

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Japanese American Project

Nisei Experience

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IKUKO AMATATSU WATANABE

Interviewed

by

Arthur A. Hansen

on

July 24, 1974

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INTERVIEWEE: IKUKO AMATATSU WATANABE

INTERVIEWER: Arthur A. Hansen

SUBJECT: Nisei Experience

DATE: July 24, 1974

H: This is an interview with Mrs. Ikuko Amatatsu Watanabe for the Japanese American Oral History Project at California State University, Fullerton, by Arthur A. Hansen at 308 North Sweet, in Fullerton, California, on Wednesday, July 24, 1974 at 3:30 p.m.

Now, Mrs. Watanabe, you're from a family of how many people?

W: I'm from a family of six: four girls plus my father and mother.

H: Where did your parents come from, originally?

W: They came from Kagoshima, Japan. That's in the southern part of Japan.

H: Did they come from a small village there?

W: Yes, my dad came from Sendai and my mother from Taniyama.

H: And your father came over here in about what year?

W: When was the Sino-Japanese War over?

H: In 1895.

W: Then soon after, so he must have come here in about 1900.

H: Was he married at that time?

W: No, he wasn't. My parents' marriage was more or less prearranged in Japan. Actually, I think he saw her sister--and he always laughs about this--because my mother was away at college then. My aunty was a very beautiful woman, so my father said right away that he

would like her for his wife!

H: So then he ended up marrying one of the family in any case! But, your mother, so to speak, was beautiful by association.

W: Right!

H: Then she wasn't a picture bride?

W: No, she wasn't. The marriage was prearranged by the families.

H: Then the parents on both sides knew one another and had had some sort of social contact?

W: Yes, they had.

H: What was your father's background in Japan? Was he from a Samurai family?

W: Yes, he was. Both my parents come from the Samurai background. I have a picture of my grandfather when he was one of the last Samurai; of course, he was very young, but he was wearing the Samurai outfit. There were thirteen generations of doctors on my dad's side of the family. My mother's father was a colonel in the cavalry, and was also very high up in the Shinto religion; I know that he was able to perform weddings and funerals. I remember when I was in Japan that the family had their own Shinto shrine in their backyard.

H: When did you see the shrine?

W: When I was six years old.

H: Oh, so you haven't been back to Japan since?

W: No, I haven't. That was my first and last time there. Hopefully, we'll be going back next year.

H: About how many years after your father did your mother come to the United States?

W: She must have come here in about 1915 or 1916.

H: Quite often among the first generation, the Issei group, you find a discrepancy in the ages of the husband and the wife. Was this true of your parents, or are they pretty close in age?

W: They are about seven years apart.

H: So your dad is just a little bit older, and was he a reasonably young man when he came here?

W: Yes, he was. He was attending, from what I understand, Kumamoto Medical School, and then he went on to the Sino-Japanese War.

H: You mean he was already a doctor before he went into the service?

W: No, he was in medical school and then he went into the service. I guess he must have been adventuresome, and he had heard so much about America that he wanted to come to this country. The real thing, I think, is that being the oldest son, he was supposed to become a doctor. What he really should have been was a diplomat like his brother. I think my dad was better equipped for that. But to carry on the family line--being the first male child--he would have to become a doctor. So he just had to get away from Japan in order to be on his own.

H: Would you classify your dad as being merely a rebel against this one part of his inherited tradition, or was he a rebel in a broader sense than that?

W: I can't picture my dad being a rebel--adventuresome, yes. He must have felt strongly about it, or perhaps he thought he would come to America and make his fortune, and then go back again. But he doesn't strike me as being what you would call a "rebel."

H: Well, by and large, most Issei were apparently planning on returning to Japan. Their stay in the United States was to be a short interlude until they could make sufficient capital, or perhaps become full of the adventure that they were seeking. Once they were here for awhile, however, as things developed and as they had families, they formed an attachment to the kind of society they found here. But you don't know whether this is the case with your dad?

W: It's possible that they wanted to go back. But realistically, it became impossible. However, they tried to make the best of things. They were from different religious backgrounds--my mother's side was Shinto and my father's side was Buddhist--and yet when they came to America, I understand that they both attended English classes. There was a class affiliated with the Japanese Baptist Church of Seattle--which, incidentally, celebrated its seventy-fifty anniversary this past month. They learned how to cook, and to speak and write in English. They both became Christians, which is, I guess, more of a rarity and for that they thought differently later on.

H: So there was an interval between the time that your dad got here and the time that he decided to take your mom for his bride and to bring her over here. I suppose during that time, if he had had some reservations about staying here, sending for your mother was an action which pretty well indicated that he was going to stay. Then he could move ahead into the English language classes, et cetera, because he had more of a stake in maintaining himself here in the United States, as opposed to returning to Japan.

- W: Yes. I understand that my dad came here first and then returned to Japan. That's when he saw my aunty, I guess, and he thought that she was the one he was going to have as his bride; he then returned to America. So that was the only time he had ever gone back to Japan. It must have been in the interlude, say, of a couple of years.
- H: Well, he might have had some indecision at that point and the return itself allowed him to get some kind of perspective on the situation.
- W: Possibly.
- H: Perhaps it gave him something of an overview of the differences between the two ways of life. So, anyway, he then settled in Seattle, Washington, and what did he do initially for a living?
- W: When he first came, I understand he worked with a railroad gang, as most of the Japanese men did. After that, when my mother arrived in Seattle, she taught at the Bailey Gatzert School, the Japanese language school. He went to work at the Seattle General Hospital, I understand, as a janitor. Later he was working at a furriery, but I think he must have developed asthma from working there. One of his friends went to Bainbridge Island and started farming out there and invited my father to do the same. What they have told us about the first time they tried farming is really hilarious, because both of them had never in their life tilled soil, as they were both students and came from professional families. And to top that off, my parents had four daughters, whereas their friends had eight sons! So you can see the difference in the farming experiences.
- H: So he didn't have the background in farming, and then the fruits of his family weren't exactly helping him too much in farming either.
- W: That is so true.
- H: Did you and your sisters work on the farm?
- W: Yes, we did. We helped out, of course, and being the youngest I probably didn't work out in the field as much as my sisters. But, I guess I was the tomboy of the family, and although I was four years younger than my next sister, I was the one that was always elected to do the leg work or the dirty work.
- H: What kind of farm was this that you had?
- W: This was a strawberry farm. When I became sixteen years old, I know I had to drive the truck down to the cannery because my dad would develop asthma during the strawberry season.
- H: How old were you when you were driving the truck?
- W: I was sixteen years old. I think I was the first one to drive in the

family, too. I used to sit on my dad's lap, behind the wheel, and he used to let me drive. Later, when I was about ten years old, I would drive back and forth down the path of our land.

H: How large was the Japanese community on Bainbridge Island?

W: Oh, as a community, we didn't have a specific place where you could say, "This is 'Japanese Town,' or the Japanese community. I believe there were some sixty families on Bainbridge Island at that time, and we were all scattered. In fact, I would say that ninety percent of them had their own homes; the average age on Bainbridge would be about twenty years old. Many of the Issei families had purchased land in some other person's name, because they couldn't own land themselves and their own children were too young.

H: Now prior to 1913, I think Japanese aliens--the Issei--could purchase land, so some of them who got here earlier bought some land, didn't they?

W: Possibly, but I doubt if they had the money to buy land then.

H: You can't recall any friends of the family who owned the land outright as Issei, can you?

W: No, I can't. Later on perhaps, since the children were born during World War I, around 1917 or 1918, and they were able to purchase it then.

H: How long had Bainbridge Island been a place where there were some Issei doing farming. Did this go back to the turn of the century, or when?

W: I would say from about 1915, and then up to the evacuation.

H: Were they out on the Island because of discrimination and, therefore, forced to take some marginal land out there and develop it? How did it come about that they ended up on Bainbridge Island?

W: Oh, I think through friends, word of mouth, and the feeling that many of them must have had more freedom in the country. They felt the discrimination in the cities and were not able to get jobs, so they came to Bainbridge Island. I think they first came to the Island because of the lumber mills. You see, Port Blakely is part of Bainbridge Island and they had had quite a lumber mill over there. I think most of them came to work at the mill and found the Island to be very rich in soil. Some of them started to work the soil and found that strawberries could be grown. This is why a majority of them stayed on the Island.

H: Let's talk a little bit about Bainbridge Island and its Japanese population. About how big is the Island and where exactly is it located?

- W: It is located eight miles west of Seattle, Washington, and it is about eight by twenty-five miles, which is quite a large piece of land. There were, as I mentioned earlier, about sixty-three Japanese families and they were all scattered on the Island; but as far as I know, most of them had farms.
- H: And this was out of a total population on the Island of how many?
- W: Oh, there were ten thousand people on the Island.
- H: What kind of situation was the Island in, socially and economically, and in addition to the Japanese, were there other ethnic groups living there?
- W: We had Filipinos working on the farms and then during the summer months we also had the migrant Indians working on the Japanese farms. The strawberry farmers were mainly Japanese. The Caucasian population had other kinds of truck farms or were white-collar commuters working in Seattle. We also had families such as Harry Bridges and Westinghouse; there were very well-to-do people who commuted to work in Seattle.
- H: Do you mean Harry Bridges, the longshoreman boss?
- W: Yes. And so you had an economic situation that went from the extremely wealthy to, say, the moderate and even the poor people, too. They also had summer resorts and a couple of exclusive country clubs out there.
- H: So the Island had something of a commuter population, people who would live on Bainbridge Island and go by ferry to Seattle to work?
- W: Right, that was the mainstream of the people, working at Boeing and in offices and maybe having their own businesses in Seattle.
- H: Is there a central town on Bainbridge Island? You mentioned a couple of towns, I think.
- W: Yes, Winslow and Port Blakely. But they also had passenger boats and about half a dozen ports that had these boats coming to them at intervals of, say, two hours, transporting to and from Seattle. At the present time, they have ferries at intervals of an hour or forty-five minutes. The people from the mainland, such as Kingston and Port Orchard, all came to the Island and took the ferries across to Seattle. It's closer that way.
- H: You mentioned a little while ago that there wasn't a geographical Japanese town or a Japanese community on the Island, but sometimes you have communities established on the basis of organizations, or on the basis of social contact, or on the basis of economic associations, whether it be farmers' alliances or whatever. On the Island,

- you also mentioned the exact figure of sixty-three Japanese families. What percentage of those families might you have known when you were a young girl?
- W: Oh, I would say I knew most of them, about seventy-five percent.
- H: How did you get a chance to know them, since you were separated by farms that were sometimes five or six miles apart?
- W: Through school, church, and the Japanese American Association, the young people's group, as well as the Japanese Association for the Issei. And periodically, we would all meet together and have Japanese movies when they came to town; people would bring their bento [lunches] and meet at the Japanese Hall. The young people had parties and get-togethers about four times a year. This is where they also had the Japanese language school. Then during the summer, once a year, we had a great big picnic where people from all over would come. It was quite a well-known affair where our Caucasian friends as well as our Japanese friends from Seattle and Tacoma and other outlying places would come and spend the whole day or weekend with us. We had all kinds of running races and prizes and then in the evening the young people would have their dances. The food was something else. It took the ladies almost a week to prepare.
- H: And you went to a language school on the Island?
- W: Yes, we did.
- H: Did your mother teach in this language school on Bainbridge Island as well as the one in Seattle?
- W: At one time, before she had her family, yes.
- H: Did you attend school with your sisters at the Japanese language school?
- W: Yes, after our English classes every other day, three times a week, we used to go to language classes.
- H: Did you have any contact with the Japanese American community in Seattle? You just mentioned that sometimes they would come over for this picnic that you would have once a year. Did you have friends as a result of your connection with church groups?
- W: Yes, mainly from the church group with the Japanese Baptist Church. Our church on Bainbridge Island, the Japanese Baptist, was the mission church from the First Japanese Baptist Church in Seattle. So we had that contact. And then, too, many of the other people may have had that their Kenjinkai, an organization based upon their place of origin in Japan. They had that type of affiliation, although that wasn't stressed as much on Bainbridge as it was in Seattle. Then the other connection was, of course, that at one time most of the people

on the Island sent their children to Sunday school. It was a Congregational Sunday school in Winslow where, I think, we all got introduced to Christianity.

H: Did the people in Seattle think of the Islanders as insular, since they were all from a farming background, as something like the Island hicks; did they regard them as something less than cosmopolitans?

W: I don't know. If they did, I wasn't aware of it because we didn't seem to have that problem.

H: So you didn't feel it when you went to Seattle?

W: No, I didn't feel it, because none of my friends in Seattle were driving as early as I was or anything like this. So, they felt that I was more fortunate. I was going to Seattle quite often anyway and attending different functions with my girl friends, too. So, I never felt it, and if there was this feeling, I wasn't aware of it.

H: Did you buy most of your supplies, such as food, in Seattle?

W: No, we had shops and stores right on the Island.

H: Were they Japanese run?

W: Oh, Japanese, no. The Japanese had a fisherman that came around maybe twice a month or maybe once a week. As I recall, it was twice a month at our place. But he did come to sell fish and Japanese food-stuff.

H: Did you have any Japanese restaurants out on the Island?

W: Oh, no.

H: So if you wanted to have a Japanese meal, you'd have to go to the Jackson Street area in Seattle?

W: Right, but most families cooked a Japanese meal maybe once a day or so because the parents, I think, preferred that.

H: I know in Los Angeles when they had weddings and other ceremonies, they would oftentimes celebrate by going to a Chinese restaurant. Did you have a Chinese restaurant out on the Island?

W: No, we didn't have a Chinese restaurant at all.

H: So, there really wasn't any community at all. You had a fish peddler that came around and you had these other institutions that you mentioned, but there really wasn't a downtown, or a small cluster of stores that had Japanese proprietors.

W: No, nothing like that, only the Japanese Hall.

H: Do they have any of that today, or not?

W: Well, the biggest chain store on Bainbridge Island is now owned by a Japanese.

H: But you still can't find, for instance, one of these little Japanese cafes or family restaurants?

W: No.

H: So you would still have to go to Seattle.

W: Right, you still have to go to Seattle for that.

H: You mentioned a little while ago that some of the people that worked for you were Indians. Where were these Indians from? Were they residents of the Island or were they migrant workers?

W: They were migrant workers. Most of them came from British Columbia just for the summer. Perhaps strawberry picking was their first work, and after strawberry season they would go elsewhere, like to the Tacoma and Auburn areas, for hops picking.

H: Do you remember what tribe they were from?

W: No, I don't. Some were from British Columbia, but those that came from our area were from Yakima, Washington, and they were the Yakima tribes. They were all very Americanized. I remember one family that came to pick berries. Their son was an ordained minister. The minister worked for us for three or four years. I know my parents treated the Indians and the Filipinos very well. My dad used to tell us that you can always learn from someone, good or bad. Every person should be able to express himself and be dignified. So I'm glad for the kind of background that I have had. After the summer strawberry season--I know others may not have done something like this--my parents always had the Indians over to the house at payday, which was at the end of the season, for strawberry ice cream, cake, and refreshments, and gave them a good send-off. The Filipinos were talented musically, so they brought their instruments on pay night and played for us. Both of my parents loved music. My mother played the violin and piano in her youth.

H: Were the Filipinos migrant workers from the Philippines, or did they live on the Island permanently?

W: They lived on Bainbridge Island permanently. The Filipinos couldn't bring their wives, so they were bachelors who lived on the Island and worked for the farmers year-long.

H: Now, I know that you're part of an ethnic group that has been victimized by a lot of stereotyping, but oftentimes stereotyping isn't just a one-way street. I was just wondering if on the Island, being

in contact with the Japanese American community, how much stereotyping was there of the Indians and of the Filipinos by the Japanese Americans? Did they regard the Indians as being slothful or as being unindustrious or undependable, or did they regard Filipinos in certain stereotypical ways?

