

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with MARGARET MASUOKA

Interviewed

By

Chuck Carrillo

On September 28, 2005

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NARRATOR: MARGARET MASUOKA
INTERVIEWER: Charles Carrillo
DATE: September 28, 2005
LOCATION: Los Angeles, California
PROJECT: Japanese American Oral History Project

CC: Hello, I'm Chuck Carrillo, graduate student in history at California State University in Fullerton. I will be conducting an oral history interview today for the Center for Oral and Public History at the university. The interview is with Mrs. Margaret Masuoka, a native-born American of Japanese descent who, with her family, was relocated away from the Pacific Coast to Poston, Arizona. The relocation of Japanese Americans to internment camps was done by the United States Government as a security measure at the outbreak of the Second World War.

These Americans suffered deprivations that offend American sensibilities regarding our liberties and rights as citizens. In cooperation with the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, who provided the facilities for the interview, Mrs. Masuoka agreed to interview to preserve her personal experiences for further generations of Americans. (Pause in recording.)

The interview is conducted with a tabletop, cassette recorder, Radio Shack model CTR-121. The entire interview will take place in the Life History Room of the Japanese American National Museum at 369 East First Street, in Los Angeles. The museum is in the Little Tokyo district of the city. Mrs. Masuoka and her husband are volunteer docents at the museum. (Pause in recording.) We're going to perform some test recordings and then erase them over the next four minutes. So, at this time, please allow the tape to advance for about four minutes more. And at that time the actual interview will begin. (Pause in recording; test recordings erased.)

CC: Good morning it's September 28, at five minutes to 11. I'm Chuck Carrillo, Cal State University, Fullerton from the Center for Oral and Public History, conducting an interview this morning with Mrs. Margaret Masuoka, who is a Nisei, Japanese American who experienced the internment of the Second World War period. Good morning, Mrs. Masuoka.

MM: Good morning.

CC: I'd like to start with a general question. Please provide us with some personal background: the year and location of your birth; your parents' immigration year if you know it; and their occupation; places you have lived, et cetera, and any childhood experiences you recall as a member of the Nisei community.

MM: Well, I was born in Fort Lupton, Colorado, North of Denver, and at the age of three, my parents and my four siblings came to California in the winter of 1925. We were invited by my father's friend who lived in Compton, California, South of Los Angeles. We made this trip and there was snow on the ground and that is my first memory and I was three years old and it was a rough trip. We settled in the southwest side of Los Angeles where my father found a church where we could attend. I went to the 36th Street School and 37th Street School and Foshay Junior High School and on to Polytechnic High School, in Los Angeles.

My father and mother were both born in Japan, in Fukuoka. My father came in 1902. He came with the idea of settling down and he was in Napa to pick prunes and things and then he stayed there where a family took him in as a houseboy and taught him English and he worked there. But before the San Francisco Earthquake he got lonesome and he went back to San Francisco and with the terrible earthquake he suffered with the others and they were given permission to leave town and go someplace. The city government paid for anyone to leave the disaster area; my father chose to go to Denver, Colorado in April 1906, then he went to Fort Lupton to farm. And so he went to Colorado where he had some friends, and then he was able to make arrangements for my mother to come as a picture bride.

MM: She came as a picture bride arranged by some relatives. And there settled in. That is when my oldest brother and sisters were born. Then I was born in Colorado. They were farming and had rough winters. Then when my father's friend, Mr. Sonoda invited us we came to California.

CC: Oh, that's very interesting. And I am curious- I'll rephrase the earlier question, did you perceive yourselves as Japanese in America or as Americans of Japanese descent, at that time? What was your self-impression of the culture that you had? Do you recall?

MM: I can. During our growing-up years, we adapted the American way of life and our parents tried to be very careful that we dressed nicely and comfortably and we don't make waves and don't draw attention to ourselves because they wanted us to be accepted in the community. We basic Japanese Americans were sent to Japanese school after public school and so that we would be able to read and write and communicate. As far as Japanese ways were, we ate Japanese food, we belonged to the Methodist Church, and we had all our friends were from that group. I noticed that we would see the Caucasian children school but we were never invited to their home to play or anything like that. So that's why we found that through the church there were clubs and organizations, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, where we mostly associated with Japanese Americans like ourselves. But we felt no prejudice. That's the one thing I have to say, I never felt that way during my young years.

