite sure. I think partly it was because my father was away for so much of the time when I was young. He was in the Army for something like eight years.

M: Would he re-enlist after his time was up?

I: Yes, he re-enlisted. He was stationed in Japan after the war for a long time. He was in the Korean War. So we only saw him for brief periods. And being the eldest son, a lot of responsibility was put on me. I can't remember ever feeling very young. I always felt very old and mature, even if I wasn't.

M: You probably thought it wasn't quite dignified to be in costume.

I: It wasn't quite dignified, I think, to parade around in these things. Too kodomorashi, too childlike. My mother was young, and she depended on me. She never treated me as a little kid, so I guess that's probably why.

M: Did they have Santa Claus in your church?

I: Yes. I know what you're going to ask. You're going to ask whether there was any Japanese Santa Claus, and I can't remember that.

M: I presume, if it was mostly Japanese people attending, then it would be a Japanese playing Santa Claus.

I: Yes, I guess that's right. It doesn't stick out in my mind, but I think that was the case.

M: You know, we hear that in Christian churches in other lands--in Japan, for instance, the Virgin Mary is Japanese. That just struck me when we were thinking about Santa Claus.

I: That's right. My grandmother got a Christmas card just the other day from her sister in Japan, and it has the Nativity scene. But

they're all dressed up in ancient Japanese robes. They are Japanese, and they're dressed like Japanese. It's a very nice card.

M: That's interesting. What high school did you attend?

I: Gardena High School. My entire preparatory education was in Gardena. I went from Denker Avenue School, which is a grammar school, to Perry Junior High School, to Gardena High School. Upon graduation from Gardena High School, I was accepted at a number of places. At that time, I thought I wanted to be a scientist, so I had acceptances from both Cal Tech and MIT. I decided to see something of the country, so I decided to go to MIT.

I went to MIT my freshman year and did average-type work there. It was quite a shock to go into a place like that after a kind of a mediocre high school. But I decided that clearly the science route was not for me, so I decided to go to a place where I could get a B.A.; MIT offers no B.A. degree. I had a friend who was at Stanford, he's also a Sansei. He spoke highly of it, so I thought, "Well, I'll apply at Stanford." So I got into Stanford and finished out my undergraduate education there.

M: And then, where did you go after that?

I: Well, after my B.A. at Stanford, I went to UCLA.

M: Oh, by the way, what was your major at Stanford?

I: I started out as an Architecture major, and was an Architecture major for a year. Then I decided to change, and I was interested both in English and Philosophy, and I chose Philosophy. So I was a Philosophy major when I got my bachelor's degree. Then, of course, for graduate study I decided I would like to be close to home, not out of California, because I didn't like it back East, particularly. So I applied to Berkeley and UCLA, and I was accepted at both places. But I was offered financial assistance at UCLA, so I decided to go there.

You might be interested in this. When I was back at MIT, I think the thing I disliked most about the area is that I was always regarded as a foreigner. That is, it was always assumed that I was from outside of the country. Because there were so few Orientals back there, and the Orientals that are there are very largely from Taiwan or Japan. Very few Japanese Americans went there. Of course, there are a fair number of Chinese Americans, but nothing like the way it is out here. I feel much more accepted here in terms of being a very common occurrence. There are lots of Japanese Americans around; it's not unusual to see one.

M: I suppose that back there they would have expected you, when you spoke, to speak another language.

I: That's right. Or even out here, you get that. It's one of my pet peeves that a third generation Japanese is expected to know something about the Japanese language, Japanese culture, Japanese history; whereas, a third generation Pole, or Irish, or any Caucasian isn't pressed. Nothing is expected of them, even if they're the second generation.

But an interesting . . . again, back in Boston it was brought home to me on several occasions again, how differently we were regarded because I was a Japanese American. My roommate was Jewish. And during Christmas . . . let's see, no, it wasn't Christmas . . . I guess it was New Year's, or something like that. We went New York and his mother went to great pains to find me a blind date, so that we could double date someplace. And she scoured the city for some Japanese girl. I guess it just didn't enter her mind that I might be interested in dating a Caucasian girl, an American girl. She came up with a daughter of some minor Japanese consul. It was quite an experience. (laughter) She didn't speak much English and, of course, I don't speak much Japanese, and yet becuase we were both Japanese, it was thought the we would hit it off.

M: She thought you'd feel right at home.