W: I would have to say, yes. The Filipinos were industrious. They were all bachelors, and being girls, we were afraid of them. I think that was kind of a sad situation, a lack of understanding on our part. Yes, I think as an ethnic group, we did look down on them.

H: On just the Filipinos or the Indians also?

W: More so on the Indians.

H: So you were in kind of a strange position out there on Bainbridge Island, insofar as you had these Indians and also these Filipinos working under you, as perhaps really subordinate groups. And yet, at the same time, you were probably made to feel subordinate vis-à-vis the Caucasian community on the Island, or perhaps in Seattle as well.

W: Yes. Unfortunately, as kids growing up, we didn't find this too much; we weren't aware of it possibly. But I know my parents have had quite a bit of harassment and prejudice.

H: On the Island?

W: Yes, on the Island and elsewhere, too. If you heard their stories . . . I mean, this is possibly why they all--the Japanese families--stuck together.

H: Can you relate a few stories concerning the harassment?

W: Well, even our neighbor, who was a blacksmith, came from someplace in Yugoslavia, and he would make fun of my parents because they didn't speak the English language well. If this neighbor really knew the type of upbringing my parents have had, it would have been a big joke, but at any rate it kind of hurts to see people made fun of and taken advantage of just because they can't speak the language well. So, those are some of the things that people would make fun of and belittle them about.

H: What about outright discrimination on the Island? I know in many prewar communities, Japanese Americans were forced to sit only in the section called "Nigger Heaven" in movie theaters--the balcony--and to sometimes only use swimming pools on the day before they were going to change the pool's water. There were also residential restrictions and restrictions in terms of occupation. It was very difficult to practice medicine, if, say, you were a doctor in a hospital, and it was very difficult to get licensed as a teacher. What about Bainbridge Island, was this a paradisaical situation or did it have its

discrimination, too?

- W: Oh, it had its discrimination, too, but as I said, as kids we weren't aware of it and our parents didn't stress that. I think with the type of upbringing the Japanese people had, they would say, "Shi-ka-ta-ga-nai," which means that it can't be helped. They more or less stayed away from places where they would be discriminated against. So because of this, I think we kind of stuck together and did a lot within our own community and stayed away from other activities where we would be put down. I guess I would have to say that until I was older, I didn't directly face all types of discrimination.
- H: Of course, you were in a somewhat different position than your parents. They could stay away from these sorts of situations, but you, as a Nisei, had to go out into the community, insofar as you went to school. You dealt with a population which was wider than the one contacted by your parents. What did you feel at the time? I don't mean isolated incidents where a thoughtless remark was directed your way, but did you ever, say, have movie theaters or swimming facilities closed to you, or confront clubs that you couldn't join, or find yourself where you felt your options were somewhat limited?
- W: No, because as far as swimming, it was mostly public beaches, so we could come and go at will. Of course, many people had their own homes along the beaches, too. These would be private, so we would not be able to swim there.
- H: But could you go to beaches with Caucasians? Was the beach you frequented pretty much of a Japanese beach?
- W: No, you could go with the Caucasians; if it was a public beach, anyone could go. There was no discrimination as to that. Now with the Indians, it's another story. When they were riding on a passenger boat, they had to remain on the bottom level, whereas we didn't have this kind of discrimination. As far as school was concerned, we didn't find much discrimination because there were just Japanese and Caucasians. Scholastically, too, I guess, the Japanese kids did all right, and so the rapport with the teachers was great.
- H: Were you given any sort of warnings by, say, your parents to watch out for the haku-jins [Caucasians] or to stay away from the eta [Japanese outcaste]--anything of this sort? Did you get any kind of cautionary advice that way, to keep your distance or to be on guard in any event?
- W: No, as far as my parents--I think maybe they were more on the rare side--I don't know if it is because of their Christian background, training and such, but they were open to a lot of things. I know that as my sisters were growing up, I think my parents were more strict with them; but when I came along, I think they were probably more aware of conditions and such, and so I got to do pretty much what I felt was me.

H: The path had certainly been cleared for you.

W: Yes, definitely. And thanks to my sisters, because I know that they had a lot to do with that, too. Maybe sometimes I would shoot my mouth off a little bit and get into trouble, and my mom would say this to me, "If you are right with yourself and with God, then don't mind what other people say." So I guess, in a way, my mother, being a former teacher, didn't believe in a lot of superstition and traditions that went on in other families. A lot of the people used to--like for New Years--"o se ji" [bow and give a canned speech] but she used to say, "Never mind those things. If you mean it, fine. But if you don't mean it, and if you don't understand it, just don't say it." I think a lot of people must have thought that we were kind of illiterate in that we would just say, "Omedeto gozaimasu," instead of the full speech, because that is the way my parents were.

H: So you gave a perfunctory observance to these procedures, but if you didn't really want to participate, it was left up to your own discretion?

W: Right.

H: They said, "Do what you want to do," pretty much, so you had more freedom than, say, most of your friends?

W: Yes, I did.

H: Now, was the population of Japanese on the Island unique in any sense? Most of the Issei who came to the United States came from southern Japan, with the bulk of them originating from Hiroshima or Okayama kens. What about the Bainbridge Islanders; did they tend to come from a particular area in Japan?

W: Well, I guess I would have to say that most of them came from the Hiroshima area.

H: Most of the Los Angeles and San Francisco Japanese who came from Hiroshima tended to be from the agricultural class. Was this true of the people on the Island as well? I know this wasn't true of your family, but were your parents atypical?

W: I would say typical, with the exception of a few; some were from the merchant class, and many had high school educations.

H: Now, what's typical; were your parents typical or . . .

W: No, I meant typical of the farming areas of Hiroshima.

H: Oh, so you did have, by and large, a farming population on the Island?

W: Yes.

- H: So it was more of a cultural rupture for your dad than for his friends out there on the Island.
- W: Right.
- H: Since you've had the chance to see Japanese Americans from other communities when you were interned at the Manzanar War Relocation Center during World War II, can you draw a comparison between those from Bainbridge Island and those from the San Pedro and Terminal Island area, or with those from the Los Angeles area, or with those from the Florin area in the Sacramento Valley? These groups were all in the camp together, and being exposed to them, can you think of any features about the Bainbridge Islanders that struck you as being somewhat unique?
- W: I would have to say that the Bainbridge Islanders were freer people. Sometimes I feel it's not fair to bring up the Terminal Islanders and say how they were, because I know they lived in a confined area where there were all Japanese, so they had a tendency to be more Japanesey than, say, the Bainbridge people, who were the minority on the Island. Bainbridge people helped one another, I will say, as a community. It was share and share alike, where people came and helped plant the berries--this is the Japanese population I'm speaking of now.
- H: It was a mutual aid arrangement?
- W: Yes, a mutual aid arrangement, and yet there was a big party-like atmosphere. The women went to cook the feast, and the men all went out in the fields; the children helped, too, to plant strawberries. So it was quite a community-spirited group. I would have to say we worked and played together to the extent that we got to know one another a lot more. The other groups, perhaps, were amongst themselves so much that some of their spoken language might be mixed with Japanese and English, where, perhaps, Bainbridge people didn't have that problem. We were more integrated than Terminal Islanders and people from Florin, California.
- H: So you think the diction and life style of the Bainbridge Islanders was a little more Americanized, and that you get more pidgin English --Japanese and English mixed together--among the other people?
- W: Yes, I guess you might say that.
- H: Then you're saying that there was more assimilation among the Bainbridge Islanders?
- W: Right, if we weren't in school, we may not have seen another Japanese for a long time until we went to some community activity.
- H: So in school you were a pronounced minority?
- W: Not a pronounced minority, but a minority, yes.

H: But you were definitely a small group out of a total school population.

W: Right.

H: Then you would see each other in the Japanese language school, at certain kinds of holidays, and you would visit other Japanese American families.

W: Right.

H: Did you have relatives on the Island?

W: Our only relative on the Island was my mother's cousin.

H: Where did you go when you required the services of a doctor or a dentist?

W: Oh, on the Island we had one doctor at that time, when I was growing up. Doctor Sheppard treated everybody, I think, on the Island. If it was not a usual illness, then we went to Seattle.

H: So you didn't go to a Japanese doctor?

W: No.

H: Did you have one on the Island?

W: No, although we did go to a Japanese dentist in Seattle.

H: What other contacts did your family make that were within the Japanese community? What things did you buy, or what services were rendered for you that came from within the community? For instance, if you were going to use the services of a bank, did you tend to operate within the Japanese community?

W: Just as far as lawyers, because my dad had to speak, so then he had to seek a Japanese lawyer. This was also true of banking until the crash during the Depression. When we got older, however, banking was the regular Security National type of thing.

H: Then most of the transactions were done outside of the Island?

W: Yes.

H: You said earlier that on your farm you raised strawberries. Were these strawberries usually marketed in Seattle?

W: Yes, the market berries went to Seattle and then they shipped them back East or wherever they were sent by the R. D. Bodle Company. But Bainbridge Island had a cannery of its own where all the preserves--jellies, jams, and such--were made and frozen. This gave lots of employment opportunities for Caucasian people.

- H: So some of the berries were sent to this cannery?
- W: Right, but the cream of the crop--the big berries--were sent back East, so they were taken care of for us in Seattle.
- H: Were Japanese farmers getting rich out there or not? Was it a modest kind of income that most of them had?
- W: I would say it was a modest kind of income. Just before the war, however, things were really picking up, because the kids grew up and were able to carry on more of the work. People were expanding more and gaining greater income, too.
- H: You said your farm was five acres; was that size common? I mean, was that a small, large, or medium-sized farm?
- W: That was considered small, and I should say that was the five acres that we just lived off of, but we always had more than that in rental property, and we had berry fields at another spot.
- H: Was it a comfortable life style for your family on Bainbridge Island?
- W: I would have to say for that time it would be comfortable--we never went hungry. My mother was very good with her sewing, and I never went without clothes because she could whip up something for each of us. In fact, I think I was the best dressed girl around; she used to sew and was able to draft her own patterns.
- H: So, as a child, you didn't feel really deprived?
- W: No, except for music lessons, as I look back now.
- H: You attended the language school where your mom had taught at one time. Was it common for the Japanese kids who were residents on the Island to attend the language school?
- W: Yes, it was.
- H: Was their performance fairly good, or was it dismal in terms of picking up the language? Now, in a lot of areas Nisei tended to rebel against attending a language school; was that the case on the Island?
- W: I think we all did; we rebelled. But the older Nisei, I must say, learned a lot more. Either they were compelled to study or maybe they were forbidden to rebel. Maybe they had a stricter teacher or maybe Japanese was spoken at home more. But I will have to say that the older group knew Japanese a lot better than at the time we were going.
- H: Did your older sisters learn the language better than you did?

W: Yes.

H: How much facility did you have in the Japanese language when you were a little girl growing up, say, through high school?

W: Up through eighth grade we went every other day; when we were younger up through grade school, we went on Saturdays. Then after that we went every other day--Monday, Wednesday, and Friday--for two hours. But we found out that we were doing our homework from our regular schools, so we didn't learn much!

H: Could you speak anything?

W: Oh, I could speak the language and I could understand, but the reading and writing is really something to . . .

H: Have you since acquired it?

W: No.

H: Did you ever get a chance to . . . well, you mentioned something about going to Japan when you were five or six years old, right?

W: Oh, yes. I was only six years old when my grandfather became ill, so my mother and I went to Japan and spent about six months.

H: Did that trip make a profound impression on you?

W: Yes. When I was there I found out that in America I was free--just another kid--but in Japan, my grandpa had a "nana" for me and I wasn't accustomed to anybody watching over me. One day I made my cousin run off to the village with me and when we got back, well, my grandpa was really put out with me and he had the whole village looking for us--the police and all. Then another time, when I first got there, I was reading, so the same cousin, whose father was a principal of a school, went to school and wouldn't speak the Japanese language. Instead she would say, "One, two, three," in English the way I taught her and also the ABC's instead of the Japanese alphabet. I don't know if they appreciated me or not!

H: You were a subversive influence over there, weren't you? What year was that?

W: That was in 1929. My uncle was running for the senate, and he . . .

H: In the Japanese Diet?

W: Yes, in the Kagoshima prefecture. So he took me on his campaign trips and he introduced me. I would get up and ask the people to vote for my uncle, until the opposing candidate complained and I was stopped because he thought it was very unfair.

H: You were a young trooper out there campaigning, weren't you?

W: I guess so! I remember one night the limousine broke down in the middle of nowhere and I was shivering, so they made a fire out in the roadside. I remember some of those things.

H: So Japan seemed much different to you from the United States?

W: Yes, it was different from what I was accustomed to.

H: Let's now move to the period after December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was bombed by the Japanese. This set up a tension, both within the Japanese American communities along the Coast and within the larger communities. I would say that Pearl Harbor set into motion hysteria within the larger communities, which in turn caused a good deal of tension within the Japanese American communities. Do you recall the circumstances surrounding your family hearing the news, and the reactions of the communities, and what sort of logistics you employed thereafter?

W: Well, it was an uncomfortable feeling to go to school the next day. I guess all the students had to bow their head and look to the East and give a silent prayer and such. And then, of course, the principal was talking about how he felt that there were Japanese in the group and we were all students and not to get reactionary and so forth. So it was a good thing for him to caution everybody.

H: You think he handled it fairly well then?

W: Yes, I do. We were seniors in high school; there were thirteen of us. The principal wanted to see if we could go to the senior prom and other activities, so he called the Army to get clearance, because, actually, for the Japanese people, we had martial law. Well, what do you call that?

H: A curfew?

W: Yes, we had a curfew and we couldn't be out of our house from seven at night to seven in the morning.

H: Was that imposed right away?

W: It was, yes. I was a student helper in the office, and I remember the principal making his calls to see if he could get us on the Army trucks to go to the senior prom, because he felt that that was part of a senior's activities. But the Army would not release us for that either.

H: Your dad, and probably others in the community, were sent to what they called detention centers. These were for people who were picked up prior to the establishment of the relocation centers themselves--the ones like those that you ended up in later in Manzanar and at Minidoka. About when was your dad picked up by the FBI /Federal Bureau of Investigation/?

- W: I believe it was soon after the start of World War II. It must have been sometime in January that he was picked up by the FBI.
- H: Now the rationale was usually that they were leaders in the Japanese community, or that they were potentially dangerous aliens. How did your dad fit into this classification?
- W: Well, the only thing I can say is that he was an officer and leader in the community because he did speak the Japanese language well, and he did read and write and help out the people that weren't able to do this. I know he was always helping the Japanese people on the Island. I would have to say that he couldn't be a potential criminal or alien, and it was kind of a sad situation to have to go see him when he was taken to the immigration . . .
- H: Where, in Seattle?
- W: Yes, in Seattle. And if we had to talk to him, there was a guard standing right there, and there were bars as if he was a criminal. I think when we saw this, it really presented something, and it hurt.
- H: How did they round these men up?
- W: They just came one evening and said, "We're from the FBI and you're one of the aliens that's going to be taken." It was kind of an arrest. They were allowed to get some clothes together, and we were told that we would be contacted later.
- H: How many were there taken from the Island? You had about sixty-three families, so they probably got about sixty-three family heads.
- W: Oh, no, not that many. I'd say about a dozen.
- H: So, maybe less than one-fourth of the family heads were picked up?
- W: Right.
- H: Do you recall who some of the other men were, and why they might have included them in the roundup? Were they leaders of sorts?
- W: Yes, I would say they were leaders.
- H: Such as the teacher at the Japanese language school?
- W: Yes, or say, the community leaders.
- H: Do you recall any sort of general fear directed against Bainbridge Islanders because of their location to anything that was strategic?
- W: Well, this is why we were probably the first families to leave to the relocation centers. Strategically, we are the closest to the Bremerton Naval Base, and then the Nike Base was just off of the

Island and there was a radio receiving station. They thought that we would be in a dangerous position.