CC: That's-- that's very interesting. In my reading the other Nisei quite often report that their families came to the United States with the idea of prospering, making some money, and then returning to Japan. Did your family ever express that intention to you or, conversely, did they ever express any plans for the future?

MM: Well, first I think that's the main reason why the men came from Japan; they mostly were farmers and they found that the rules of the Japanese way of life, the oldest son kept the house and just stayed and they took over. So it was mostly the men who were second or third, or fourth, sons that came over, and that was my father's case also. So I think generally they came to earn a lot of money and hurry home. But as it turned out, as they got married and had children and they got established; there was no way they would ever go back. They accepted that as their homeland. And of course they got letters and packages from Japan and took pictures and that's how they kept in touch with the people there. But that's why we were raised with the thought that this is our perfect home. We were born here and this is where we are going to live. We are very grateful for that.

CC: Let's see, another question: what can you recall about the general attitude about it, and you spoke to this a moment ago, other Americans toward Japanese Americans, but more specifically during your high school and community college years before the war? Did there seem to be opportunities, were they promising, for you, family and friends, other Japanese Americans; did it seem-- did the idea seem promising that you could enter into the work force or go on to college if you wanted to?

MM: I myself felt that, well, very free about it. I felt that nothing was holding us back. And I feel that I was no different from anybody else. And of course we had our churches and activities among mostly Japanese Americans but other than that I felt no prejudice. I think that the main goal of our parents was to be accepted and to not make waves. That's the reason why they always said to be low-key and dress properly and so that you wouldn't draw any attention. And that much my mother really stressed.

CC: Very good. Okay. Just personally did you have a plan for the future? Did you have your eyes-- sights set on a particular goal?

MM: Actually, my father had said okay, there was one boy and five of us girls, and my father had always said that at least he wanted his son to go to college. And that was what he stressed. And they worked so hard: my mother did domestic work, my father was a gardener, and this was one thing that they stressed in our lives. My brother did go to UCLA but worked part-time and he worked in a fruit stand in the market and he did, he graduated in 1928. But for the rest of us, my sister Iris went to Frank Wiggins, which I wanted to do, and she took up dress making and she got a job; and my third sister, she worked at Robinson's as a helper in the beauty shop. And she was the one that when I graduated from Foshay Junior High School got me my first pair of nylon stockings. Yes, that I remember clearly (laughter).

My parents decided that they wanted to do more than just gardening and domestic work and they finally were able to buy a flower shop at Sixth and Alvarado over at

Westlake Park, it later became MacArthur Park. My older sister Gladys worked in that shop. She ran the flower business. I was going into high school and it turned out that it was a cold winter and the flowers were too expensive and they weren't able to make a go of it. So they went bankrupt when I was in the tenth grade.

So at that point members of the community came to our financial rescue. Mr. And Mrs. S. Nita of Santa Ana who were church members at the Methodist Church in our neighborhood, they heard about us and were able to find an old nursery in Santa Ana and on Main Street where their Issei man was ill and could no longer run his business. So we took over and we moved out to Santa Ana in June of 1937. And from then on our career was all patterned out for us. While I was going to school we still helped the nursery and the owner built the flower shop for us and so we were busy after that. As far as careers go, and then when I was a senior in high school, they let me go back to Polytechnic High School in Los Angeles for one semester so I could graduate with my friends. And that I wanted to do. But I promised to stay home from then on, and no more schooling, but to take over and help run the flower shop and nursery because my sister Gladys got married and moved.

That one year that I was out I even envied people carrying books because I really wanted to continue my schooling. That's when I met my husband, Dave. He was from Los Angeles, going to USC pharmacy school, Pharmacy Department at USC, and I really felt that I needed to get more education myself. The friend that introduced us was someone that I knew in Santa Ana and it was sort of a distant relative by marriage. She wanted me to meet Dave. The Church was Saint Mary's Episcopal Church of Los Angeles that they had a summer retreat at Balboa Island. I begged my father to take us, so we spent the day there and that's when I met Dave at Balboa Island. They had a church program and they had a free time where we went to the Pavilion to the penny arcade. He gave me a handful of pennies and we rowed a boat with several other friends and that was our first date together on August 30, 1939.