I: The same kind of situation would happen in these college mixers, you know. There would be a dance, the dorm dance, and there would be an invitation from Simmons College or one of these girl's schools back there. And the first thing that would happen is that I'd get paired off with whatever Oriental girl was there. It was a very strange kind of thing, because I wasn't used to it. Out here, in my high school, you know, it was considered quite okay, quite ordinary for an Oriental to be going out with Caucasian girls, or at least socializing to a great deal with them. I didn't do much dating in high school, but certainly I socialized a lot, went to parties with the white students and all. It was considered no big thing, but back there it was quite something. It made me feel very awkward.

M: There is certainly a lot of difference in numbers, isn't there?

I: That's right. Just the numbers does make a lot of difference in many ways.

M: Did you get a master's degree at UCLA, or did you go right on to a doctorate?

I: Well, I was in the doctoral program, and I didn't have to write a Master's thesis. But after you pass your doctoral exams, they give you a master's degree. And after you have your proposal for the dissertation approved, they give a degree that's called a C.Phil., Candidate of Philosophy degree, and that comes along the way, so that if you drop out anywhere, you still have something to show for your efforts.

M: And your doctorate is in Philosophy?

I: That's right.

M: How did you happen to go out to Cal State? Did you just know about an opening there, or was there something specific that brought you into Orange County?

I: As you probably know, there is a great pinch in academic circles, job-wise. It's very difficult to get a position in college teaching these days. So I applied to a lot of schools. My wife and I both wanted to stay in California, and at one point it looked like I was going to have to accept a position in Illinois, which we were not too happy about, but it was better than nothing. But then at that point, some of the schools nearby came through. Cal State Dominguez offered me a position, and shortly after that Cal State Fullerton offered me a position. And I was very happy to get the Fullerton position, because I already knew two of the people in the department, UCLA graduates. They told me about the position initially, and they gave me their support in getting the position. It allowed us to stay in the Los Angeles area, which we were very happy to be able to do.

M: I noticed, Dr. Ihara, by the certificate on your mantle that you are a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Where and when did you get that?

I: Well, that was my senior year at Stanford. I was very happy to get it, of course. I don't know that I was particularly deserving. I think they give out a higher percentage of Phi Beta Kappa's at schools that are considered academically superior. So Stanford will get, I think, more than its share of Phi Beta Kappa's. MIT had a very, I thought, refreshing attitude toward Phi Beta Kappa. Their attitude was that any one of their students could get a Phi Beta Kappa most anywhere, and so they didn't allow a Phi Beta Kappa chapter on campus, because they felt that they were above that.

M: Oh, did they allow any award of that type?

I: I suppose valedictorian, or something like that, but they didn't have anything like Phi Beta Kappa. I guess they did have a dean's list, or something like that. Maybe that was just a MIT myth, about why they didn't have a chapter, but they didn't have one.

M: What about high school? Were you active in extra-curricular activities?

I: Yes, I was very active in both junior and senior high school, especially in senior high school. I'm not sure exactly why. I think my mother encouraged me to be active in those types of things. I held a number of student body positions, and I was class president in my junior year, and student body vice-president in the first half of my senior year, and then student

body president in my last semester in high school. I belonged to scads and scads of clubs, and I'm not sure why now, because I find I have a real distaste for clubs. But at that time, I was very much involved. I guess I wanted to be an all-around student; I wanted to excel in everything. Even apart from grades, I wanted to, I guess, be prominent in these fields, social activities. I'm no great athlete, but I did my best to try to get into the athletic program. I was on the gymnastics team and did fairly well there. And I even participated in a number of musical shows and things of that sort. I was always very interested in dancing. I'm a fairly good dancer. At that period, I was involved with a couple of other students. It's kind of strange--two Caucasian girls and another Japanese guy, and they all had some dance experience. They kind of taught me as we went along, and we did all kinds of strange amateur programs, presentations.

M: Exhibition-type dancing?

I: Yes. Sometimes ballroom things, sometimes for a play. The high school would have a play, so they would want a dance sequence, or something of that sort. So I was involved in four or five productions. And we performed outside of school, too. We did . . . there's this Battle of the Bands thing that they have every year at the Hollywood Bowl, and we were involved in the very first one. In that very first one they had a dance troupe to go along with the bands, and so we spent a summer doing that kind of thing. It was a lot of fun. We played shows at these recreation centers in the area. Then at a certain point early in my senior year, the other people wanted to go on and do something professionally, go into dance really seriously. I decided that wasn't for me, that I'd continue with the academic pursuits.