H: Were you summarily evicted from the Island; that is, like the Terminal Islanders were you similarly given forty-eight hours notice to get out, or was the evacuation handled a little bit more humanely?

W: I would have to say our evacuation was a little more humane, because I think we had approximately two weeks notice. We could only carry two suitcases, however. When you think of teenagers and two suitcases, that does present a problem. Without the head of the household and with four girls, we were kind of leery and we were kind of . . . I wouldn't say scared, but maybe apprehensive about not knowing where we were going, for what reason, and for what length of time, and then to leave familiar surroundings, school, friends, and all our animals--especially Teddy, my fox terrier. We couldn't take him along; I remember how he looked out the window and cried when we were leaving. We were fortunate enough to have a Filipino come and stay in our home. We had a newly wedded minister's daughter, and she used part of our furniture and so in that event, when we came back they were intact, too. But about two weeks later we found out Teddy died. He refused to eat because he just couldn't get adjusted to not having the family there.

H: How long was your dad held in Seattle?

W: Well, a lot of those things were secretive, so we didn't know how long he was there. I think it was just a couple of weeks and then they sent him to Lordsburg and Santa Fe, New Mexico, and then, of course, later to Missoula, Montana, and to Bismark, North Dakota, for the duration of the war.

H: When did he finally rejoin the family?

W: Let's see, I was gone in 1943 and my sister got married in 1944. My dad, I believe, joined the family in Minidoka in late 1944.

H: So it was at least two years that he was kept?

W: Right.

H: And all this time he was detained for no real reason?

W: For no real reason that we can think of.

H: To just satisfy a public lust for punishment?

W: Well, yes. I would have to say that, yes.

H: So while he was in New Mexico, you were evacuated, and on what date did this occur?

W: We were evacuated on March 26, 1942.

H: And when did you get to Manzanar?

W: We got to Manzanar April 1!

H: In a strange way, it was appropriate to arrive there on April Fool's Day, wasn't it?

W: Right, and the first food we had was kind of . . . We could see all this sagebrush. The way we traveled, too, I might reflect on that. We had a soldier per family.

H: One soldier per family?

W: One soldier per family was watching us all the time.

H: So if you had sixty families, you had sixty soldiers?

W: Right, and each soldier was from back East someplace, because we used to kid them and talk about "Toity-Toid" Street and all this because their language seemed so strange to us. And they, in turn, found out that we were human beings. They thought that we were the "buck toothed" and the "slanted eyed" people and were very dangerous. They had their guns right there with them at the beginning and all, but toward the end they knew we were just like they were. So, when we finally did part in Manzanar--after traveling together for the three or four days--I know that most of them cried.

H: This was by train, then, that you came down from Washington?

W: We came by train, yes. The soldiers felt that this was very unjust themselves, and yet, they never knew a Japanese person personally. I think we all took a collection since we knew that a soldier's pay wasn't much, and we gave them money as gifts. They, in turn, sent us some things that they felt we didn't have. Looking at the camp, they really wept because they thought it was very unfair since it wasn't even up to the specifications that they were accustomed to; the camp wasn't finished by the time we got there.

H: Well, construction had started only a few days before that. The first volunteer contingent came up to Manzanar March 21, and here you were arriving within a matter of ten days, on April 1.

W: Right.

H: What was the state of things at the time of your arrival? How many barracks did they have up by that time?

W: Well, they had up through the third block, because the third was the one that we occupied.

H: Oh, so you were definitely in one of the earliest community groups, then, weren't you?

W: Yes. The people who voluntarily came had grown beards and were unkempt much like the hippies of today. We were so unaccustomed to seeing Japanese people in that condition, that I think we were actually frightened!

H: So when you arrived at Manzanar, the barracks were in an unfinished state and you went to Block 3, which consisted of about how many barracks?

W: Fourteen, and the fifteenth was the recreation hall.

H: Were these barracks all filled by Bainbridge Islanders, or were there other people mixed in?

W: There were others because in each barrack they had, I believe, four families, and each one had to have at least six people.

H: So what did you do with only five people in your family?

W: Well, we had to have another family of three girls live with us.

H: So you had seven girls living in your apartment?

W: Right.

H: And at this time, they mostly had single men in camp. Those living in the first couple of blocks, I imagine, thought this was going to be a real boon to their stay!

W: We were kind of scared, too, when they said, "Well, watch out for that family! How did they get in?" Some of the workers were saying that, so it did kind of frighten us. And I know when we wanted to take showers, we had to have some of the Bainbridge boys come and guard the shower houses.

H: Why? Was there a lot of Peeping Tom activity going on then?

W: We had heard this, yes. And we were kind of afraid--not knowing the California Japanese--from what we had heard about them previously, I guess.

H: What had you heard about them?

W: Well, we had heard that they were kind of a scary people--rough and tough.

H: The Bainbridge Islanders seemed somewhat timid in comparison, I suppose.

W: Well, no. We found out later that the Californians were no different; but that was what we had heard.

H: Did you have any relatives from Los Angeles interned at Manzanar?

W: No, we didn't.

H: So you didn't know anybody. Was that generally the case, or were there a lot of people on the Island who did have relatives down here in Southern California?

W: They had some, but not closely related--maybe first or second cousins.

H: So this was really venturing into a strange land, by and large?

W: Right.

H: Especially so for your family, since you didn't have your father, because he was off in a detention camp and your mom had seven girls on her hands. She must have developed an acute case of paranoia during the time she was shouldering this responsibility alone.

W: Well, I do know she was getting headaches quite often.

H: Did you then get established with some kind of work right away for your mom or for the girls? Was there some kind of job that you could do?

W: Yes. Since we were there from the beginning, we did have a choice of jobs and we worked right away. I worked in the personnel office; we could watch everybody coming in and they had a lot of clerical work to do.

H: Did you just get a job or your sisters, too?

W: Oh, my sisters, too. We all got jobs.

H: You were there on the ground level, so a lot of the jobs were pretty much available in processing people, et cetera?

W: Right.

H: Where did your sisters work, in personnel, too, or at other jobs?

W: No. One of my sisters worked in the library, the other sister worked in the kitchen.

H: Did the other three girls staying with you get jobs, too?

W: Two were still in school. Later one worked in the guayule factory making nets for the war cause.

H: Did you have a fairly decent family income? Each of these people were earning \$12, \$16, or \$19, weren't they?

W: Yes. Well, as I indicated, the two girls that were with us were still students, but the oldest daughter was working. So the amount of money

we got, I guess, was \$12 at the beginning. Twelve dollars a month and, of course, being in an area where \$12 didn't go far because, after all, teenagers want to have cokes and potato chips and things like that which were not available except at the canteen.

When we first got there, the barracks weren't finished, the windows were still open, and the ditches on the side were open. And, of course, one of the girls--who later became Miss Nisei--fell in one of those holes and hurt herself. So it was really in terrible condition.

H: Of course, you didn't even get your salary until June. You worked a couple of months for nothing before they finally came through with five dollars worth of script, after two months of working forty-eight hours a week or something?

W: Right, we did work like any regular person working outside, because it became self-sustaining later. But I remember those dust storms we had! It was just terrible! We'd have maybe an inch of dust on the window sill, and they even issued World War I goggles! So you can see how bad it was!

H: Yes, everybody who was at Manzanar seems to remember the terrible dust storms. They say that you couldn't see in front of your face for more than a couple of feet. So it was really terrible then?

W: It really was.

H: And that was something you encountered very early during your stay in the camp.

W: Right.

H: What kind of weather did you have when you arrived that time of year in April?

W: Oh, in April it was very hot, and we weren't accustomed to that and I think the older people felt like they were going to pass out or something like that.

H: Now they didn't establish schools right away, did they? They had all these kids starting to pour in throughout April and May, especially, without any school. What I understand, from reading pertinent documents, is that there developed a lot of gangs at Manzanar during this time. There were kids roaming and roving all about the camp, weren't there?

W: That's right.

H: Do you remember that situation?

W: I think it was all in fun really, but they felt like they had to.

They had zoot suiters and offshoots of different gangs. Even the little kids thought that was fun and they joined certain gangs and such.

Oh, you might be interested to know that we were the first graduating class there. The thirteen from Bainbridge, although we didn't go to school in Manzanar at all, had our diplomas sent from Bainbridge High School. We still marched to "Pomp and Circumstance." We used a record player and had a little ceremony, but this is also the class of the unlucky thirteen. I don't know what it is, but it's the same class that had never had a graduation in our life! What happened was that when we were sixth graders, they decided to have the graduation for grade school at the eighth grade level. So they upped it to the eighth grade and we didn't graduate like sixth graders generally do. When we got up to the eighth grade, they felt it didn't work, so they put it down to the sixth grade. So we didn't have a junior high school graduation either. And then, of course, we didn't get to graduate with our class at Bainbridge Island. So, I think we were the class that never had a graduation!

H: So you had a record player in camp?

W: Right, a record player that we borrowed. You see, no one in the Bainbridge group had one since we couldn't take things like this. It was quite a sad affair!

H: So you were really the first graduating class, not of Manzanar, but in Manzanar, right?

W: Right.

H: Do you recall when you left Bainbridge Island, if there was suddenly a lot of hostility from people on the Island toward you as a Japanese, hostility that you hadn't experienced before? Did Pearl Harbor change attitudes?

W: Well, when some people did change attitudes, especially in school, then you knew that they weren't really your friends.

H: Did you yourself notice a change in attitudes? Was there exploitation?

W: Not where we were concerned, but some of our friends experienced it.

H: Did credit sources dry up or did you have people who tried to intimidate you? For instance, a good example would be that a lot of the Japanese communities allegedly experienced difficulties with Filipinos, especially after Japan invaded the Philippine Islands. You had Filipinos on the Island that worked for you. On the other hand, you said you also had a Filipino who took over your property.

W: Well, this is why I say that it depended on circumstances, because my parents were good to the Filipinos that they had working for them,

so we could trust them to stay. Yes, I think a lot of them changed their attitudes, too, and some took over the farms completely. I don't know by what means, but in the case of some families, when we came back you could see that they took over everything.

H: The Filipinos took over the farms?

W: Right, and I can't speak for them, but there were some circumstances I would have to say.

H: Did you feel antagonism from the Caucasian population on the Island?

W: The people that we were friends with felt real badly because they, too, didn't know. So those that would be friends for life, you really knew right then and there.

H: Did they ever do anything concretely, aside from just standing by you as friends?

W: Oh, definitely. For instance, our Christian friends and neighbors took over some of our things for us that we valued. Although I will have to say, my family had the Samurai swords due to my dad being the oldest, and I know one of those was missing. Well, those things were taken right away, unfortunately. Also, the government took our radios, cameras, et cetera. We had a couple of violins in the family and they were gone. So, unfortunately, things that just meant a lot to us were gone. But, other than that, I would have to say our Christian friends were tremendous and stayed with us and helped us in every way possible.

H: Who did you direct your antagonism toward, the government or the Caucasian population? All of a sudden you're having not only your graduation year interrupted, but your whole family is being torn asunder by your father being peremptorily taken away from the family. You find yourself being uprooted and being put on a train with blinders pulled down and armed guards taking you to some God forsaken desert camp. Who do you get mad at?

W: I suppose at that time it must have been the government and the people that just didn't know the Japanese. I think that's it, if people knew the Japanese, they would have had second thoughts.

H: What is ironic is that the people who were most proximate to the Japanese, but who didn't really know them, caused so much of the difficulties. It wasn't the people in the Midwest, or the East, it was the people out on the West Coast that were starting most of the anti-Japanese crusades.

W: Right, the opportunists. I think you would have to say that was true because they knew that they could take over different farms and places of business. But on Bainbridge Island, on the whole, I will have to say--maybe I am not aware of it, or I have forgotten

or something--the people weren't that way. Reading about the historical views, I now see the political implications.

H: Well, maybe it was because of the Island situation that people were a little bit more compatible or closer knit, and felt more familiar than they did in other places.

W: I think so.

H: But in talking to people who were at Manzanar, it certainly becomes clear that many Terminal Islanders were viciously exploited.

W: Oh, yes.

H: Did you feel yourself, then, as a Bainbridge Islander, somewhat more favorably disposed than, say, some of these people?

W: I would have to say yes, that the government only allowed us to take two suitcases and nothing personal--these were all things that we had to leave behind. But as far as people-wise, we didn't have this kind of . . . I'm sure we had some exploitation, but not to the same extent as on Terminal Island. Terminal Islanders had to sell everything like pianos and ice boxes for around five dollars, and people were there just for the taking and making fun. I think that's terrible! But as far as we were concerned, most of our homes were taken care of by someone who worked for us or say, maybe a young couple who didn't have a home yet. When the Bainbridge Island people came back, most of the people had their homes to come back to.

H: A fascinating sociological phenomenon is that in Manzanar, located very close to one another, were the blocks containing the people from Bainbridge Island and the blocks containing the people from San Pedro and Terminal Island, because these groups were dramatically different. Part of the psychology underlying the evacuation was that there was no difference among Japanese and, I guess, it was summed up best in General DeWitt's oft-quoted statement that, "A Jap is a Jap." But in fact, when you study the camps, you notice glaring differences, and I have sometimes heard it said that the Terminal Islanders felt that the Bainbridge Island people looked down on them as being a very Japanesey and very unlettered sort of group. Oftentimes, too, the Terminal Islanders were frowned upon because they had gangs and the youths dressed differently and they seemed tough. In fact, the kids from Los Angeles, I am told, were scared of the ones from Terminal Island because they thought of them as a very rough group of fishermen's kids who had lived a rough and tough style of life. Did you notice this kind of differentiation between people in your block and the people in the Terminal Island-San Pedro group?

W: I guess I did, yes. At first, it was hard to believe that we spoke the same language. They spoke a little bit of pidgin English, they were somewhat rough, and they did have some of their gangs and such.

But when we got to know them individually, we found out that they were just like any of us and today some of my best friends are from Terminal Island. Unfortunately, I think that Terminal Islanders were in this clustered group and their way of speaking and such was a little different. And the funny part is, when we went to Minidoka, our kids, just for fun, acted like the Terminal Islands kids. They went with their pant leggings like zoot suiters. Luckily, the Seattle people knew the Bainbridge people before, or they would have been frightened of the Bainbridge people coming from Manzanar!

When the Terminal Island or the Boyle Heights people came to top beets in the Idaho Falls area, they would come into the Minidoka War Relocation Center because they had made friends with us before we had left Manzanar for Minidoka. I remember I was in an office and the girls all got so scared. They hid right under their desks and they all screamed. I stood there laughing because I knew they were just harmless! They first came in to the administration office to ask for directions to go and see the Bainbridge people. We were located in Block 44 at the end of the block--which was the end of nowhere--because we came into Minidoka last. Our Bainbridge boys were dressed this way when they first came to Minidoka from Manzanar to shock the Washington group. But, of course, most of them knew who they were. Although they might have been shocked when they saw the actual Californians come as a group and thought, "Oh, this is what California did to them," the Minidoka group was scared. These kids . . . honestly, I had to laugh.

- H: I read a thesis written about Minidoka which concerned the period in camp history after you left. In any event, this thesis notes that when they made Tule Lake into a segregation center, they sent some of the people from Tule Lake to Minidoka, and the people at Minidoka looked with great apprehension at these Californians. They regarded them ipso facto as troublemakers--that if they were from California, they were a tough breed of people. The people from the Washington area were definitely suspicious of them.
- W: Right.
- H: So I suppose this is the reaction that you are talking about. Washingtonian Japanese Americans had a perception of Californians as something you had better be a little bit wary of: these people are different.
- W: They came with zoot suits or whatever, and they did look different from the kids that those from Washington were accustomed to.
- H: Their hair was swept back in a duck tail and everything else, right?
- W: Right. And, of course, I had to laugh and let them know that they were just as harmless as anybody else and that they did this for fun, too. It's really amazing what happens when people just don't know.
- H: You left Manzanar in about February of 1943, correct?