CC: That's amazing that you remember that-

MM: Yeah, both of us, so now, we've been married sixty-one years. And last year we were, well our health wasn't that good, so all I asked was drive me to Balboa Island to that spot and we found it. So, that's jumping ahead but, and then we started going around in 1940 and I really felt the need for education. So that's when in 1940 I found a friend, an old friend, Yae Kawazoye who was not working at the time. I asked her if she would take my place at the nursery so I could go to school. And she came to work for us and her husband and her father-in-law did gardening. And so for two years she came and took my place and so I have her to thank for my being able to go on to college. But that's how determined I was. But in the meantime I did all the books and everything and I noticed my grades weren't that high, but that was because I was really under pressure. Dave and I were dating. He came every Sunday from Los Angeles. And I mean, that we'd go on day trips and things like that. But that was our courtship. But going on from there, Pearl Harbor (Pause in recording.)

CC: Yes?

MM: But is there something else you want to ask me?

CC: Well, no. Please, I want to hear what you have to say, but the next question I have on the list was mentioning the Pearl Harbor attack; of course it surprised everyone, it startled the world. Do you have particular memories about thoughts or feelings, maybe fears, when that happened, because of your ethnicity?

MM: Okay, I'll just continue then, because there was a Trojan-Bruin dance and football game. We didn't go to that but he invited me the night of the football game on December 6. There was a Trojan-Bruin dance and we went to that dance. And somebody asked us later, What was the score? The score was zero-zero. We looked into that; somebody asked us because it was a big date for us. And then that night I stayed at one of my sisters' home in Boyle Heights and Dave picked me up in the morning to bring me home to Santa Ana from Los Angeles. And that was on the way home, at 8:30 in the morning, we heard it on the radio as we were driving home. So that's how we remembered. And to us, we couldn't believe it; it was such a shock. And so we were the ones to tell my parents when we arrived home. We made sure no customers were around, and in the flower shop we saw the parents in there and told them and it was unbelievable and we were so shaken by it.

But from then on as far as we were concerned, I felt that all my neighbors in Santa Ana, the butcher, the banker, they were overly friendly. They wanted to know if they could help us in some way. You know, to help us feel a little better or to accept it. But then in other cases we heard of department stores not helping them, customers that looked like they were Japanese, and things like that. But in Santa Ana I have to say that everybody was real good to us. And then we had the closeout sale.

My brother came from Los Angeles, and he was an insurance man, but he came to go to camp with us and then that's when he helped us put an ad in the paper and people came from all over and we just -night and day, and rain and all- people, you know, bought out all the things we could sell. But that was a trying time having to dispose of or to store, especially for our parents. But also, we were scared that anything that looked Japanese that they found, the FBI is going to come and put us in jail. So many people have thrown away even dolls, records-- I saw a movie and that's another thing they did, they just broke anything that looked, you know, Japanese. Because, you know, it was a frightening time.

Some people, I hear, even buried something in the ground, you know, all kinds of things. But as far as for ourselves, luckily the Methodist Church stored our goods for us and then took care of them. But we had to close out sales and I think we left a refrigerator and anything else that we couldn't sell. We just left it. One thing, though, my brother got an idea; he phoned the El Toro Marine Base, which is nearby, and asked them to bring their trucks and take away all the trees and whatever is left on the property. And so we said later that the Marines had a lot of shade trees because they came and, you know, picked them up from us. And since

there was curfew, Dave and I couldn't see each other from six o'clock at night until six a.m. And then as they closed in my parents said, "Oh, no, not the Nisei, because we are American born," and that maybe the enemy aliens, they may have to go to camp. But we found out when the posters came out, they nailed it on the telephone posts, and said all Japanese and all non-aliens, to, you know, report at a certain place.

At that time Dave took the pharmacy exams and he found out that he passed, although he was short one year in credits. So he couldn't get a full license, but was an assistant. And he phoned me and asked me to come April twenty-third because he was going to be sent to camp. I took a bus into town and he took me to lunch and he gave me his fraternity pin. And then naturally I accepted it because we didn't know where we were going or where we were going to be sent. But as it turned out my father found out that if we go to camp with the people we grew up with in Los Angeles in the west side, you know, at least we'd be together. Well as it turned out, my father found out that Dave's uptown area of Los Angeles were also going to be sent to Santa Anita temporarily until they found, or built a more permanent barracks away from California.