The guy who was the dancer went on and actually is a professional dancer now. He does the choreography work for Frank Sinatra, Jr., or something like that. I can't remember exactly what he does. I haven't kept in touch with him, but he was a little older than I was and, I guess, at that time he was quite an inspiration to me. He was two years older than I.

M: When you got into college, did you participate in activities there?

I: I did pursue the dancing to some extent in college. A few productions, amateur productions at Stanford. I didn't take part in many organizations at Stanford. I was a member of the gymnastics team for awhile, for a year. But aside from that, it was mainly academic. I spent most of my time with my course work at Stanford because, in part I guess, since I missed that first year, I never felt completely at home there at Stanford. Even now, I don't have very many strong allegiances to the school. I really feel much closer to UCLA than I do to Stanford.

M: Was your wife interested in dancing too?

I: She enjoys ballroom dancing. But since we've been married we have not had a chance to do much of it. We spend our time with many other things. With the photography when we can get around to taking pictures. One of the things we want to do is to set up a darkroom. And, when we can, to go to the galleries, to see what painting and new photography is around. We're interested in pottery, handicraft things too. So there are a lot of other things that keep us busy.

M: I notice you like antique furniture. Do you do any refinishing?

I: Well, that's another thing we'd like to do. We haven't had a chance to do very much of it. Some of the furniture we have is intended for refinishing, but we haven't had a chance to do enough of it yet.

M: You mentioned earlier that you had made a trip to Hong Kong. What was the occasion of that?

I: That happened right after I passed my doctoral exams. I had had a reawakening of interest in Oriental philosophy. When I . . . I guess I should go back. When I was at Stanford, when it came time to write my senior thesis in philosophy, I decided that I would like to know something about the philosophic traditions of the Orient, because it was part of my cultural background that I knew nothing about. So I took a few courses and wrote a senior thesis in Oriental philosophy, in Confucian philosophy. When I came to UCLA, there was no one, of course, in the department interested in Oriental philosophy. So I spent the next three years doing the average, the normal kinds of course work preparing for my doctoral exams. But I became reinterested in Oriental philosophy, and I wanted to go someplace where I could learn some more. I had heard of this U.C. program which was an education abroad program, basically, which is geared primarily to undergraduates, with the exception of this Hong Kong campus which accepted graduate students. So I applied, and I convinced them that I had a serious interest in Oriental philosophy, and that I couldn't get that kind of education here at UCLA and that I would be better off studying in their Hong Kong campus. I actually made arrangements in advance to study with someone at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. So, late in that year, I was accepted to that program, and they furnished me with a fellowship and transportation, so it was a very nice program. It was the only condition that I would have to teach a course there, and so I taught a course while I was there. I studied Chinese, studied Mandarin, and I studied Confucian philosophy with a professor at the Chinese University.

M: What did you teach?

I: I taught Introductory Philosophy in English. At the Chinese University, at least at the one college at the Chinese University, Chung Chi, the students have to know English in order to attend. In fact, students really have to know English, Mandarin, and

Cantonese. Cantonese is their native tongue, but many of the teachers are Mandarin, or Northern Chinese, and so they teach in Mandarin, so the students have to be able to, at least, understand them. So I taught in English, and it was difficult because of the language barrier.

M: What year was that?

I: Let's see. That was the 1968-69 academic year. My wife and I were married just before we left. I had met my wife while I was at Stanford, actually. She went to San Jose State. And this trip to Hong Kong sort of precipitated our getting married. So we had a very nice honeymoon really because we made it our honeymoon. We married, then we left, spent some time in Hawaii, spent five weeks in Japan, went to Hong Kong. And on the way back, too, we got to visit the Philippines and Japan again, so it was a very nice year.

M: What sort of living situation apartment-wise did you have in Hong Kong?

I: Well, they furnished us with a faculty flat on the Chinese University campus in the new territories. A one bedroom flat; it was very nice, and they charged us only eighteen dollars a month.

M: Oh, wow!

I: So, oh, we had a very nice year there. I had my fellowship of two hundred and fifty a month, which here doesn't get you very far, but which there was a very substantial income, especially since our rent was so cheap. We got to see a lot of Hong Kong, and we traveled to Southeast Asia; Cambodia before the invasion, Bangkok, and Taiwan.

M: When you were in Japan, did you have any funny situations, not knowing the Japanese language well?

I: Many, many.

M: They expected you to know?