W: Right.

H: So you were there from April of 1942 to February of 1943. Now that was a rather tumultuous period in the camp's history. There were a lot of problems within the camp--some of a political nature, like those which led to the bloodshed on December 6, 1942 when there was a riot. At the very time that you were getting ready to leave for Minidoka, there was a big flap in the camp over the attempt by the United States government to register people for a volunteer combat team and there was a big to-do over loyalty oaths that were being administered to the internee population. So during the time that you were there, it was a really seething period in Manzanar's history. You were probably somewhat privy to this through your work in the personnel office. Exactly what kind of problems were causing Manzanar to be anything but a quiet kind of a camp at the time, and what were the causes for discontent that became apparent to you?

W: Well, I suppose some of the people that were raised in Japan felt that this was an injustice being done, and that the others probably were not being made aware of it. I think they made an issue of that and, possibly, that was behind the riot. And yet, one of the people that died in this so-called Manzanar Riot was as innocent as could be; I knew him.

H: Now, was this James Ito?

W: Yes, James Ito. He lived in Block 4 and happened to be just a bystander. Another one of our friends had a bullet just graze by him. You know how kids are; they just went to see what was going on. So in that nature, it had to be political. But it was just a small segment of people; there weren't that many Kibei--they are those born in America but raised in Japan. I think for that reason, though, the government did let those of us from Bainbridge Island go to Minidoka; they felt that we were a little bit more assimilated.

H: I've heard that the Bainbridge Islanders just simply could not adjust to the climatological conditions; that the climate was such that they couldn't get used to it and they were having problems with health and everything. Is that the reason for the wholesale removal of the Bainbridge Islanders from Manzanar, or was it the riot?

W: Well, I think because of this unrest and, actually, removal was petitioned by the group.

H: So the Bainbridge Islanders petitioned to go up to Minidoka?

W: Right, to be with the Washingtonians.

H: Were the Bainbridge Islanders very much involved in the politics of the camp during the early years? Who, for instance, was your block leader in Block 3?

- W: Our block leader was Bill Kito, who was from Los Angeles.
- H: Oh, he was from Los Angeles. I wonder why he got elected, as opposed to somebody from the Island. Were there more people from Los Angeles in Block 3 than Bainbridge Islanders?
- W: No, but I think people from Bainbridge Island were younger and possibly they didn't want that job. Also, the Issei leaders were in camps, so for this reason I believe Mr. Kito became our block leader. I think he wanted it.
- H: Was Kito a Kibei?
- W: He was a Kibei.
- H: Was he a popular block leader?
- W: Maybe to the Issei.
- H: Not so much to the Nisei?
- W: No, not especially.
- H: Was he a militant?
- W: No, he wasn't militant. But for that reason--and this is why the petition was sent to Washington--they agreed to let us go to Minidoka.
- H: For what reason?
- W: Probably, for the reason of this unrest in camp and all. Probably with all of that, and maybe the people finding that the climate was another factor.
- H: Did everybody from Bainbridge Island get transferred, or did some people prefer to stay in Manzanar?
- W: A few of them stayed--maybe those that got married and now had relatives there. But just very few stayed. I'd say sixty families left and three families stayed.
- H: Who took over the nominal leadership or spokesman position for the Bainbridge Islanders? You had most of your leaders, like your father, in detention camps in New Mexico or in Montana or wherever. Who, in your opinion, did the people from Bainbridge Island look to as the nominal head of the community?
- W: I would have to say it would be a couple of the Nisei fellows.
- H: The older Nisei?
- W: Yes. I'd say those in the JACL [Japanese American Citizens League].

H: Can you think of the names of any of them?

W: Arthur Koura and Bob Koba--I would say maybe those two.

H: They weren't too happy, probably, with the block leader, were they?

W: Maybe, that could be.

H: They would be the ones who would probably be a little bit at odds with his way of leadership. Did you say it was Bill Kito who was the block leader?

W: Yes. I think he was a good block leader because in block leading-- I don't think he had anything to do with politics as such--it was like issuing different articles and things, like the gas for our heaters and blankets, et cetera. So, it wasn't a political issue with our block. Anyway, I wasn't aware of it.

H: There was a very controversial block leader in the block next to yours, Karl Yoneda. He was in Block 4. Did you ever hear about him or see him?

W: Yes, I saw him.

H: What was the general feeling in Block 3 toward him?

W: Well, I don't think the people in Block 3 liked him.

H: Can you perhaps explain why?

W: I think, because he was outspoken.

H: Yes, he was a Communist and he was sometimes criticized by being called Aka. Now what does that word mean in the Japanese community?

W: Aka means Red.

H: And what connotation does it have?

W: Well, it means Communist.

H: Why was that viewed as such a bad thing?

W: Because I think the Japanese just didn't believe in Communism. That was something that was just, practically . . . oh, if you were an Aka, I guess, you were just not with it.

H: In camp, Yoneda took a very strong pro-American position--perhaps even stronger than almost anybody in camp with the exception of people like Tokie Slocum or Fred Tayama--and many other leftists, Communists, et cetera, were outspoken in support of the war effort. Obviously, they had reasons for it, insofar as the Nazis had attacked

the Soviet Union. They took a very strong pro-American position, and part of the reason that they were either beaten up or threatened by certain groups within the camp was because of their wanting to open up a second front and to draft the Nisei. They started a Manzanar Citizens Federation in camp, which was sort of like a JAFL chapter. They were very much pro-administration and they accommodated themselves to the administration's needs. Yet, you still find people who are suspicious of people like Karl Yoneda. Do you think it was just because of this association with prewar Communist activities? Do you think that was it when you heard the term Aka? No matter what else you say about him, are you still going to be suspicious?

W: Probably. A person doesn't change overnight. But one thing, though, the Bainbridge group or the Washington group did have a lot of volunteers--well, they had people in the service, let's put it that way, prior to the evacuation. I suppose they were maybe known to be a pro-American group. So, rather than being picked on, they probably initiated this petition. They had nothing against the Californians because, as I say, you can't put one group against the other so quickly, and it certainly wasn't so anyway. They wanted to be with their own relatives and friends of long standing. This is why they petitioned the government: to be with the other Washingtonians.

H: What of the intimidation that was going on in the camp against so-called inu /informers/? Certain people that I have mentioned before, and then others like Joe Blamey--I noticed you had his name on some celebration item--were administered beatings. Blamey worked for the Manzanar Free Press. Togo Tanaka and Joe Grant Masaoka were put on black lists, death lists, et cetera, at the time of the Manzanar Riot. Did you feel this in the camp? Maybe not, because you were still a young girl, but you at least would have heard about it. Did you hear about threats, and about the Nisei being intimidated, or people holding a very pro-American position being intimidated?

W: Well, we did hear of some of the beatings. I knew who Fred Tayama was, but I did not know of the California politics.

H: How did you know him?

W: My girlfriend and I were in the personnel office. Of course, we handled the personnel of all the kitchen groups, and Fred Tayama used to drive this paneled truck. I think many of the internees thought that a lot of these guys were getting things special for themselves--for their own betterment--and I think this was what people were resenting.

H: Do you think it was true, or was it just generally believed?

W: Let's put it the latter way: it was generally believed.

- H: Most of the reports that I have read pretty well indicated that Fred Tayama was a very unpopular man within the community of Manzanar, and that many people were perfectly satisfied when he was beaten. They felt that it was something that he had coming to him. Do you think that is an accurate assessment?
- W: Well, of course, I would not want anybody beaten up, so at that time I probably just thought, "Well, somebody had it in for him."
- H: But it was pretty widely believed that he was especially tight with the administration, received special favors and privileges, and might even have been leaking information to the FBI and that he had done so before the war. It was rumored that he charged the Issei exorbitant fees for filing certain papers and that he was an inu, that he was somebody who did not have the interest of the Japanese American community at heart. I'm not suggesting that this was a fact, I'm saying that this seemed to be a shared belief.
- W: Probably, because when you think of people all working together and everybody not having favors and, of course, I was never in his barrack and all, so I have no idea, and what I thought at that time could be wrong. You see, I wondered, "Is he getting favors?" Because I remember him having the special paneled truck and such.
- H: I have heard also that there was some resentment directed against people like yourself, Nisei girls who had jobs in the administration offices, like in personnel. They felt that they were especially well-treated and that they got better positions, and that they were also given special treatment when it came to meals--that those in charge let them get in line in front of other people there at the barracks. In short, evidence suggests that there was some disgruntlement towards younger Nisei girls who held clerical or personnel positions within the camp. Did you feel that?
- W: Not where we were concerned, but possibly with some of those private secretaries.
- H: More with the private secretaries?
- W: Yes. They probably could get in line ahead of others at the mess halls. We usually would go back to our own block to have lunch anyway, and dinner we always ate in Block 3.
- H: So you didn't eat in the Block 1 kitchen or anything?
- W: Very seldom.
- H: So you didn't feel much resentment toward yourself or your co-workers?
- W: No. In fact, when we went to some of the kitchen areas to see the people, they welcomed us. I know one time the six of us girls--class mates--got up early in the morning to take a walk around the blocks,

and the first kitchen that was open we went to have breakfast. By the time we came back, we ended up in three kitchens and had three breakfasts!

H: What with the starchy food they were serving, that was another way to put on weight, wasn't it!

W: Lucky we were teenagers and very active. They had coupons for everybody though. They had a head counter, and they knew where you were from--but if you visited another place, they usually let you stay and have dinner.

H: What do you think the feeling was among the camp population at large toward the Kibei, as a group?

W: I guess, coming from a Nisei, I would have to say that most of the Kibei felt a strong loyalty to Japan, or they were a lot more Japanese than any of the Nisei.

H: Did you know any Kibei up in Bainbridge Island?

W: In Bainbridge Island, very few.

H: How about Seattle?

W: Seattle must have had some, yes.

H: Was your first real association with Kibei as a group in Manzanar?

W: Yes.

H: Did they hang around together in Manzanar?

W: Well, I would have to say that they must have, but, of course, I wasn't in any situation to notice that.

H: Did your mother caution you about Kibei at all?

W: No, because we didn't come in too much contact with Kibei really.

H: How did the Kibei conduct themselves in camp? I mean you must have seen them at sometime or other, like coming into the personnel office. Did they have a particular style that was unique to them?

W: I think they had a chip on their shoulder, and then, of course, being with Nisei, too, they would always . . . I couldn't tell by appearance--only through conversation would I really notice. I mean, just by looking at them I would have to say you didn't notice any difference.

H: Did Nisei look down on them?

W: Yes.

H: And do you think they treated them, then, as something of an outcaste group or subgroup within the Nisei generation?

W: Yes. Maybe not on a one to one basis, but on the whole, I would have to say, yes. In general, they felt that the Nisei didn't like them.

H: Could you elaborate a little bit about each of the following groups from your perspective? You've just gone through the Kibei, now, how would you distinguish the Kibei in the camp as against the people from Terminal Island and San Pedro? How were they different as groups? Both of them have a much more pronounced Japanese manner than do the Bainbridge Islanders, but how do they differ from one another?

W: Well, Kibei, their thinking is different. See, their thinking will be more like Issei. It will be the old Japanese way of thinking, as well as attitudes.

H: More traditional?

W: More traditional, yes. Whereas the Terminal Island group, when you come right down to it, they spoke differently but they thought more like us.

H: So you felt more compatibility with the Terminal Islanders than the Kibei in terms of general outlook?

W: Oh, yes.

H: They might live a little bit differently, but their thought patterns and everything were more similar to yours?

W: Right.

H: What about the people from the Florin area in the Sacramento Valley? They represented another major camp group outside of Los Angeles, in addition to the Bainbridge Islanders. Did you meet any of these people in camp?

W: Yes, I did. But I would have to say those that I really knew personally were those through church, and so they thought more like us. Although, again, their English was quite different from the way we spoke. That's one thing we noticed right away. And we couldn't imagine when . . . well, I suppose they lived in certain confined areas, too, or they must have to gone to schools that had a lot more Japanese or something, because they did speak differently and quite a bit in Japanese. Their th sounds were different and I remember being teenagers and giggling and, of course, we used to laugh about those things. It was kind of mean.

- H: By and large, did the people in the camps tend to sustain the old community basis? I don't mean that you might not have had friends from Boyle Heights or from Florin or from Terminal Island, but within the camp, did people tend to cluster according to pre-camp places of origin? For instance, did the Terminal Islanders tend to stick with Terminal Islanders, people from downtown Los Angeles with people from downtown Los Angeles, people from the west side of Los Angeles with people from the west side and people from Bainbridge Island with people from the Island.
- W: By and large, yes. Later on possibly not, but at the beginning, the first year, I will have to say, yes.
- H: The people pretty much did stay together, then, during that first period?
- W: Right. But my mother had quite an experience. When she went to college, there was a woman there that she hadn't seen for about thirty years, I guess. She was a senior when my mother was a freshman, something like that, and yet when they were passing one another, they recognized each other instantly and called each other by their maiden names and became so excited. So, see, people they knew from Japan and college days and so forth just became fast friends again, even after thirty years.
- H: They were friends jumping way back to Japan.
- W: Right. So you had friendships like that too.
- H: And where were most of your new friends from? I would presume they were from Los Angeles since about, I think, seventy percent or more at Manzanar were from Los Angeles City and about eighty percent were from Los Angeles County. So, did most of the friends that you acquired at camp, come from Los Angeles or did they, as you suggested a little while ago, perhaps come from Terminal Island?
- W: You mean right now or at that time?
- H: At the camp itself.
- W: There were six of us girls from the same class and I think we had the tendency to be friends with a lot of them from the Glendale area. And then, of course, girls that we met in church, I think, played a great part in becoming friends. So, it's not necessarily certain areas; it would be with another like group, I think.
- H: So, you met through a common agency like the church?
- W: Yes.
- H: Was church a big part of your experience at Manzanar?
- W: Yes.

H: Who was the pastor for your church?

W: Well, unfortunately, we were one camp that was without a pastor. So, we had leaders that kept the camp going and that was one of the big groups. But we had good ministers come in from the Council of Churches in Los Angeles.

H: Were they always Baptists?

W: No, no, from different denominations.

H: Did you sometimes have Reverend Herbert Nicholson?

W: Yes, we had Reverend Nicholson and Dr. Ralph Mayberry. We had some of the finest group of men come in to conduct sermons, and other times when we didn't have any, then one of the young people just took over.

H: Did you take any classes while you were at Manzanar in adult education or anything, or were you pretty much out of school insofar as classwork was concerned.

W: I started to learn Spanish, but then, as I said, we left. So, no, I guess we didn't actually go and take adult classes.

H: Well, before commencing this interview, you were showing me a little announcement in your camp scrapbook about a wiener bake that turned out to be rather significant in your life. Do you want to relate that experience?

W: I think the experience that we have had would have to do with the young people of the church. That was a big group, too. Well, it so happened that many of the girls were raving about this particular tall good looking guy, I'll say 5 foot 10 inches, and quite a personable leader.

H: What grade was he in, or was he out of school?

W: He was a junior at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles]. So the girls were talking about him, and one day I'd met this fellow who waved to three of us girls. My girlfriends, being shy, looked the other way, so I thought, "Well, there is a guy waving, better wave back, " and I waved to him. We later found out that he was the one the girls were talking about.

H: He was tall for a Nisei, wasn't he?