So there was four months that we got to see each other. His barracks was in another block but he was at the hospital, Santa Anita hospital, as an orderly but there were other pharmacists there so he couldn't get a pharmacist job. And I was assigned latrine duties but I showed them my notice saying that I was a student and I had to finish my studies so they excused me. So every day I would meet Dave at lunch at the grandstand at Santa Anita and we had our lunch together. And then in the evening I would go over to his mother and father's and his barrack and I would study and he would be doing some readings and things. So every night when he would walk me home to my barrack, the searchlight would be coming around so we'd be holding hands but when the flash of the searchlight comes on, we'd drop our hands and that's about the privacy we had. And it was that type of situation, the watchtowers and the guns and it was very frightening. But those four months to me were good. I was able to get to know Dave's parents. As for me, they sounded like they accepted me, and they were very nice to me but we gave them no privacy, we were right there. But suddenly my sister in Poston, Arizona asked for the rest of the family to get together and come to Poston and request for a separate transfer. And so we went on August 26, of 1942. We got an okay and we went. And we went in school buses, no air conditioning. August, summer time, and I remember driving near Palm Springs on the way to Poston, which is near Parker, Arizona and it was a - (Pause in recording).

CC: [This is the other side of] the tape. I'm Chuck Carrillo, interviewing Margaret Masuoka, discussing transportation from Santa Anita to Poston aboard a bus and the last statement was that her brother was a bus captain. Okay, the tape is running again.

MM: And so it was dusty and hot and it was a real rough trip and my brother was in charge of passing out the sandwiches with something to drink. That was about it We arrived at nighttime and the gates and the barbed wire were right there. They

assigned us in barracks and this is in Camp 3. And they gave us mattresses, a cot and an Army blanket, for each of us in the barrack. And there were five of us in a small room of twenty by twenty. The following day we found out that my sister that invited us now is in Camp 1. There are three camps: Camp 1; 2; and 3, and we ended up in 3. And she was in Camp 1, and so it was like five miles apart. We didn't see them right away, but luckily for us she found us a barrack in the next block from where she was, and so we moved to Camp 1 and left my other sister Iris and her family in Camp 3. And this turned out to be the camp that we would have gone to and the block we would have gone to if we had stayed in Orange County. So we were back with all the Orange County people.

And Mr. Nita who was a sponsor for us, who got us to Santa Anita, he was very happy to see me because I was able to write his letters and type his letters to his farm. He had somebody running the farm while he was in camp, and to the bank and all. And then my younger sister, Marion was in high school. I got a job as block secretary. And for each block there was a manager who ran the block. They were all Nisei. And then I worked for him. And in that same building, besides the block office, there were three living quarters for newlyweds. And the newlyweds had only three compartments with just a blanket hanging over the partition. That was about the situation of privacy in camp life.

And then the first thing that was so shocking was the showers. They were big stalls with just the showerheads all in one room. Females are females but then for Marion, my sister and for me, we would go like at midnight where there would be less women in the showers. I was told later by my sister-in-law that she would leave on her underclothes and take a shower, because she just was modest. And it was the hardest for the Issei, Issei women who had never been exposed, never, and I think that was the hardest part for them. In the latrines -there weren't doors on ours- so some of them took blankets or corrugated cartons and things like that, and that was really pathetic. And that's what I feel. (Pause in recording).

CC: So, do I understand correctly, the shower buildings didn't have doors for privacy from the outside?

MM: Well, in the latrines, they had no doors, they had, you know, just divisions, where men didn't, they say, but then, you know, the shower, the bath, each stall didn't have doors.

CC: I see. OK, I just wanted to make sure-

MM: Um-hm, you're right, right, uh-huh, uh-huh.

CC: Well, let's go on about the camp life.

MM: At Poston and Gila both it's that the summers are hot. You can get up to 116 degrees and I've had to walk in that to the administration building a few times. And then the winters are cold and they had oil heaters for everyone. Not like Arkansas, they had wood stoves where they had to chop their own wood and cut their own

down. They had a harder time of that, I think. And so weather-wise, you know, it was mainly hard on the Issei, the older people. Let's see, (Pause in recording).