I: Many funny situations. Very often they can still spot you as being a . . . well, they usually just call you "Nisei," you know. Usually they recognize that you're not from Japan, if they look at you carefully, because we were dressed differently than ordinary Japanese would be dressed. It's a little bit more color or more casual, too. Sometimes they wouldn't notice though, I mean, they'd just glance at the face and they'd assume that we were Japanese. Actually, this happened to us in Hong Kong a lot as well: they assumed that we were Chinese. It's very hard to tell in many cases. Anyway, so very often, as soon as we opened our mouths, they could tell that something was amiss. (laughter) "Either he's a foreigner, or he's mentally retarded." Usually one of the first things I would explain is that I was a Sansei. Once you told them that, they would be very understanding. They

are very polite, and so they were always very helpful. They may have laughed a little behind our backs, but they never laughed in our faces.

We made some very nice friends there. We stayed at an otera, and we met the young priest and his brothers. We stayed in Kyoto where this otera was, for about four weeks. We really enjoyed Kyoto.

M: "Otera" is the name for a Buddhist temple?

I: That's right. It's a temple, and it usually has these temporary living quarters, you know, for pilgrims and for people who want to pass through and stay. Not exactly like an inn, but kind of. And we heard about this from some people, some students that we met in Tokyo. They recommended this place, so we went, and we made good friends with the people while we were there. I just sent them a Christmas card the other day. I'd like to know how they are getting along. We had some very nice experiences there and some very funny ones. Getting lost. Because we wanted to do it all on our own, and we did. We traveled on the buses and the subways. I guess we knew enough Japanese so that we could get by.

Now that I think about it, the funniest thing that happened to us was that we went on a tour--the one tour that we went on--to Nikko. It was a tour of Japanese; everyone else was Japanese. And the tour guide, the woman, was Japanese. We couldn't understand any of her explanation because she was speaking in this very, very polite Japanese. And so they would be going along, and then they'd sing a song. It was a very marvelous experience that we had. She'd lead a song, and everybody would sing, and it was glorious, except we couldn't sing. We didn't know what they were saying. Then every time they would stop, she would tell them what time to come back, and she'd always rattle it off so fast that we couldn't catch it. So we'd kind of have to follow the tour guide around, because we were afraid of drifting away too far and missing our connections back on the bus. I think that was one of the funniest things that happened to us. She really did think we were retarded, I think. (laughter)

We also visited our relatives. We both have relatives in Japan. My grandmother's sister on my mother's side and also relatives on my father's mother's side; we visited them both. We stayed with my maternal grandmother's sister and her husband. Her husband is a retired professor in Kure which is near Hiroshima. That was very nice, because they had communicated over these many, many years, so they know about us and we know about them. So it wasn't like meeting really distant relatives. It was very nice. We hadn't kept in quite such close connection with some of the other ones, so it was a little bit more formal and strained. We didn't spend much time with them.

M: Did you have a language problem with those people?

I: There was a certain amount, yes. In fact at that time, it was strange. They gave a dinner party in our honor, and they started asking us questions about Vietnam. "Why are the Americans still in Vietnam?" And the best I could do was to tell them, "Well, it's something like the feeling of a samurai--the warriors thing, and you can't give up." But, of course, anything more sophisticated than that I couldn't communicate.

M: They weren't holding you personally responsible for it, in a way?

I: No, no.

M: They just wanted some explanation as to the rationale for it?

I: That's right.

M: I found this true when I was in Europe as long as seven years ago.

I: That's right. They kind of just don't understand why. "What's the use?" Of course, especially in Japan there is still a very strong, I felt, a very strong aversion to war in general and how horrible war is, and nuclear weapons in particular. I mean, they have a very strong reaction and feeling about atomic weapons, and I doubt very much that the people as a whole, at least, would be at all happy about going to atomic weapons. Maybe the government feels differently about this, but the people are very strongly against war.

M: And you said some of your family lives close to Hiroshima.

I: That's right.

M: So they would be particularly close to that situation, the atomic bombing.

I: We went to the war memorial there in Hiroshima, and it was quite an experience. Not a pleasant experience there, but something people should see.

M: I became aware that there were a lot of immigrants from that area that came to the United States many years ago. Have you come across a lot of Japanese who have relatives in that area?

I: Well, my understanding is that most of the Japanese Americans are from Southern Japan. In fact, I think it's even speculated that, the reason why . . . well, let me put it this way: there seems to be more of a facial similarity between Japanese Americans than if you go to Japan and look at Japanese, because they're . . . I was surprised to see how many different-looking types of Japanese there were. And I guess part of the explanation for that is that most of the immigration comes from Southern Japan.