W: Yes. When I came back to the barracks, I said, "I think I saw Hideo Watanabe," and described him. "Oh, yes. That's him." And I replied, "Well, I've seen better looking guys than that!" That was my first impression of him! Later that night I had gone to a wiener bake with my girlfriends and newly acquired friends, fellows from

UCLA. Who should show up but this "tall dark and handsome"--he was leading the campfire songs! I was helping with the food and lo and behold this fellow made me a special roasted hot dog and gave it to me. This is how I met my future husband. We were there at the creek having a good time singing. He happened to be the song leader! And then coming back from the wiener bake, he decided he was going to walk home with us; since his friends from UCLA were with us he wasn't about to be left out. So anyway, he walked home with us. I had this big jar of mustard and my mother wanted to put sugar in it, so she said, "Be sure to bring the jar home." This jar was from the graduation party and I had inherited it. He said he was going to carry that back for me and I was telling him to be very careful, since he was studying to be a chemist, I just gave him some of these little formulas. "BANA<sup>2</sup>." He said he just couldn't figure that out and I said, "Oh, it's banana." I was getting kind of silly and I was asking him about the formula for hot water; afterwards he said, "What is it?" And I said, "O-U" in Japanese that is hot water. With that he flung the jar and broke it! So the first time he met my mother was . . .

H: Was she mad?

W: No, he came to apologize to her for breaking the bottle! But that was our first meeting up there, at the wiener bake.

H: Did you get married in Manzanar?

W: Oh, no. It wasn't until three years later in Chicago.

H: Oh, he was not from Bainbridge Island, was he?

W: No, he's from Glendale, California.

H: And he was in which block at Manzanar?

W: He was in Block 12.

H: So he was a junior at UCLA and had his college career interrupted by evacuation?

W: Yes.

H: And then after he left Manzanar, did he resettle, or did he go into the Army?

W: I was out in Chicago first, then he came out after beet topping; then he went to Kenosha, Wisconsin, and worked and later applied for the University of Wisconsin. His application was honored by the University, but the Army wouldn't release him. We never did know why but perhaps because of the G-12 program they had. Of course, we wrote to the Army and asked what reason they had in not releasing him to attend the University. And we wrote twice, but they never answered.

After that he was drafted into the service.

H: Why don't we get back to your experiences at Manzanar at about the time of the riot. What do you remember about the so-called Manzanar Riot of December 6, 1942?

W: All I remember was a big commotion and weird noises and people running. We couldn't hear clearly because we were in Block 3. It happened right outside of the guardhouse. And people were screaming . . .

H: It happened right near the camp's entrance where they had the jail.

W: Right.

H: And so you were not located that far away in Block 3, were you?

W: No, so we could hear. I can only say that it was a weird kind of a feeling and a weird kind of noise and people shouting and just running and screaming. Then someone got hit; that's all we could hear--gun shot.

H: Did you hear about the meetings held earlier in the day?

W: Oh, no.

H: The only thing you heard about then was the riot itself?

W: Right.

H: And you heard a running sound?

W: Yes.

H: Outside of your barracks?

W: Yes.

H: So you just heard a lot of footsteps.

W: Right. And then we heard that one of the boys that was grazed <sup>by</sup> was from Glendale's Block 12. He used to come to Block 3 often. We heard that he just got grazed on his coat and was not hurt.

H: Was he just a bystander?

W: Yes, a bystander. So I guess they were wondering what was going on. You know, curious teenagers and they were all down there. That's about all we heard.

H: One died right away and ten were wounded and a little while later one of the other fellows that was down there also died. What did this incident do to the community? Wasn't there a redoubled indig-

- nation toward these tough, militaristic policies? People just didn't go smiling along did they, not after that happened?
- W: No.
- H: I know that the Bainbridge Islanders petitioned to get out of the camp, but what was the general internee feeling toward the . . .
- W: Well, of course, we couldn't have gatherings for awhile, we had a curfew law, and Christmas was quiet and rather sad. So people generally didn't congregate much; we just went to work, went to the mess hall, went home and stayed there. At seven o'clock everybody had to be in and there were no social functions at all. So, whatever went on, we weren't aware of them, other than conversations and hearsay about the pro-Japanese factor. Yet, you hear that those guards had no business shooting when there were so many kids there. The one that was killed [James Ito] was just a kid, innocently just standing by; he wasn't militaristic, just trying to see what was going on. I knew his sister.
- H: What was the camp feeling towards this fellow, Harry Ueno, who figured so prominently in the events surrounding the riot? He was the fellow in the jail that they were having the demonstration all about. He was a Kibei cook in Block 22 and the head of the Kitchen Workers Union. Did you ever hear of Harry Ueno?
- W: No, not until afterwards when I read about him.
- H: So at the time he wasn't somebody that appeared in your life's horizon?
- W: No, no, because all the kitchen complaints that we used to get . . . Mas Takigawa was the personnel director for the kitchen crew and [Joe] Winchester was the big boss [Chief steward]. I worked for Mas so I heard the complaints always, such as "So-and-so came back here and ate and certain kitchens got much more meat," and this type of thing. And, "It's unfair that Block 24 was the one that always got the best food." One of those fellows lived in Block 24.
- H: Tayama?
- W: Tayama, yes, and so that block got a lot more. We even went there to eat one night to find out.
- H: Did they have better food?
- W: Yes, I guess so. I don't know, it could just have been that night.
- H: Just a unique situation?
- W: Perhaps.
- H: After the riot the camp authorities moved out about sixty internees

- that they called pro-American, people who were mostly identified with the JACL, and they sent them to an abandoned CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] Camp in Death Valley. Then they moved out another group of people, I guess around nineteen, who they considered agitators. They didn't really have any precise information as to what their activities were, but they were moved out in order to calm down the community. Were people happy to be rid of these two factions?
- W: Yes, I think so.
- H: Then they probably felt these outspoken "pro-American" types--I mean the Fred Tayama types--were just as obnoxious as those in the "pro-Japan" group.
- W: Yes, I don't think the people knew who or what to believe. I think that they were agitating in both ways, and they wanted peace and contentment in the camp. I believe that they were kind of good riddance.
- H: Did the Bainbridge Islanders sometimes feel like they were sandwiched between warring Los Angeles factions whose differences predated the evacuation?
- W: Right, this is why I think we felt like, "Gee, what's going on?" This seemed like it was way before our time, yet we were caught right in there. We just didn't know. This is why I can tell you only the things that I've experienced and derived from later reading about them. But at that time, I don't think we knew any of it.
- H: These controversial camp personalities weren't people that you had read about every week in the Rafu Shimpo because you didn't live in Los Angeles and therefore probably didn't even get the Rafu Shimpo.
- W: Right, we didn't even get the Rafu Shimpo.
- H: So you really were kind of strangers in Manzanar.
- W: Yes, those of us from Bainbridge Island were isolated from what was happening.
- H: Right, so part of the reasoning behind the Bainbridge Island petition was to allow you to return to people that you were somewhat more familiar with, because except for the people from Florin you really were the only "outsiders" in camp.
- W: Yes.
- H: I mean, Bainbridge Islanders sort of stood out; they were quite unique. So after this riot, then, you were only there for a couple of months and then it was time to leave. The petition apparently was honored and you were sent to the Minidoka War Relocation Center in Idaho. How did you get transported to Minidoka?

W: We went by train, at least most of the way.

H: And you went up as a group like you had when you came to Manzanar?

W: Right.

H: Did they pull the blinds down this time, or were they up?

W: This time they were up! No more curfew.

H: This time you spotted more than Mount Shasta, right?

W: Well, I guess so, but from what I spotted I was not very impressed!

H: You were more impressed, then, when you just saw Mount Shasta alone and could generalize on California from that. But this time you had a look at some of the unpleasant spots in California. On this trip I suppose you weren't as heavily guarded by military as the first time?

W: No, we weren't.

H: And what was the exit from Manzanar like? Were you given a farewell party or was there some sort of send-off for you?

W: Yes, you saw that Block 3 farewell program I showed you earlier. Yes, there was a farewell party for us.

H: Oh, the program that was in your scrapbook that you were showing me before this interview? Yes, now I remember it.

W: There was a send-off party and I think the people--especially the new friends--were all gathered saying their goodbyes. It was rather a sad farewell.

H: Then you went to Minidoka, and what did you think of that camp?

W: We were transported by army trucks again, when we were taken out of Manzanar and later by train. Yes, we did have a tearful farewell; people came to help and wanted us to use their blankets. Our supplies were all Army-issued, and we weren't to take anything. They were picked up the night before, so some people brought their blankets so that we wouldn't freeze to death!

H: You don't think that those remaining in Manzanar harbored much resentment toward you since you had turned around and left them? Did they feel that you were thinking, "We don't want to live in this neighborhood."

W: No, I don't think so.

H: What did you think of Minidoka when you first got there? You probably

had heard something about it through correspondence with different families and things like that.

W: Well, it was just flocked with snow. I think we probably felt like we had left a good place!

H: Oh, you got there at that time of the year, didn't you? You had some second thoughts once you got there! Were the Minidoka people very resentful about giving you barracks space?

W: No, because Block 44 was not all occupied.

H: Oh, you went way to the back of the camp then, didn't you?

W: Yes. I think either way we went, I felt like we were welcomed. Maybe it's because we had a lot of friends and relatives, but I didn't feel any resentment.

H: Had you already filed for resettlement prior to getting to Minidoka?

W: Yes.

H: So you were waiting for your papers to be processed, was that it?

W: Right.

H: And so you got to Minidoka, and you stayed how long after you arrived?

W: Well, we left in February, so I stayed about two and a half months.

H: Your sisters stayed in Minidoka?

W: Yes, they stayed for awhile. I was the most adventuresome, the non-conformist of the family. My dad was still interned and I know some of the friends came to tell my mom not to let me go to Chicago, a place where I knew nobody. But my mother said that she knew how she raised me, and how I was. I was eighteen and she didn't want me to wilt in some . . . I mean, this wasn't a good atmosphere for young people. Before I left Bainbridge Island, I would have had a scholarship in home economics at Washington State, so my mother wanted me to go and pursue this course of study.

H: Were you intending to go to school when you left the camp?

W: Well, I was hoping to, but when I got there I found out that you have to make a living, really, and I got to a hostel. When you really think, then you wonder, "Why did I come like this not knowing? But I'm here, so I'm going to make the best of it."

H: Did you get a job right away?

W: Yes.

H: How soon after you arrived, did you get a job? You went to Salt Lake City first, didn't you?

W: No, I went straight to Chicago.

H: What was it you were mentioning to me about Salt Lake City earlier?

W: Oh, some of the girls that left camp went to Salt Lake City.

H: But you went straight to Chicago?

W: Yes.

H: And you didn't have a job in advance?

W: No.

H: You had to go out and secure one?

W: Well, Doctor Thomas is the one that was instrumental, really, in talking me into going East. He wanted me to go to New York and work in his office.

H: Who was Dr. Thomas?

W: Dr. Thomas was the director of the Baptist work, I believe, City Mission Society in New York.

H: Do you recall his first name?

W: John W. Thomas. He wanted me to come and work for him as one of his secretaries.

H: He had met you at Minidoka?

W: Yes, he had this other girl, Cora, I think, that was going to be his secretary, so he asked if I would be one of the secretaries also. She was going to go, and I kind of had second thoughts. New York was kind of far and Chicago was a little more in between and, of course, money-wise, too. We had to pay our own fare. Supposing I wanted to come home, then Chicago would be easier. And anyway, Chicago had the hostels operated by the Quakers, and I thought if I got there and I started working, then I would have the opportunity of going to school. So my mother said that she wanted me to go, and yet her friends advised against me going to Chicago, a big city.

H: Your family was pretty independent minded all throughout, weren't they?

W: I would have to say, yes.

- H: Because I think in a similar situation, the youngest daughter in a Japanese family would have been pretty well prohibited from being the first one, at least, to resettle to a strange area.
- W: Right, but I did leave and, of course, Hideo, my husband now, had been against it. He wanted to be the one to go out first, but I felt like, well, I had . . .
- H: But wasn't he still back in Manzanar?
- W: Right, although he was in Idaho topping beets at that time.
- H: Oh, he was part of that gang that came into Minidoka and scared the residents?
- W: No, he wasn't one of the individuals at that time. Anyway, he said, "No, wait until I get out first," but I felt that I wasn't anything to him yet, so I left. The train stopped at Pocatello, but I didn't even let him know and he was at Sugar City which was very close. Anyway, I went out to Chicago and a year later when my father got back from the internment camp in Missoula, Montana, and my older sister was getting married, I came back from Chicago for a visit. I had worked a year now and sported a new outfit; I was well groomed in the eyes of friends and seemed very happy and content. You should have seen all my girlfriends' mothers making arrangements so their daughters could go out, too! One by one my girlfriends came to Chicago.
- H: So you were sort of a groundbreaker?
- W: Right. I let them stay with me until they found work or a place to stay, and I have done that for quite a number of my friends.
- H: How long did you stay in Chicago?
- W: From 1943 to 1945.
- H: Did you then, after the war, go back to Bainbridge Island?
- W: Yes, we got married in 1945. But before I get into that, I did have a good family that I got to stay with. He was a reverend in the Methodist church. I met him, and he had four daughters--just like our own family--so we really had something in common, although now I became the oldest daughter instead of the youngest.
- H: Who was this fellow?
- W: Reverend Laury.
- H: What was his first name?
- W: His wife's name was Zella, and she is teaching right now in Danville,

and his first name was Raymond. I stayed with them until I got married in 1945 at the First Baptist Church.

H: Oh, you got married in Chicago?

W: Yes, in Chicago. And then my husband was in the service, so from there we went to Minneapolis; we were stationed there for awhile.

H: Where was he stationed?

W: Fort Snelling. Then from Fort Snelling, he was sent to Japan so I went back to Bainbridge Island, and I worked at the Federal Public Housing in Seattle until his return.

H: Did you run into a lot of antagonism from Caucasians while you were in Chicago?

W: No, on the contrary.

H: No incidents whatever there?

W: No, except for housing. We would always get this, "We would love to have you; I think you seem like such nice girls, but what would the other tenants say?" Or they would say, "We won't be able to rent." Once the Japanese were known to the people in Chicago, the Caucasians really opened up because they noticed that the people were good workers. We didn't have open hostility or anything. I've always found that once people know you, then they are very pleasant. It took awhile until they knew you to become friends. People were rather cautious in the beginning.

H: Well, you were one of the earlier resettlers, weren't you?

W: Right.

H: So there weren't too many other Japanese Americans, and very few Nisei, back in Chicago when you were there, isn't that right?

W: Right.

H: Initially, if you didn't run into any kind of hostility, were you treated like a curiosity by people in Chicago?

W: Oh, perhaps if you put it that way, curious, yes. Because I know when I first went to an all Caucasian Methodist Church, right away young people would come around and say, "You're the first Japanese I've ever met." But, I guess I didn't take it as . . . I was glad to make new friends.

H: So you were sort of the sword swallower at the carnival.

W: Probably, and then, of course, I joined the choir and got right in

- there with them and then they would feel like, "You're no different than the rest of us." So, it was a good assimilating experience there, too.
- H: When you went back to Bainbridge Island, how had it changed from the prewar days? Did your family move right back in and take up where they left off on the farm?
- W: Right.
- H: And the Filipino who handled it had done a pretty good job of managing the farm?
- W: Yes, I would say he did.
- H: Was there an economic gain or loss during the time that you were gone?
- W: I would have to say an economic loss.
- H: Were things in something of a state of disrepair on the farm?
- W: Well, remember, when I got back there, that was in 1946, and my family had gone back soon after the war, in 1945, so things had been started. I mean, I didn't see it as it was when they returned from Minidoka.
- H: In its original state?
- W: Right. But coming back to Manzanar, on August 15, 1945--we were right there in Manzanar when the war was over.
- H: What were you doing in Manzanar?
- W: My in-laws were there.
- H: Oh, so you went back to Manzanar.
- W: Right, because we were married in July, and in August we went back to relocate my in-laws' family.
- H: In August of 1945?
- W: Yes. August 15.
- H: Could I have you expand a little bit about the way Manzanar appeared to you at that later date?
- W: Oh, you could never believe that it was the same camp. It was just beautiful with the rock gardens, the Japanese gardens, and the lawns. When we left it was in the dead of the winter; they were only then starting to have the gardens and lawns. And, of course, Manzanar

in the first summer was self-sustaining already and, in fact, they were producing all the vegetables which were being sent out to Arizona and different places in Los Angeles. But much to my surprise, when we got there in 1945, it was just a beautiful place where everybody had beautiful lawns and beautiful gardens!