CC: Did, did the poor conditions have a lot of affect on health; you said it was harder on the Issei, on the older people? I would think conditions like that might, might lead to illnesses-

MM: That's right, there was. And early on, like at Santa Anita, I remember hearing about septic tanks and this and that and floods, and with so many people, you know, using them, the bathrooms and all. Well, the medical people had it the hardest because they had to try to take care of patients within all kinds of conditions and not with the right equipment. I've been hearing more and more about the illnesses that were, you know, (Pause in recording) attention wasn't given as much or they didn't have the equipment. Which brings me to the point of (Pause in recording) Dave's father, he died in camp. Well, so Dave and his family went from Santa Anita, went in October, to Gila River concentration camp outside of Phoenix, Arizona. And they went on a train and they had to be with the shades pulled down, they couldn't look out. They didn't want us to see, you know, what was happening either, I guess. And so he worked in the pharmacy at the hospital, which is a long distance from them and his father, we're talking about his father. Well they went in October and in June we got permission to leave if he had a sponsor or if he had a job. They would let us go east; the government decided there was a mistake and there wasn't a single spy case among the hundred and twenty thousand. So we were allowed to go out if we had a sponsor.

Well his brother was drafted into the U.S. Army. Shig was drafted into the U.S. Army in, I think, March of 1942 and then a month later, in April, the family was moved to Santa Anita. And that is what his father was thinking every day when I saw him in Santa Anita, the four months I saw him. He would say that one son was good enough for the Army; the other two sons are put behind barbed wire. That doesn't make sense. He was really upset. And so, going back to the story, after he got to Gila Camp he was working on the farm. He was ill for a while. They said it was San Joaquin Valley Fever -and many people had Valley Fever breathing the dust in the air- and he said he was recovering. But as it turned out, Dave, in June, decided to go out and get the sponsor by the soldier brother who was stationed at Fort Harrison, Indiana So he went out and his father and mother were okay. But that's why Dave went out, to finish that one year of Pharmacy, and he went out. He tried to get in at Purdue University to finish that one year and he was told that they had Navy students so, We'd be afraid for your life. And that's how they turned him down. And so he worked at the Hooks drug store as an assistant pharmacist and he got a notice from his mother that the oldest brother had gone to Chicago from Jerome, Arkansas. And Shig got transferred.

But at that time mother wrote to them and said that their father is ill. And when they got the letter he had passed away. So the three brothers, one from Chicago, and Dave in Indianapolis, and Shig who was in the Army just got transferred to Massachusetts. So the three brothers came back in time for the funeral. And I was told by a friend -she was a nurse at the hospital at the time- that he died of stomach

cancer, the father, and he went real fast. And here it was August 27, of 1943 and she, the mother, who was like seventy-nine pounds, a tiny woman, every day walked to the hospital to be with her husband during that period. I was notified and I was in Colorado and I went by train but I was too late so I helped them pack up and all. So at age fifty-seven, you know, this is what age he died. We helped her packing, and then she went off to Chicago to live with the oldest brother. So that is the hardest part for him, you know, Dave, to feel now, even now, is that.

When the Japanese American National Museum Pavilion opened, there were newsmen from all over the U.S. and the Chicago Tribune interviewed Dave. And at the end he told this part of his story and he said to the family that they feel that the war is what killed his father. And so many Japanese hold things to themselves. Maybe sometimes if we let it out and talk more. But then a lot of them are just "grin and bear it," but then they didn't make a fuss over things. And so between all of that we feel that, you know, if he could have gotten better medical attention sooner or, you know, it might have helped. That's the reason I mention the kind of the health conditions that weren't, say, like it would have been if they were not in a camp.

CC: Very tragic.

MM: Yes, uh-huh.

CC: I'm very sorry. (Pause in recording). Oh, gosh. Well, you mentioned some more questions that I was going to ask. I-- it's probably best if you just continue to talk about your experience at Poston. One of the questions coming up is the-- What do you remember about the date of your release? But I think, I think for now, it's probably best if we hear more about your memories of your experience there. I have to compliment your memory; you are able to recall those dates very readily. That's amazing.

MM: So we went back to camp. I think that like in our case, the mess halls, it just depended on who was the chef at the mess hall because the earliest arrivals got the best job, see. And so it turns out that we were lucky because the chef was the owner of the Chinese restaurant in Santa Ana. So I had come back and we were with the Poston people. And so we had whatever they had to serve. Even mutton, you know, he doctored it up so that we didn't taste it. Most people remember mutton.