M: Do you know why?

I: I'm not quite sure. My own speculation is that the people in Southern Japan, I think it's Choshu, were more the seafaring people. I think Choshu was the province that had lots of influence in the Japanese Navy, and so they have a long tradition of overseas travel. That may be the reason, maybe one of the reasons. I really don't know. But I think, except for my grandmother on my mother's side, everyone else is from Southern Japan, my grandfather on my father's side, and my paternal grandmother, and, I believe, the other grandfather who was the orphan. The family may not even be sure whether his parents were from the north or the south.

M: We talked before about your relatives having been Christian. I wonder if we mightn't now discuss the religious aspect of Japanese Americans. Do you have any idea whether most of the immigrants were Buddhist, or if there was a large Christian population right from the early times of the immigration?

I: Well, I strongly believe that the majority of Japanese Americans are Buddhist.

M: You mean, today?

I: Even today, yes, and to begin with as well. But there is a very large Japanese American Christian population. And from my own experience, there must be at least thirty Japanese American churches in this area of Southern California and up and down the California coast. I know, when I was active in the church that there would be these church conferences, statewide conferences. And Japanese-American young people would come from all over the state, representing churches from all over this area and all over the San Francisco area. I don't know exactly what the numbers are, but it must be quite considerable.

M: When you say thirty churches, do you mean thirty specific buildings?

I: Individual buildings, yes.

M: You are not speaking of thirty denominations?

I: No. Although the conferences I used to go to were simply for Protestants. And I understand that there are a fair number of Japanese Catholics. I'm not sure, again, of the number.

M: When you speak of conferences, do you mean specifically Japanese-American conferences or conferences of a specific denomination?

I: Well, there would be a conference of Japanese American Protestant Christians, I guess. I mean, there is an organization--I'm not sure of the name--of Japanese Protestant churches.

M: Oh, and it would involve more than one denomination?

I: That's right. There'd be many denominations.

M: Would you name some of the Protestant denominations that you know of?

I: Well, there's Presbyterian, Episcopalian, it seems like most of the Protestant denominations. My own was Baptist. I can't remember whether there were Lutherans there, but there were Methodists, lots of Methodists.

M: And you said there are Catholics as well?

I: Yes, there are. I don't think Japanese were too discerning, in terms of which Protestant denomination they went into. I know, my own grandmother certainly wasn't raised with any kind of Baptist background, but just what was convenient, and that was the Japanese church in the area, that she started sending us there. So perhaps many of the denominational differences tended to be overlooked by the Japanese Americans.

M: Do you know if most of the churches started out as missionary churches? What I mean to say is, do you suppose they sent a missionary group into a certain area which had been populated by Japanese Americans and started a little mission church there?

I: You mean sent out by whom?

M: By a central organization. Say, for instance, the Presbyterians sending out a mission group to . . .

I: For example, you mean the white Presbyterian organization?

M: Yes.

I: There were a few Caucasian ministers who were quite influential in the growth of the Japanese Christian churches. But I don't know to what extent they were affiliated with some kind of white church organizations. That's something that, if you talk to some of the ministers here, they will be able to tell you much better how that worked.

M: Do you have enough association with Sansei who are Buddhist, for instance, to express an opinion about the difference, if you have observed any difference in the attitudes or, say, cultural attitudes; I'm thinking of striving to succeed and that sort of thing. Do you think that the church background makes a great deal of difference as to the culture of the Sansei, at this point?

I: My own impression is that it doesn't make much difference. The Japanese churches in the United States, from what I can gather, have become so acculturated that essentially there are very little differences between the Buddhist churches and the Christian churches. Most of the functions of the Buddhist Church, among the young people

I knew when I was in high school, seemed to be largely social. They didn't seem to have especially strong commitments to the religion and seemed to look at it as, you know, just one of those things that you do. There would be young people's organizations, and they would take part in that. But it wasn't something that seemed to be a very serious part of their lives. I doubt that it makes much difference in terms of over all academic motivation or career motivation, whether they belong to the Christian or the Buddhist churches. I imagine that is much more of a cultural than a religious thing. My impression is that the Buddhist churches don't have much of a strong hold over the Sansei. My wife was raised nominally as a Buddhist, but she rarely went and certainly had no serious inclinations with regard to the religion.