- H: It was changed in some other ways, too--for instance, the population had been depleted.
- W: Yes, the population had been depleted; most of the young people were gone.
- H: So the camp contained mostly older people and very young school kids?
- W: Right, and yet we did see some of our own age friends too. Before going to Manzanar on August 13th--my birthday--my husband and I were in Denver to see my family. My married sister was living in Denver now, and my sisters had relocated there. My parents went to visit them. We had the Amatatsu family reunion! This was the day Hiroshima was devastated by the "A-bomb."

Two days later we were in Manzanar and the War ended--the people would not or could not believe that it was over! After hearing the news and hearing the statement made by the Emperor, they finally believed it.

- H: Well, I understand that they even had heard and believed rumors that the Japanese forces had landed and they had taken over Salt Lake City and they were going to come--and this was true at Minidoka, too--and liberate them and that they were going to give them a ten thousand dollar a year pension and they were going to be taken back to Japan and honored with dignity. But this was probably believable because of the largely Issei camp population.
- W: Probably, and wishful thinking maybe?
- H: I don't know if you picked this up in talking to people when you went back to Manzanar, but from what I understand, there was an awful lot of resistance to doing away with the various camps, including Manzanar. The Nisei were gone; they were younger and they had other things to occupy them, like you did in Chicago. But the Issei were sort of out in the cold; they had put in their thirty or forty years, built up businesses and things and then all this was interrupted when they were sent to camp. They had finally adjusted themselves to this new way of life and then they were going to be evacuated again. Some people said, "This is worse than the original evacuation." And then the WRA started closing down their kitchens and doing everything possible to force them out of the camps.
- W: Right. I think there was a lot of that, too, because they had no place to go. Many of them didn't have anything.

H: How did your husband's family feel about it?

W: Oh, they were lucky for they had a home in Glendale.

H: Then they wanted to come back?

W: Yes, they wanted to come to their home in Glendale. But then, of course, whoever it was that took their home didn't take care of things too well. I suppose there is wear and tear in three years. They were lucky that they had renters though. We paved the way beforehand so the rest of the family were able to come home without waiting.

H: Others didn't and they had to stay in one of those crowded hostels or hotels.

W: Oh, that's right. They had to go into those little hostels with many, many families. I have seen that, too, and it was really pathetic. After all, to them that one room they had in Manzanar now looked beautiful compared to what they had to put up with in those little hostels with insects that they had to go to. They didn't know where their next meal was coming from since nobody had jobs. When you think of it, our parents were in their sixties and it was a big problem for them. What to come back to? Their life had been interrupted, and I think it was a traumatic experience for most of the people.

H: Did you by any chance stop in any of the small towns located on either side of Manzanar, like Lone Pine or Independence, when you went back to Manzanar? Did you have occasion to stop?

W: Yes, we have.

H: I mean in August of 1945 when you went back to see your in-laws. Did you go through those towns?

W: We drove through.

H: What I'm trying to find out is if you met with any kind of hostility on the West Coast when you came back here.

W: Yes, we did in some places. Going back to when my husband was in the service, we went to Denver and we thought . . .

H: From Chicago to Denver?

W: Yes, from Chicago to Denver. They were having some well known band leader there and we wanted to go hear him. We got up there and the cashier said, "Well, you are Japanese; I'm sorry, we can't admit you."

H: And this was in Colorado?

W: This was in Colorado.

H: And Colorado had the reputation for having been the most hospitable state to the Japanese.

W: Well, I wouldn't say it was. To me it was Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Chicago, Illinois. Minneapolis was terrific because they had all the soldiers. But in Colorado they said, "I'll have to call the management. We can't admit you." And was that an insult! When you're a serviceman . . . here you are wearing the uniform of your country and to be said that you just can't get in due to your looks.

H: Then they never did let you in?

W: No, and they said they'd have to go ask the management and made such a big thing of it that we said, "The heck with it. We don't want to get insulted like this." We walked away. I don't know, had we tried then maybe, but . . .

H: Yes, it was too much of an insult to you, then, to . . .

W: Yes, to pursue it.

H: What happened when you came back? You paved the way, as you put it, for your in-laws in the Los Angeles area. When was it that you were out here in Southern California?

W: Right after the war, say August 17, 1945.

H: What kind of reception did you get out here? Were there any kind of stares?

W: Yes, there were stares everywhere we went. You know, "The Japs are returning now."

H: Was there open hostility at all?

W: Not openly, but you could feel them thinking, "Here they've come back." and that type of thing. In Los Angeles my husband couldn't get a haircut because the barber would not serve a "Jap." He was a serviceman then and in uniform too.

H: Did you go into Little Tokyo in Los Angeles? It was pretty much occupied by the blacks during the war.

W: Yes.

H: It was then known as Bronzeville.

W: Right.

H: Did you happen to see it?

W: Yes.

H: Did Little Tokyo look pretty much like a black area when you came back?

W: Yes, the same way with Seattle, too. This was my first time in Los Angeles and I know more about Seattle before and after the war. So I think I noticed that more in Seattle, where the blacks had just taken over completely.

H: When did you recall that Seattle's Japanese Town was converted back to a Japanese community?

W: It still isn't, I don't feel. Now, before the war, it used to be practically all Japanese, but you have a lot of blacks now, too.

H: So the war permanently changed the complexion of the Japanese community?

W: Yes.

H: What about on Bainbridge Island? Was there a changed character to Bainbridge as a result of the war? When you went back there, did it look different to you? If so, how?

W: Oh, the farms were no longer Japanese owned. It was quite unkempt. There were mostly Filipinos engaged in strawberry farming now.

H: Mostly, you would say?

W: Yes.

H: So you mean that more than half of the people who had owned farms didn't own them any longer?

W: Yes, maybe at the beginning they had a little, but then a lot of them became old. The kids no longer wanted to farm it, or the kids moved away and the folks got old, too. Now there are just very few Japanese farms growing strawberries.

H: Did you experience any hostility on the Island when you came back? You came back a little later, though, didn't you?

W: Yes, I came back a little later so . . .

H: Did you hear any stories from your parents?

W: No. Most of the people welcomed them.

H: So it was reasonably friendly on the Island?

W: Yes.

H: What did you do after you got back while waiting for your husband? Did you have a job on the Island, or did you work on the farm?

W: No, I worked in Seattle.

H: What did you do there?

W: I worked at the Federal Public Housing office. While I was in Chicago, I worked for the federal government and so I transferred each time. I was transferring every six months. Even though it was on account of my husband's transfer, I begin to wonder. The people in Minneapolis went out of their way to be just gracious and helpful. I would have to say that's one area, if it wasn't for the extreme weather and such, I think I'd like to live in.

H: When did your husband get a chance to rejoin you?

W: Let's see, in November of 1946. You see, he was gone not quite a year.

H: Can you fill me in on the main contours of your life since that time--when you had your children and where you lived, in basically what areas?

W: Well, while he was away, I lived on Bainbridge Island and I commuted to work by ferry everyday and worked for the federal government in Seattle. When he came back, we went back to live at his home in Glendale, California, with his folks, an older sister and her husband and a younger sister. He commuted and went to UCLA again, while I went to work for the Treasury Department in Los Angeles--until I became pregnant with my first son, Brian. We lived with his family for four years--two years while he was still in college and two years when we had our son. In the meantime, we bought property in Pasadena and built a home there. Hideo was working for Aerojet Corporation for a few years, later he went to work for Beckman Instruments. Beckman was then located in Pasadena.

H: When was that?

W: Brian was two, so it would be 1951.

H: Then you moved to Orange County in 1950?

W: We moved here in 1953.

H: So he commuted for a few years?

W: He commuted for almost two years. We wanted our own home but had problems. We had a problem buying this house, too.

H: Where were you living when your husband was working at Beckman Instruments?

W: In Pasadena.

H: What kind of an area were you living in then? Was it restricted or not?

W: No, it was located on Orange Grove Avenue, but it was on North Orange Grove. Orange Grove South had very ritzy homes and was restricted, but there were no restrictions on the north side! We had our first home built in Pasadena. There were more Japanese here, and, gradually, the blacks were coming. We lived here for four years, prior to building our house. We had looked for homes and it wasn't easy to buy homes because of the discrimination. When we were trying to buy a home, we really started feeling the discrimination. We were going to get a place in South San Gabriel. Actually, it was a tumble-down home that we could fix up. It was on one half an acre of land.

H: Was that a largely Caucasian community?

W: Yes, there was nothing pretentious about it, in fact, it was run down. The real estate man was willing to sell it to us, but that night when we went to look the place over, we saw about twenty-some people, mainly mothers and children, threatening the real estate man and threatening harm to us. This was about the first time I had seen open hostility. If the real estate man sold to us, they said that they would do bodily harm to me, or to us, or to him.

H: The women and kids told you that?

W: Right. Well, there were several men, but mainly women and kids.

H: And they just stood there and told you that?

W: Well, they didn't tell us directly, but they were all standing there as if they were ready to pounce on us, and then they told the real estate man that afterwards.

H: And this was as late as 1950?

W: Right. Well, it would be 1948. So we decided . . . well, I would have wanted to take them up on it; it was a challenge to me. But being pregnant, my husband wouldn't hear of it. So we just discounted that whole idea. Then we bought the property in Pasadena and built our home. We lived there for four years and in 1953 we were looking for a house in the Orange County, Whittier vicinity. Every place we went they wouldn't even talk to us. The real estate people would just ignore us as if we were poison.

H: They were building a lot of homes around here then.

W: Right. Then they would tell us, "Oh, you don't qualify because you don't make enough." Well, being a chemist, my husband was making a substantial income then.

H: Then you knew that you were being discriminated against.

W: Right. When we came here to Fullerton, there was a real estate man who understood and, evidently, had hidden our papers. He told us later that he did this so they couldn't give us back the money we had put down to hold the home. He didn't like their tactics and was quitting his job. The builder would give us one excuse after another. We were among the first Japanese people to try to buy out here in Fullerton.

H: Do you mean here, in this area where you now live?

W: Yes, the present home that we live in. This was before Dr. Sammy Lee's time. He's the Olympic diver and an eye, ear, and nose specialist. He also was trying to find a home in Garden Grove near his practice, and he had this same kind of problem because he was Oriental. He was going to make a test case. He didn't want to live in Garden Grove then, and this is the same thing that happened to us--but this was before his time. We knew that there was no house to look at, just the house plans. Since it was close to Beckman Instruments, we wanted to buy in this area. Representatives would tell us one thing after another why we couldn't get in. They just went on and on and yet you knew that people were moving in. We had put our money down and adhered to everything else that was specified. Finally, my husband and I talked it over and decided to let them know that we were going to have a lawyer and find out why we're being discriminated against. And at that time, Beckman did say that people who were having problems finding places could see their lawyer. I went to see Frank Chuman, a lawyer, who is quite active with JACL, to tell of the discrimination and of our predicament. He asked if we could make a test case, and my husband and I discussed it and felt we ought to, because sooner or later people would want to live close to their work and should be allowed to live where they want. We felt we should do this for the minority groups.

H: Did you do it?

W: We started to until they got wind that something was going on. So they called us and asked us to come to their Beverly Hills office. At first, the builders told us why they had all kind of delays, and talked about the home not going through certain inspection, et cetera. But we told them that we knew that this was discrimination and finally they admitted it. "Well, it is. Would you wait until that the whole tract is sold?" They had so much money invested, otherwise they'd stand to lose so much!

H: They did own up to the discrimination, though?

W: Right, they did. Then we said, "We have sold our house. The new owners were nice enough to let us store the furniture."

H: These were the people who were going to move into your house in

Pasadena?

- W: Right, and they should have been in the house by November; December came and they had looked forward to being in their home for Christmas. January passed, and in February we were still around. We really felt badly. The new owners suggested that both families could live together when we told them we'd look for temporary quarters. After much conversation, the builders finally agreed to pay for our motel until we could move in with our deed. The lady next door--who happened to be black--worked for the Veterans Administration and knew whom I should see. Yes, I walked the papers. The loan company official a Mr. Peterson, heard our plight and thought it was so unfair that he promised that he would personally take care of matters. We had our papers, escrow deed, so Exhibit Builders had to let us in. They had no choice! This is another time that I've moved on April 1--well, actually it was 10:00 p.m. March 31.
- H: You almost moved on April Fools Day again! At that time there weren't too many Asians in Orange County at all, were there? There still aren't too many.
- W: Well, there are quite a number now.
- H: But I guess they are moving mostly into Fountain Valley, aren't they?
- W: No, Irvine and all over the County. These are the things that we had to buck against prejudices. Then of course, having children I also knew that it existed right within my own neighborhood. My little boy Gordon was only about two years old and the kids would pick on him and say, "Oh you dirty Jap."
- H: It happened when you first moved into Orange County?
- W: Right here, yes. And he stood right up to them with his hands on his hips and said, "I am not! I'm an American!" They never picked on him after that! And then coming here, the first day of school was the same way. We thought--in Pasadena it was Easter Holiday--so we weren't prepared to send Brian to school. The neighbors came and said, "Isn't Brian going to school?" And we said, "Well, it's not school is it? I mean, It's Easter Holiday." And they said, "Oh, no. It's not a holiday." So we had to really rush him. My husband took him by car then and, of course, they were fixing the road here which complicated things. Ordinarily we would have taken Brian to school and to show him how to get out there, but we couldn't. My husband had to take him and then left him at school. As soon as Gordon was up from a nap, I was going to go after Brian. I found out they got off earlier and when Brian started to come home he got confused on the playground. Two big fellows, sixth graders, came up to him and said, "Oooo, look who we have at school, a Chink!" They made fun of him so he started to cry, but one of the two boys was nice enough to take him to the principal.

H: One of the two boys that was persecuting him?

W: Yes, the one calling him the "Chink." So the principal called me and said, "I'm going to bring him home." He came and he met me and said "Do you know that this place is exactly one mile from school? And you know, these kids in this new tract have to walk, even the kindergardeners? And it's really unfair." He told me that I should get in touch with some of the neighbor ladies and call the school district, and get the bus for the young ones because it was unfair. The fifth and sixth graders got to ride the busses because they were the old timers' children. So, this is what I did; I called the assistant superintendent who was in charge of transportation, and he brought the map and came over to our house and said, "It's not quite a mile; I'm sorry they can't ride the bus." I said, "No, I clocked it, too, and it's exactly a mile to this, the shortest distance. If I go around to where his class is, it's over a mile." And, so, I fought it.

H: You won the point, too?

W: Yes, I did.

H: So you had a bus?

W: Right. Not until the following September, though, because that was already April. I remember when the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] gave me an honorary life award, he was there, the assistant superintendent in charge of transportation to congratulate me. I said to him, "Now Dr. Graves, I bet you thought you had a tiger on your hands when you met me for the first time. And he said, "Oh, no. I didn't think that."

H: I bet he did!

W: I think so! I've always fought for justice, really!

H: A lot of the people in the Orange County Japanese American community are migrants away from larger, more established Japanese American populations. In this neighborhood, for example, you probably don't have very many other Japanese Americans, do you?

W: No. I know when my boys were going to school, they were the only Japanese.

H: How does this affect the maintenance of a Japanese American heritage and culture? What do you do to revitalize your own ethnic background?

W: Oh, I guess we were always at the church in Los Angeles and it's more of an ethnic church, the Evergreen Baptist.

H: Oh, the Evergreen Baptist?

W: Right. Are you familiar with it?