So people would come and sneak over to our mess hall to eat. They would make friends or something 'cause they didn't have a ticket system. At Santa Anita they had a ticket that you had to eat at this green mess hall or the red mess hall and things like that. And then, my sister's barracks, they had a baker who was good. So he would make, well with what they had there, he would make like cupcakes and things like that. So one of our employees in our block office, he used to sneak over some muffins for me here or something sometimes.

But one thing I just remembered about my sister's block, I went to see her one day for a few moments one day and she said, "See that man over there walking towards the mess hall?" and I said yes. He had on black pants and a black shirt and a beret

on his head. And she said, "That's Isamu Noguchi." And I said I didn't know who he was at the time. And she said, "He's an artist, he's a sculpture, he's," you know, "he's well-known." And so I saw him a couple times I think, but here he was, part Japanese and part Irish I think his mother was. And so he felt that he should go to camp and he went voluntarily although he was in New York. And so he went in and he found out that he was going to try to teach art to the students that read. He set up for everything and he went to the administration building and he said he'd like to teach art to some of these Japanese people and he did and waited for an answer and they refused him saying that, you know, As a prisoner, how are you to tell us what to do? type of thing. So he wanted out. And it took him seven months of paperwork to get him out of the camp.

And then this is something that, you know, we had studied and we had this exhibit here. But here he turned out to be a well-known artist. And we have even his rock garden in Little Tokyo, which he sent, and things like that. But when his exhibit came on here and I would tell people that I saw Isamu Noguchi nobody believed me! (laughter). But this is one thing that even the folks who spent a lot with him said. But I did, I saw Isamu Noguchi. (Pause in recording).

Let's see. I guess we could go on about camp. I talked to you about Dave when he got to Indianapolis, but I didn't say when we went out of camp. My father said, "Yeah, well," you know, "Let's get out of here." So in July, on July eighth in 1943 we went. We were sponsored by his nephew in Fort Lupton, Colorado. And he met us at the train. And we went to stay with him for about three days. And at that time we found out that his nephew Hirochichi Funakoshi had sponsored before the evacuation. There was something called a voluntary evacuation, those people who wanted to go away from the military zone, you know, at their own expense, it was okay, they could go. In fact they got redress, too, I hear.

So Hirochichi Tatsuko Funakoshi who my father had sponsored from Japan, he sponsored them when he was a young man. He got them to Colorado. We left him to go to California, but he was there as a farmer, and I don't know, there were umpteen people who came through there. And then I found out that one of the persons that was helped by them was saying that it was like a dormitory. Then the nephew and the niece of my father would cook on a wood stove for all these people. And I just got a story that was written by one of them and how grateful people were to have somebody, you know, sponsor them like that and come and stay with them. We were there with him at the end for only three days and we were the last to be helped by them. He picked us up at the train station and he took us up to their home and actually that's where I was born. And so it's coming back, but I didn't remember when I was little because I was only three years old. We did domestic work around Denver and Inglewood, California where there is a country club there. Domestic was the only way to go because it meant a place to live and you can get food.

So my father and mother and my two sisters with Marion, who was a teenager, they went into one home. And then I was nearby and I went to the Bents who were a couple then, two boys and a grandmother, there. It was five people and I was like twenty, twenty-one years old, just a kid and just after that. And then I said yes, I

could cook. It was a two-story house. And then when they told me that at Thanksgiving they would like to have Thanksgiving dinner with twelve guests, I had never done a turkey before.

I helped my mother chop things up, but actually I could really only make stir-fry and rice. But I said I could. And so I took the job. So there I was, and pumpkin pie and, you know, cocktail, shrimp cocktail for an appetizer. She gave me enough time. But then she did the shopping because the country club was away from Denver. And so I had to plan everything out and have a dinner for them to be ready at a certain time on Thanks giving Day. So I planned it all out and I did it, but you know, Betty Crocker Cookbook saved my life (laughter). I have to tell that and my son has that cookbook now. And when he went off to Berkeley to school that was something I gave him when he said they were going to take an apartment. I managed to serve and so when I wrote this story one of the persons in my writing class that I took from her, she said, "Did they thank you for that?" And I said no; I said I could cook and that was it. But I didn't eat, you know. But otherwise, they were nice to me.