M: One of the articles that I have been reading indicates that there is probably more influence culturally speaking, in the changes of generations than there is as far as religion is concerned. In other words, the break between the Issei and the Nisei and then between the Nisei and the Sansei is greater than a changeover from, say, a Buddhist to a Christian church situation. Would that seem to coincide with your thoughts?

I: I think that's probably right, although I'm not sure how much switching over there has been. At least among the Sansei, it seems to me that the people I knew who were raised as Buddhists remained Buddhists, and vice versa. As I recall, there were very . . . in my experience, there has been very little conversion from one to the other. Again, I can only speak for my own family, and there the grandmothers were already Christian. I don't know how it worked with many of the other Sansei.

M: So, in other words, would you think if conversion went on--and it obviously did at one stage or we wouldn't have Japanese Americans who are Christian . . .

I: That's right.

M: Would you think, then, perhaps it happened more at the Issei level than at the Nisei or the Sansei? Or do you have no opinion?

I: I really don't know. I don't know how that might have happened.

M: Have you come across, amongst your friends, any who are readopting the Buddhist faith, even though, perhaps, their parents had converted to Christianity?

I: No, not among my friends. And maybe I should make it clear that I don't really keep in touch with all that many Sansei. Among my friends there hasn't been much of that. But I suspect that that's partly because I'm just a little bit older than many of the young Sansei who are radicals, more radical. And so that the people that I grew up with, even now, do not have as much of a feeling of trying

to reclaim their cultural heritage. It's one of the things that I found irritating among the Sansei my age. They tended to go into very conservative professions. More of my friends are dentists, and doctors, and engineers, and such. Very, very few Japanese people are even in the humanities. And a very nonrebellious group at my age level.

I would suspect, although I haven't any evidence to show this, that among the younger Sansei, the ones who are in college now or just out of college, that many of them are trying to reestablish these religious roots in Buddhism. It would fit in with their attempt to reclaim much of their heritage.

M: Do you have any idea why so many people of your age and earlier have become professional people? Can you address yourself to that?

I: Well, it's well known the kinds of goals that the parents, the Nisei, had for their children. And there's a great deal of success orientation among the Sansei because of that fact.

Again, it's hard for me to speak for everyone. But in my own experience, right after we had gotten out of camp, and we were very poor and, you know, my parents had just got out of high school and nothing else. Nonetheless, from the very earliest, as far back as I can remember, I was always told that I would go to college. And, of course, I never questioned it. I just knew from the time I was five years old, that I would go to college and be an engineer or a doctor. They said, you know, it doesn't matter what career. But if someone had asked me if I was going to college, I'd say, "There is no doubt about it." And I think that that's one of the things that they do. It's so important to them, the Nisei and the Issei that were around, that their children and grandchildren go to college that your mind is set in that direction. And the same thing with occupation, I mean, they never thought . . . I never suspected that I would grow up and be a gardener or anything like that. I'm sure my friends felt the same way. They always knew they were going to grow up and have some kind of professional occupation. It's one of those things you grow up with.

M: It seems that it's a bit of a mystery, and I'm trying to sort out the roots of that. Because apparently before the war, there was no possibility of ever attaining. For most Japanese Americans, a college education didn't do any good. So I'm wondering whether you feel there is any religious . . . apparently that's more of a cultural aspect than a religious one, because in your family's case they weren't Buddhist, they were Christian, and yet they had the same aspirations.

I: I doubt that there were any religious reasons, explanations, for why this emphasis on education occurred.

M: Do you think it predates the American experience?

I: Very possibly. There is a lot of respect in the Japanese culture for education. My grandmother, my mother's mother, in particular felt that because she had so much respect for her father and he was an educated man, that if possible, I guess, that we should get as much education as we could.

M: Do you think possibly that those who took it upon themselves to emigrate were those who were coming for higher expectations to begin with?

I: Well, certainly they were a self-selecting group. And they must have had some hope of improving themselves to take this huge leap, to come to a foreign country and establish themselves. And I'm sure, from even back then, they were hoping for better lives for their children. So very possibly, that's right. It was a matter of having higher expectations for themselves and for their offspring.

I should say, one remark you made about before the war . . . it's true that many Japanese Americans who were college educated could not get jobs before the war. But there were a fair number of Japanese Americans who were able to get college educations. And I think, the kind of frustrations that those college educated Japanese Americans had happened over such a relatively brief period of time that this kind of general despair or disillusionment with education really didn't have a chance to set in. If it had happened over a generation's time or longer, it probably would have affected, in my opinion, it would have affected the Japanese-American outlook toward education in general. But, I think, it just didn't have a chance yet to really discourage them. I know that . . . well, with my family, there wasn't anybody in my family with really a college education yet, and so no one had an opportunity really to be disillusioned with a college education.