- H: Well, that's near the Evergreen Cemetery in Boyle Heights [Los Angeles], isn't it?
- W: Right. We were both teaching; my husband was superintendent of Sunday School then. We needed to build an education unit and they needed us, too, so we stayed. We also felt that this way at least our boys will be aware of Japanese people; no matter how they may feel, they still have found discrimination. For example, the Los Coyotes Country Club opened up and some of our friends were in that country club.
- H: Japanese American friends?
- W: No, these were Caucasian friends. There are Japanese now in it. In fact, it's now Japanese owned. But before our children went swimming, I noticed one of the mothers calling to find out if it was all right if they brought a Japanese boy. She did this because she didn't want him to be insulted and find out he shouldn't be there. But at Los Coyotes they said, "Of course, Sammy Lee is our swimming instructor here!" I know our older son felt like we were being hypocrites by associating daily with Caucasians and yet remaining with an ethnic group for our church affiliation. But it was our desire that they should know both. He said, "You say you want us to be like everybody else and yet you want us to meet Japanese people; you are just being hypocrites." And I said, "Fine," because we have both proven, my husband and I, that we can be with all people. It's not the color of your skin; it's the people that you associate with. I've belonged to a church in Chicago with all Caucasians. I didn't feel any different. I felt right at home with them and I'm sure my husband felt the same way in Kenosha, Wisconsin.
- H: I don't understand your son's point about your being hypocritical.
- W: He felt that we just wanted to go over there to be with our Japanese friends. He wanted to go to church with his Caucasian friends here. "No, we want you to have some Japanese associations, because your everyday associations are with Caucasians." This way they will have both associations as we did when we were growing up.
- H: Are their everyday associations almost exclusively with Caucasians?
- W: Yes, exclusively. And I said, "We want you to have something so that later on in life you will be able to choose and feel like you have not been forced into one or the other culture against your will."
- H: Well, how Japanized would you say your kids are, in terms of their cultural upbringing? Do they speak Japanese?
- W: Not really. Our older son was bilingual until age two, and do you know, even today he does pick up and can understand some Japanese? He did take Japanese at Johnston College.
- H: Oh, he took formal instruction in the language?

W: Yes, he took the language there. Our youngest one felt he'd like to talk to his grandparents, so he wanted to take Japanese. But when we finally did let him go to the Japanese language school, it was too late. He was in sixth grade.

H: Where was the school, here in Orange County?

W: In Orange County, yes, in Garden Grove. And he was a sixth grader in regular school. He was awarded the most improved student in his Japanese school class, but then the next year he took French, so he wasn't that interested anymore and he doesn't understand any Japanese at all now.

H: Do you ever go into Los Angeles to Little Tokyo for anything?

W: Yes, if we want Japanese food.

H: So you go to the restaurants?

W: Right.

H: Where do you buy things like Japanese food products?

W: We go to Little Tokyo, or right here to "Shi's" in Garden Grove.

H: Is that near Midori's restaurant?

W: Yes, that's a place to shop for Japanese food.

H: Right, but it's right near, I think, either Atami's or Midori's restaurant in Garden Grove. It's a store like the one in the East-West Center in Anaheim, isn't it?

W: Right.

H: Would you say that most of your social contacts tend to be with Japanese Americans or not?

W: I would have to say half and half. When it's over here in Fullerton, it's all Caucasian people with the "Y" groups and the associations we both have with our work. As for anything to do with the church, it would be more Japanese.

H: Do you subscribe to any Japanese vernacular newspapers?

W: Well, the Pacific Citizen; that's all. It's a bi-monthly paper put out by the JACL.

H: Then you don't take the Rafu Shimpo or the Kashu Mainichi or any of the big vernacular newspapers from Los Angeles?

W: No, we take the Los Angeles Times and the Fullerton News-Tribune.

H: I want to ask you just a few more questions, Mrs. Watanabe. First of all, is there a Japanese American community in Orange County?

W: I would say, no, not a community as such. They do have the JAACL.

H: Are you active in that?

W: Not what you might call active.

H: You must be a member to get the Pacific Citizen.

W: Right, we're members but that's about all.

H: That's about it?

W: Yes. Our boys played in Little League and Pop Warner with a Caucasian group. But I know that the Japanese have this SELANOCO group, which is South East Los Angeles and North Orange County.

H: Is it just a youth organization?

W: It's a youth organization, but they also have the JAACL in that group.

H: What do they do, athletics?

W: Athletics mainly, and they also have speakers who come in and talk and they sponsor socials as does the JAACL. But the youth organization, that is strong, and I noticed that many of the people are in this. But as far as our boys, they grew up with their friends here in the neighborhood. In Fullerton they had all their activities within the city so they will have to be very Americanized.

H: What do you think of the recent resurgence of ethnicity among various groups, including the Japanese Americans, where there's been a renewed interest and at times a militant outlook. The young Sansei are saying that the Asians and the Japanese Americans are not to be used as a "model minority" bludgeon to beat back other minorities like the blacks and chicanos and to say, "Look, the Japanese Americans have made it, why can't you?" These Sansei say there are still problems within the Japanese American community, as with the other minority groups, and that these problems shouldn't be glossed over. For instance, there is still discrimination of one sort or another. Japanese businessmen sometimes get locked into middle management positions and don't get promoted to the upper echelons because of the operative stereotype that Japanese cannot be aggressive; this means that they tend to get stalemated at a position disproportionate to their ability. There are also serious drug problems within the community among the youth, and a host of related difficulties. What do you think about the Sansei rejecting the Nisei idea of, "We can out-Americanize or out-white the whites," and their demand that some ethnic identity be taken into account? How do you feel about this consciousness movement?

- W: That's quite a big span, isn't it? I feel as far as ethnicity, yes you have it. After all, you do look different and you're bound to be categorized as such. So you do have it and you have to live with it. Although in many of our cases--and again I'll have to say because of my Christian upbringing, we are all brothers, and many of our friends and their children have intermarried--we have also noticed that when it comes to friendship, it's been great just as long as you're not my son-in-law type of thing. So you still have this to contend with. And no matter what, you're going to get it. It's been proven with our boys, too. Yet, I don't feel that as one race . . . as I said, I am in the field of education with World Book and Childcraft and way back when I was calling on, say, the Mexican people, and they told me right away, "Well, you're Japanese so you people can have these things. You people are smart." I really got angry with them and they noticed that, too, and I said, "Listen, you're going to tell me that in front of your children?" I said, "What kind of education will your children have and what attitudes will they have?" If our parents were that way, then we would have stood still, too. Our parents felt that education was the only way to rise above, and I said, "You have the same opportunity. What makes you think that your child is not as smart as mine or not on the same level? It's how we relate to them and how we cope with situations and yet you're telling me this in front of them? Your children will never want the education if you instill this kind of an attitude." And so I'm a believer of everyone having the same kind of opportunities. It doesn't come from the militancy. You cannot just say, "I'm going to love my brother." It has to be taught from the early age that we are all each other's keeper, too.
- H: Then you're an advocate of Christian humanism?
- W: Right, right.
- H: But part of this humanism can be, for instance, looking out for a group's interest, in the sense that I think that what some Sansei are saying is that we shouldn't mask the fact that there was, say, something like the incarceration of over a hundred thousand Japanese Americans. That was a wholesale violation of civil liberties. They feel this shouldn't be kept down and that Nisei should tell Sansei and Yonsei about what had occurred, and that, also, there should be some concerted effort made to change vicious, prejudicial stereotypes in the media. I mean, you turn on the television set and the way that Asians are portrayed is something that undermines their dignity as human beings.
- W: Right.
- H: And there should be something perhaps said about the fact that a lot of stereotyping comes about because the Americans have been involved almost entirely in this century with wars against Asian people. After awhile it becomes an identity between the Asians over there and the Asians here, which is, of course, what brought about the incarceration.

Moreover, girls of Asian background here tend to be looked upon now as though they were the same girls that the GIs consorted with for two dollars a throw over in Saigon. Some of these stereotypes continue to be visited upon not only the Japanese Americans, but Asians as a whole. Something has to be done to alter this fact and so, I think, whether you're Christian or not, you can agree that there has to be some reorganization.

- W: Oh, yes, I would agree. Definitely, yes, because they shouldn't be stereotyped that way. But as far as identity goes, let's face it, we look it. We're Asians and anywhere you go in a crowd you're going to be identifiable.
- H: But the media can show Asians in a multiplicity of different functions and roles and not always characterize them as brutal karate choppers or confused laundry workers.
- W: Right.
- H: Japanese Americans have always had their fortunes dependent somewhat upon the international position of Japan. One of the things that, of course, made the prejudice against the Japanese Americans so extreme on the prewar West Coast, was the rising power of Japan. All of a sudden, there was this failure to discriminate between the Japanese in Japan and the Japanese Americans here in the United States. With the postwar resurgence of Japan as a major economic power, and as Japan increasingly today makes this economic incursion into the American market system, you start to see the prominence of Japan. Many Nisei businessmen think that Americans, seeking reprisals against Japanese businessmen and businesses, will take them against Japanese American businessmen.
- W: Which will be true.
- H: Is there a big fear in the Japanese American community that this may very well be occurring, or might conceivably occur in the near future?
- W: I think they feel that it might, yes. But I don't know that it's a big thing with them at this point. I mean, we have noticed it and felt that it can happen again, yes. You know, some of your talk shows? Even a year ago you could find out that people are still saying, "Well, I know a Jap from . . ." and this type of thing, and you do hear those every now and then.
- H: I read an article in the Los Angeles Times about a year ago that was quite alarming. You know how Channel 22's programming on Sunday night will consist mostly of programs originating from Japan: variety shows and movies and what have you. There was this article in the Times which said that 100 percent of the Japanese American community watched Channel 22 on Sunday nights. Now, that is the kind of statement, for instance, which causes people to impute to Japanese Americans a total identification and solidarity with things Japanese. I feel that this

represents an absolutely irresponsible sort of article.

W: Right.

H: I don't know if you saw the article or not.

W: I read it, yes.

H: Did you feel a certain blast of indignation when you read that?

W: Right. So once in awhile we watch it, but does that mean 100 percent? I have a Kibei brother-in-law who loves this particular program; for him it's easy to understand. Well, for us we watched it only after the newspaper came out with the article. We wondered why the people liked it so much. It is a fine family kind of thing and it's not open hostility, the bang-banging with a gun nor a sexy movie. I think the American families will like their kids to see something comparable to these type of programs, really. Take our regular American television--the ones that people want to see--so much has to do with killing and violence.

H: Sure, right.

W: So I think some of the Nisei parents might want their kids to see the Japanese movies because it's a family thing.

H: Of course, some of them, like the old Samurai movies, are as brutal I imagine, as the American Westerns.

W: I don't think young people understand those Samurai movies as well. But that family type of program we watched a couple of times and it was humorous.

H: Yes, just a situation comedy.

W: Right.

H: Plus Shirley Yamaguchi's variety show.

W: But how many times have we watched it? Maybe two or three times.

H: Right.

W: See, after that article came out in the Times, then and only then did we watch it to see what it was all about.

H: But the point was, it seemed to me, that Japanese Americans couldn't win anyway, because it should be of your own volition whether you want to watch Channel 22 or not. Now Japanese Americans are made to feel somewhat more guilty than before about watching it, because it's almost like there's a price to be paid for watching it. There obviously wasn't a 100 percent viewing audience, because how many

Japanese Americans really understand Japanese?

W: Right. Among our friends there might be a few that have older persons living with them.

H: Especially if you move into the Sansei and the Yonsei generation. Certainly very few of them understand Japanese.

W: Right, you are.

H: So, you're not going to have a 100 percent audience. But then people who legitimately want to watch it, I think, might now feel a little bit intimidated into not watching it. Because their watching Channel 22 somehow indicates a primary loyalty to Japan. So it really bothered me when I read that article and I don't know how that kind of thing gets released. And it also disturbs me when I see other things, like some of the ads on television with the kind of costume things and kimonos or the Judo ad man, or the exaggerated language accompanying those ads. It seems that there is still this inability to project Asians, and Japanese Americans in particular, in a variety of different roles. There has been a capitulation to the fact that blacks and chicanos must be imaged more complexly, but Asians are still largely kept in the background, kept invisible or managed within tight stereotypes.

W: Well, after the war, everything was assimilation, so, we are the product of trying to assimilate into the white society. I think a lot of the people still carry this on; and yet, maybe more and more, they're beginning to find their own identity. What the young people are saying is, "Let's face it, we are of Japanese origin. What are we trying to prove?"

H: Are Nisei coming around to this, too? Are they being educated somewhat by what's happened recently among other ethnic groups and among their own children?

W: Yes, we're of that age now where our children are getting married, and I think we are beginning to feel this again.

H: Do you have any marital preferences for your kids? Very candidly, would you prefer your boys to marry Japanese girls?

W: It's awfully hard to say because we tried to raise them with the Christian feeling that it's the person that matters the most. Yet, when you think of the food situation, the things that they may want out of life, identities and all these things, and so that they will be accepted wholeheartedly, I will have to say, yes. Because when they date, it's all right until the parents begin to think, "Well, my daughter is going to marry that boy." And it's happened in our situation.

H: In both cases?

W: Yes. So, preferably, I will have to say, yes, but probably it won't happen.

H: Have they dated Japanese girls at all?

W: Hardly.

H: Have they known any?

W: Yes, they've known family friends.

H: Through connections in the church?

W: Yes.

H: But their schoolmates are mostly Caucasians?

W: Right.

H: Did they ever appear to you to feel a kind of aversion to other Japanese Americans, that somehow or another they'd been socialized into an environment that made them feel somewhat ashamed of being a member of an ethnic minority?

W: I don't think so. Maybe with the older one someplace along the line, but with the younger one I doubt it. But just recently, his girlfriend that he's had for a number of years, felt like her parents would never be prejudiced. Since they've known each other from junior high schools days--they ran against each other for vice-president of the student body--and they've been kind of dating, gone to all the proms and everything.

H: Foes became friends, huh?

W: Yes, and so now both of them will be seniors in college. She's a Catholic girl and he's Protestant; and then his being Japanese is just a problem right there. We like the girl, and the girl thought her parents liked him, too, but then she was shocked because she found that her parents were prejudiced. But it comes to this, and it does hurt, so you always have to feel like people look down on you for being Japanese.

H: It's kind of funny because you get prejudice coming from the other direction, too. We've interviewed a lot of Japanese Americans and many feel, because of traditional pride and such, that they would be marrying below themselves to marry outside their ethnic group.

W: So you get that from Japanese Americans?

H: Oh, yes. In fact, I've talked to one Nisei woman in a mixed marriage,

and she says that her mother wouldn't even talk to her because she married a Caucasian. She regarded her as dead for four or five years before finally becoming reconciled to the fact. Her mother couldn't imagine how she would want to marry anything but a nice Japanese man. It might have been because her mother felt that a mixed marriage was troublesome, that it was going to bring trouble not only to the girl but to the family or the community as well. But I think that the fears that you've expressed work both ways. Take the idea of a small thing, like the food. I've been with Japanese Americans on trips where we've been away from rice for a little while, and they will go almost haywire. I mean, they have a certain kind of adjustment to having this type of food every so often and if it's not there it causes anxiety. One of the cruelest things I think they did in the early days of the camps concerned the food. You will probably recall this. They'd give you hotdogs and beans, spam and things like that for dinner. It's not a question of having to eat Japanese cuisine every night, but it's got to be there regularly. The Japanese American friends that I have simply need their regular quota of rice, and if they don't have it, it's like something vital is missing. Apparently the food preparation has to be something that is there or else it can cause all kinds of frustration.

W: Yes, right. And, when the children have offspring, would they be accepted? See, I mean, that's always the case.

H: Well, the out-group rate of marriage among Japanese Americans is now over fifty percent.

W: Yes.

H: That doesn't mean that they're all marrying Caucasians, but they're marrying outside the Japanese Americans. They're marrying Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, Mexican Americans, as well as Anglo Americans, but it's fifty percent. So increasingly, the solidarity of the ethnic culture's going to be diluted.