M: And I presume that since the Depression immediately preceded the war and everyone was not meeting their expectations, I suppose they didn't feel themselves as singled out as they might have if it had been an affluent period.

I: That's right. That's true. It probably would have been much worse after the war. But, of course, after the war things started to improve job-wise for Japanese Americans.

M: The Japanese American group <u>is</u> the most rapidly upward mobile group of any minority group within the United States. And it is a unique situation. Do you recall any overt things having been said to you as a youngster about "You've got to make it." You know, "You've got to do better than the Caucasian boy." Was it that blatant with you?

I: No, not nearly that blatant. But, I suppose, I was lucky in some respects. School came very easily to me. I was taught to work

hard and, I guess, I had enough ability, so it wasn't hard for me to get good grades. And of course, I had a lot of positive reinforcement from that, so I always had a very strong incentive to continue to do well. But things would have been much different, I suppose, if I had slipped. I wonder what would have happened at that point.

I know that a lot of the trouble that Sansei have with drugs or crime--there is now, and even in my time, a problem with juvenile delinquency in the Japanese community--is largely a product of the fact that the children feel that they have failed to live up to the expectations of their parents. And I imagine, if a Sansei were bringing home bad report cards, that it might come out as blatantly as that--that you have to do well to make it. I'm not sure what would . . . what they would say exactly, but certainly a lot of pressure would be brought to bear.

M: Then you feel that in the Nisei generation, they're still attempting to live up to the expectations of the original immigrants, to a certain extent? In other words, there is still the carrying on of the tradition of work hard and stick to the expectations of your forefathers?

I: Well, I don't know if it would be put in quite those ways. There would be a lot of emphasis on hard work and making something of yourself.

M: When you were little, were you required to do a certain amount of tasks around the house?

I: Yes, but not an enormous amount of work.

M: You didn't have a certain schedule you had to stick to at home?

I: No, I had a fair amount of responsibility. I had a fair amount of responsibility over my younger brothers. My mother was working so I would watch out after them. I used to help clean the house, do the dishes and things like that; but nothing that consumed a lot of time, and never anything that interfered with my studies. They made it quite clear that my studies were the most important thing. And any sacrifice . . . I knew that if there was anything that I felt was needed or, even, wanted as far as school was concerned, that I could have it just like that. (snaps his fingers) I knew they would just do anything. So, again, I guess that's the business of building in, on a very subconscious level, the importance of education. I always felt that that was my main responsibility, to do well in school.

M: I'm wondering if the girls in the Japanese American culture get the same push to go on in higher education as the boys do.

I: My suspicion is that they don't. Although a fair amount of pressure is put on them to succeed in one way or another. They

are not pushed quite so hard as the boys to go toward college or toward a profession. In my own experience, the Sansei girls in high school, the brighter ones, were certainly, I think, expected to succeed in school, but they were directed largely toward teaching on some level or other, or perhaps secretarial work. I don't know whether this is more an outcome of Japanese male chauvinism or just chauvinism in the society as a whole. But, I think, it is true that Japanese-American girls were not expected, in the same way that boys were, to go on and succeed in some professional training or other. I think you will find that it would be a rather interesting study to see whether or not the Sansei boys who go to college actually go more in the professional direction and the girls more in the liberal arts direction. I would suspect that that would happen. But of course, again too, that probably happens in the Caucasian community, as well, because of the opinions about the roles of men and women.

M: But are you of the opinion that there is a high percentage of Japanese-American girls that do go on to higher education, even though it may be only for teaching?

I: A higher percentage of Japanese American girls over some other group?

M: Over, say, white or some other group?

I: I really don't know what the percentage would be on that. It's very hard for me to say. I suspect there are a lot of Nisei parents who really don't encourage their girls to go on to college. My wife had something like this experience. She really had to go to college over the objections of her father, rather than with his support. I found that very surprising when I first got to know her, but now I suspect that that's not a problem with her alone, but perhaps a fair number of other Sansei girls have that same problem.

M: You mentioned earlier to me that you had visited the relocation camp where you were born. Would you tell me something about that?

I: It was a very interesting experience from my point of view. I don't know how much general value this has, but I was just very interested to find out where I was born and what it looked like, and get some kind of feel of what the camp situation was like. This was in my second year of graduate school. Toward the end of the summer, I decided that I'd like to see Rohwer, Arkansas. Well, I wanted to see the country in general, also, and I wanted to visit some friends back in New York. This was going to be my big adventure, so I set out hitchhiking. I hitchhiked back to Arkansas, and I visited an ex-roommate of mine who was from Arkansas who lived in Fort Smith. It's in northern Arkansas, and Rohwer is down toward the southeastern corner. I went down there. A very depressed area and relatively few people are down there now. A lot of the Negro workers have left the area because there are no jobs.

M: Is it hilly?

I: It's flat. Northern Arkansas is hilly; southern Arkansas is flat, what I saw of it. It's largely farming country, cotton primarily. It was, my parents say, largely swampland before the Japanese came in, and apparently the Japanese did a lot to reclaim the swampland and turn it into a good agricultural area.

One of the benefits of hitchhiking is that you get picked up by very interesting people. I got as far as McGehee. It was getting very dark. McGehee is just off the main road and about twelve miles from Rohwer. Rohwer has a population of about fifty people. One option was to stay in McGehee. I wanted to try to run down any Japanese American families who may have stayed there. So I contacted the local paper, and to their knowledge there were no Japanese. Everyone had left.

I didn't really want to stay in McGehee. It was a very depressing town. It looked like an all black town which was very depressed. And so I started hitchhiking out, and I was picked up by a sharecropper and had an interesting talk with him.

M: Was he a Caucasian?

I: No, a black man. But the next ride, I got picked up by a white man who was the principal of the school, which was now on the grounds where the camp used to be. So the remaining buildings and the land that was there are now converted to a school. First through twelfth grades, six hundred students; it goes all the way.

M: Do they use the same camp buildings?

I: There are actually two buildings that are still in use that were there during World War II. Most of them have been torn down, of course. There were--I don't know the exact figure--something like ten thousand Japanese there. Of course, that takes an awful lot of barracks. But these two buildings are still used by kindergarten grades, and so I got to see them. I even slept overnight; the principal let me sleep overnight there.

M: Do you mean in one of the camp buildings?

I: In one of those buildings.

M: Did you have a sleeping bag?

I: Yes, I had a sleeping bag and slept on the table. But two other interesting things happened in that experience. One was the cemetery. That was a very sad experience for me, I think, too, to see these graves with the Japanese characters on them. A fairly extensive graveyard. One plaque commemorating Japanese-American GI's who had died. The place was, you know, terribly overgrown

with weeds and stuff. I really felt like cleaning the place up, or something. That's still there, and the foundations of a lot of the buildings are there.

Then I got to talk to some of the people who had been there during the relocation period. I talked to one man who had been a guard at the Rohwer camp. I talked to a man who owned a grocery store which had been frequented by Japanese Americans. Well, I know that I was getting a very slanted view of things, because to hear these people tell it, it was all peaches and cream. The guard said that there were some suspicions at first and uneasiness, but very shortly it was gone, and that he was on very friendly terms with the Japanese Americans. And the grocer said something to the same effect. I suspect he was making a lot of money from their business. But I did get to talk to some of the local people.

M: Were the last two you mentioned both Caucasian?

I: Yes. But at least it's interesting that their feelings now, whatever they were then, are very favorable toward Japanese Americans. They probably underplayed their feelings of hostility at that time, but now they thought it was a perfectly okay thing, and they even spoke rather proudly of the fact that, at some couple of years earlier, some Japanese consulate had come to visit the camp--probably came with some of the State officials, something of that sort. So, it's something of a landmark. When I first got picked up by this man, I told him that I was coming back to see the place, and he understood immediately. So I was something of a celebrity for a day or two when I was there.

M: I'll bet! Did they take your picture for the local paper?

I: No, I don't think Rohwer has a paper. McGehee does, but I don't know that they send reporters out as far as Rohwer.

M: Did you, by any chance, get to the Manzanar thirtieth anniversary commemoration?

I: No, I haven't seen any of the camps in California. I had particular interest in Rohwer because I was born there, but I haven't seen the ones here. My wife and I would like to see that sometime.

M: I've really enjoyed talking to you, and I'm just wondering if there is anything else you think we ought to cover before we turn off the tape recorder.

I: I'm sure there will be things as soon as you turn it off, but I can't think of any at the moment.

M: Well, when we're at Cal State Fullerton, perhaps sometime we can add onto it, if you think of something else.

I: Fine.

M: I do want to thank you very much. I enjoyed it.

I: Well, thank you. I enjoyed it too.