W: Just like my older son who is now attending Purdue University in Indiana. He has a Caucasian girlfriend--the girl didn't tell her family that he was Japanese, but just that he was a fellow who is in graduate school. Her parents were delighted and invited him to Michigan to visit them. When they learned he was Japanese, they became upset. When he got there, they were cordial but with reservations--something like Guess Who's Coming to Dinner. Yet, on the other hand, he talks about another family in Illinois who so reminded him of his own family that he immediately took to them and they to him. And they were Caucasians, and would have liked him for a son-in-law. But I guess that's not going to work out. As I said, it probably won't happen. Our boys think like Caucasians, because their everyday association has been like this almost all throughout their lives. We'll just have to hope for the best and remember it's the person that's important regardless of race.

H: Do you have anything that you would like to add before we close out the interview--about any of the topics that we've touched upon? Or do you want to end on something of a prophetic note?

W: Well, I just want to say in a prophetic way that when I went back to Chicago, after being away from there for twenty years, I went to a conference with Field Enterprises Education Corporation. Our business is people business, and they had the whole ethnic group--children--sing at the grand finale. I just sat there in the orchestra hall and just bawled and bawled, because I felt like this is really something! Twenty years ago I had come to this city because I wasn't wanted and felt like a second-class citizen, and here things were now changing. It was so beautiful! They had kids, the blacks, yellow, and the browns, and everybody singing on stage, smiling and feeling good. It just made me cry and I thought that some day it's going to come to this, that everybody could be accepted as a person on an individual basis. I hope someday soon this will be a reality!

H: Then there will finally be a correspondence between American practices and American ideals, right?

W: Right.

H: Mrs. Watanabe, on behalf of the Japanese American Oral History Project at California State University, Fullerton, thank you very much. I certainly enjoyed talking to you; it's been both very instructive and very illuminating for me.

END OF INTERVIEW

- America  
See United States of America
- Americanization  
of Japanese Americans, 13, 58  
of Native Americans, 9
- Americans, 61, 65
- Asian Americans [Orientals], 58, 65  
See also Ethnic stereotypes and Racial discrimination
- Atomic bomb  
Hiroshima, used at, 47  
Auburn, Wash., 9
- Bainbridge Is., Wash., 4, 26, 33, 37, 42, 44, 45, 51  
ethnic groups  
Caucasians, 6, 10, 25  
Filipino Americans, 6, 9, 10, 24-25  
Native Americans, 6, 9, 10  
high school, 24  
Japanese American community, 10, 11, 13  
activities, 7  
agricultural basis, 5, 6, 8, 12, 14, 15  
evacuation of, 18, 19, 24  
institutions, 7, 8  
Japanese language school, 7, 14, 15, 16, 18  
location of, 5-6  
origins and development, 5, 12  
population, 5, 6, 7, 12  
postwar character, 9, 46, 50  
prewar character, 5, 6, 8, 15  
size of, 6  
social arrangements, 7, 8  
socio-economic makeup, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15  
urban centers, 6  
See also Manzanar and Minidoka War Relocation Centers
- Baptist Churches, 36  
City Mission Society, New York, N.Y., 43  
Evergreen Baptist, Los Angeles, Calif., 55-56  
First Baptist, Chicago, Ill., 45  
First Japanese Baptist, Seattle, Wash., 3, 7  
Japanese Baptist, Bainbridge Is., Wash., 7
- Blacks, 54  
ethnic awareness of, 58, 62, 65  
See also Racial discrimination
- Blamey, Joe, 31
- Bremerton Naval Base, Wash., 18
- Bridges, Harry, 6
- British Columbia, Canada, 9
- Bronzeville, Los Angeles, Calif., 49
- Buddhism, 3
- Caucasians, 6  
attitudes of, 5, 10, 24, 25, 45  
integration of, with Japanese Americans, 7, 11, 56-58, 62-64  
occupations of, 14  
See also Ethnic stereotypes and Racial discrimination
- CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]  
as detention camp, 40
- Channel 22 [T.V. station], Los Angeles, Calif., 60, 61, 62
- Chicago, Ill., 45, 48, 49, 56, 65
- Chicanos  
See Mexican Americans
- Chinese Americans, 8
- Christianity, 60, 63  
Caucasian Christians, 25  
at Manzanar War Relocation Center, 36  
Japanese Christians, 3, 8, 11, 59, 62

- Chuman, Frank, 53  
 Colorado, state of, 48-49  
 Communists  
   Japanese American, 30-31  
 Congregational Church,  
   Winslow, Wash., 8  
 Council of Churches,  
   Los Angeles, Calif., 36
- Denver, Colo., 47,48  
 Depression [the Great], 14  
 DeWitt, Gen. John L., 26  
 Discrimination  
   See Racial discrimination
- English language, 3,7,10,13,  
 16,26,34  
 Emperor of Japan [Hirohito],  
 47  
 Ethnic stereotypes, 9-10  
   of Asian Americans, 59,60,  
   62  
   of Filipino Americans, 10  
   of Native Americans, 10  
 Evacuation  
   See Bainbridge Is., Wash.  
   and Watanabe, Ikuko  
   Amatatsu
- FBI, 17,18,32  
 Filipino Americans, 19,64  
   agricultural basis of, 6,  
   46,50  
   See also Bainbridge Is.,  
   Wash. and Racial dis-  
   crimination
- Florin, Calif.  
   Japanese American commu-  
   nity, 13,34,35,40  
   See also Manzanar War Re-  
   location Center
- Fullerton, Calif., 53,57,58
- Garden Grove, Calif., 53,57  
 Glendale, Calif., 35,37,38,  
 48,51
- Hiroshima, Japan, 12  
   See also Atomic bomb
- Independence, Calif., 48
- Indians  
   See Native Americans
- Integration  
   See Caucasians and  
   Japanese Americans
- Issei, 32,34,47  
   immigration, 2,3,12  
   institutions, 7  
   internment, 19,29,44  
   property restrictions, 5  
   See also Japanese and  
   Japanese Americans
- Ito, James, 28,39
- JACL [Japanese American  
 Citizens League], 53,57-  
 58  
   at Manzanar War Reloca-  
   tion Center, 29,31,40
- Japan, 47,60  
   Diet, 16  
   immigration from, 3,12,35  
   Kagoshima, 1,16  
   Kumamoto Medical School, 3  
   loyalty toward, 28,33,62  
   Occupation of, 45  
   Okayama, 12  
   Sendai, 1  
   Sino-Japanese War, 1,3  
   Taniyama, 1  
   See also Pearl Harbor
- Japanese, 60  
   food, 8,57,64  
   language, 4,7,13,15,16,18,  
   34,56-57,62  
   motion pictures, 7,61  
   Japanese American Assoc., 7
- Japanese Americans  
   achievements, 11  
   attitudes of, 10,11  
   businesses, 4,5,6,9,12,14-  
   15  
   communities  
     See specific city, e.g.,  
     Bainbridge Is., Wash.  
   cultural fidelity of, 13,26,  
   33,34,55,56,57  
   customs  
     arranged marriages, 1,2  
     ceremonial meals, 8  
     eldest son, obligations of,  
     2,3

- holiday observances, 12
  - picture bride system, 2
- first generation
  - See Issei
- group solidarity of, 11,13, 61,64
- integration with
  - Filipino Americans, 9-10, 24-25
  - Native Americans, 9-10
  - See also Caucasians
- Japanese language school, 4,7,14,15,16,18,57
- Japanese terms, used by,
  - Aka, 30,31
  - eta, 11
  - hakujins, 11
  - inu, 31,32
- philosophical styles, 11, 58
- places of origin, 12
- property restrictions, 5
  - See also Racial discrimination
- second generation
  - See Kibei and Nisei
- third generation
  - See Sansei
  - See also Racial prejudice
- Japanese Hall, Bainbridge Is., Wash., 7,8
- Japanese Town, Seattle, Wash., 5,50
- Judo, 62
- Kashu Mainichi, 57
- Kenosha, Wis., 37,56
- Kibei, 39,61
  - comparative analysis of, 33-34,61
  - at Manzanar War Relocation Center, 28,29,33
- Kito, Bill, 29,30
- Koba, Bob, 30
- Koura, Arthur, 30
- Laury, Rev. Raymond, 44-45
- Laury, Zella, 44-45
- Lee, Sammy, 53,56
- Little Tokyo, Los Angeles, Calif., 49,50,57
- Lone Pine, Calif., 48
- Los Angeles, Calif.
  - city of, 21,34
  - county of, 35
  - Japanese American communities, 8,12,26,29, 35,40,55
  - Boyle Heights, 27,35, 56
  - See also Manzanar War Relocation Center
- Los Angeles Times, 57,60,61
- Manzanar War Relocation Center, 17,33,41,48
  - activities at, 36-37
  - Miss Nisei contest, 23
  - Bainbridge Is. group at, 21, 24,29
  - compared to Calif. Japanese, 13,21,26-27,31,34,40
  - petition to leave, 28, 29,31,39,40
  - conditions at, 20-21,23, 46-47
  - education at, 36
  - JACL at, 29,31,40
  - Kitchen Workers Union, 39
  - leadership at, 28-30,31,40
  - loyalty registration at, 28
  - Manzanar Citizens Federation, 31
  - Manzanar Free Press, 31
  - occupations at, 23,31
    - agricultural laborers, 27, 40,44
    - clerical workers, 22,32
  - Riot at, 28,31,38,39,40
  - San Pedro-Terminal Is. group at, 35
    - compared to Wash. Japanese, 13,26-27
  - wages at, 22-23
  - youth gangs at, 23-24,26
- Masaoka, Joe Grant, 31
- Mayberry, Ralph, 36
- Methodists, 44,45
- Mexican Americans, 58,59,62,64, 65
- Minidoka War Relocation Center, 17,19,43,44,47
  - conditions at, 41-42

- Bainbridge Is. group at, 27  
 compared to Calif.  
   Japanese, 27  
 transfer to, 28,29,31,  
 40-41
- Minneapolis, Minn., 49,51
- Motion pictures, 7  
   American western, 61  
   Samurai, 61
- Native Americans, 6,10,11
- New Mexico, state of, 19,29
- Nicholson, Rev. Herbert, 36
- Nisei, 32,45,47,60,62  
   Americanization of, 11,29,  
   58,59  
   Japanese language, study  
   of, 15  
   servicemen, 31  
   zoot suiters, 23-24,27  
See also Kibei
- Olympic Games, 53
- Orange County, Calif., 51,  
 55,58  
   housing restrictions in,  
   52-53,54  
See also Japanese, food
- Pacific Citizen, 57,58
- Pasadena, Calif., 51,52,  
 54
- Pearl Harbor  
   bombing of, 17,24
- Peterson, Mr., 54
- Port Blakely, Wash., 5,6
- Racial discrimination of  
   Asian Americans, 53,54  
   Filipino Americans, 9  
   Japanese Americans, 5,  
   10,11,48-49  
   housing, 45,52-53  
   blacks, 49,50,52  
   Native Americans, 11  
See also Ethnic stereo-  
 types
- Racial integration  
See Caucasians and  
 Japanese Americans
- Racial prejudice toward  
 Filipino Americans, 10
- Japanese Americans, 10,  
 20,24-25,45,54,55,63
- Native Americans, 10  
See also Ethnic stereo-  
 types
- Racial slurs  
 "Jap," 26,49,54,60
- Rafu Shimpo, 40,57
- Religion  
See specific religion,  
 e.g., Baptist Churches
- Sacramento Valley, Calif.,  
 13,34
- Salt Lake City, Utah, 43,47
- Samurai, 2,25,61
- San Pedro, Calif.  
   Japanese American commu-  
   nity, 13,26,34  
See also Manzanar War Re-  
 location Center
- Sansei, 58,59,62
- Seattle, Wash., 6,15,18,51  
   Japanese American commu-  
   nity, 4,7,8,14,27,33  
   postwar character of, 50
- Sheppard, Dr., 14
- Shintoism, 2,3
- Sino-Japanese War  
See Japan
- Slocum, Tokio, 30
- Southern Calif., 22,49
- Spanish language, 36
- Takiyama, Mas, 39
- Tanaka, Togo, 31
- Tayama, Fred, 39,40  
   Manzanar Riot, role in, 30,  
   31,32
- Terminal Is., Calif., 27  
   Japanese American community  
   evacuation of, 13,19,26  
See also Manzanar War Re-  
 location Center
- Thomas, John W., 43
- Tule Lake War Relocation  
 Center, 27
- UCLA /Univ. of Calif.,  
 Los Angeles/, 36,37,51
- Ueno, Harry, 39
- United States of America, 16,  
 17,60

- immigration to, 2,3,4,12
- United States government, 25,28,51
- Univ. of Wisconsin, 37
- U.S. Army, 17,41,49,60
  - Fort Snelling, Minn., 45
  - Japanese Americans in, 37
  - U.S. Dept. of Justice, 19,44
- Washington, state of, 20, 27
- Watanabe, Brian, 51
  - acculturation of, 58,62-63,64
  - education, 54,56-57
  - ethnic awareness of, 56
  - racial discrimination toward, 54-55,64
- Watanabe, Gordon, 56
  - acculturation of, 58,62-63,64
  - racial discrimination toward, 54,63
- Watanabe, Hideo, 44,54,56
  - education, 36,37,51
  - employment
    - Aerojet Corp., 51
    - Beckman Instruments, 51,53
    - as chemist, 52
  - Manzanar War Relocation Center, at, 37
  - marriage, 37,44-45,46
  - racial discrimination toward, 49,53
  - U.S. military service, 37-38,45,49
  - wife
    - See Watanabe, Ikuko Amatatsu
- Watanabe, Ikuko Amatatsu
  - attitudes toward
    - Caucasians, 11,25
    - Eastern U.S., 20,25,43
    - eta, 11
    - ethnic identity, 58,59, 60,62
    - evacuation, 19,26
    - Filipino Americans, 10
    - Japanese Americans, 10, 25
    - Native Americans, 10
    - West Coast U.S., 25
  - childhood, 4,5,11,12
  - children
    - See Watanabe, Brian and Watanabe, Gordon
  - Christian background, 3,8, 11,56,62
  - employment
    - Federal Public Housing, 45,51
    - U.S. Dept. of the Treasury, 51
    - World Book and Childcraft, 59,65
  - evacuation of, 17-20
  - family, 14
    - ancestors, 2
    - aunt, 1-2,4
    - grandparents, 2,3,16
    - property, 4
    - in Japan, 2
  - father, 5,9,11,12
    - birth place, 1
    - Christian conversion, 3
    - education, 3
    - immigration, 1,3,4
    - internment, 17-18,19,42, 44
    - marriage, 1,2
    - occupations
      - agricultural worker, 4
      - janitor, 4
      - railroad gang, member, 4
    - Samurai background, 2
  - husband
    - See Watanabe, Hideo
  - Manzanar War Relocation Center
    - arrival at, 20-21
    - return to, 46-47
  - marriage, 37,44-45,46
  - Minidoka War Relocation Center
    - transfer to, 28,29,31, 40-41
  - mother, 9,11,15,22
    - attitudes of, 12
    - birth place, 1
    - Christian conversion, 3
    - education, 3

immigration, 2,3  
marriage, 1,2  
occupation  
    Japanese language  
        teacher, 4,7  
    Samurai background, 2  
relocation  
    to Chicago, Ill., 37,  
        42-45,51  
sisters, 1,4,10,12,15,47  
    Christian background, 11  
    education, 7  
    Manzanar War Relocation  
        Center, at, 22  
    visit to Japan, 2,16  
West Coast, U.S., 25,48,60  
Winchester, Joe, 39  
Winslow, Wash., 6,8  
World War I, 5,23  
World War II, 13,18,47,49,  
    50  
WRA [War Relocation Author-  
    ity], 47  
  
Yamaguchi, Shirley, 61  
Yoneda, Karl, 30,31  
  
Zoot suiters  
    See Nisei