At that time, that's when Dave went out of camp. And he worked in Indianapolis, as I said, and he worked in a drug store. I went to the mailbox in Colorado where I was working and there was a package for me, so I opened it. And it was a diamond engagement ring. And I was so excited that that night my parents were nearby so I walked over there and showed them my ring. And then he wrote and told me, "I've mailed it." He didn't even insure it or anything and then he said that why didn't we have an engagement party. And here he's in Chicago. He moved to Chicago because of that other, Shig; the brother was drafted, shipped out to Massachusetts from Indianapolis. So Dave went to Chicago. See, he stayed within Chicago and so, we made arrangements that my brother was in Chicago by that time so they had their engagement party in Chicago on October twenty-third, 1943, and we had ours in Boulder, Colorado because my sister and her husband and sister-in law were in Boulder, Colorado.

They had come out of Heart Mountain and were working at the university in the cafeteria for the Navy students. And so we had our engagement party there and we took our dog. And our dog who was a toy fox terrier was brought to us from post-east in camp. So we were the only people with a dog in the camp. And we had our dog while we were doing domestic so my father carried the dog in a box on the bus, and we went and I baked a cake and that was our engagement party. So in January of forty-four, Dave suggested that I arrive on January ninth after my brother's wedding. He and his wife, they were there in Denver and they lived in Chicago. So I took the same train, but then I took a seat, a coach, and they had a compartment. And I tell people that I went with them on their honeymoon but actually they were going back to Chicago and married in Denver and I was going to Chicago to get married. And I arrived in Chicago. My older brother Masy, and Dave were at the train station but Masy came and greeted me and everything and I'm looking for Dave, and he's more on the quiet side, and he was standing there. Well, anyway, I made arrangements for a wedding in a couple of weeks time and then because their father had died in camp in August, decided to have it very simple.

But we had two ministers Father Bowman and Father Yamazaki. And I became an Episcopalian, I was a Methodist, to get married and I wanted to be. And so we would be. So we had this father going in this small church St. John's with Dave's brother Masy. And so we were married, and just before we got married Dave said "You know what? Why don't we wait a year?" And after what we'd been through I said, "What?" And he said "Well, we'll be able to remember our anniversary," you know, "more if we wait a year." And it was because it was January 23, 1944, 01-23-44. And in one more year it would have been 01-23-45, and that was it (laughter). And you know, we tell this story here at the museum and you know everybody gets a kick out of it. But that was just a joke.

And we honeymooned in Evanston, and then after that we got to visit and see what Chicago was like, which is a big city for us. And Dave worked in a drug store there in Chicago, Right and Lawrence. His brother's wife had a baby so I helped take care of it. And my mother-in-law was with them because she went through. And by Easter time I decided I better get out and get to work. And so with the flower shop experience from Santa Ana, thank goodness. And I found a flower shop job, Scanlon, in Chicago on Madison Avenue and worked in the flower shop from Palm Sunday in forty-four. Then on Sundays we would go sightseeing because we had to know Chicago but by fall of forty-four, Dave got a notice then, a draft notice, so he was drafted into the U.S. Army in November of 1944 (Pause in recording). Did you want to go back? I kind of jumped ahead there.

CC: No, that's fine. So, when he left to go to Boulder and then on to Chicago, that was the end of your experience at the camp? You were out of there at that time, you never went back?

MM: Um hm, um hm, no, except for reunions.

CC: Reunions?

MM: Yes, we have some still, but, no, we still look back on the camp experience and how it was so bitter, you know, psychologically. And so some of us are talking about camp. So even at that period in Chicago, we just rented a place and had a place and it was the greatest. But going back, we both feel that we can't talk about it. Can't talk about it. And even after getting married and having children we didn't talk about it. It was too painful. And we felt like second class citizens. I mean we couldn't vote when it was election time. But we just felt shame, ashamed kind of like we're not something that. I think most of us mostly felt the same way. And so- (Pause in recording).

CC: I can understand that.

MM: And so for us it wasn't until Susan, our daughter when she was at Berkeley took an Asian studies class in one of her semesters. And she came home at Christmas and she said, "You never talked about it. We didn't know anything about it." She was obviously shocked. She said, "I want to see the camp." So we went, between

Christmas and New Year's; grandma was with us because she lived with us the rest of her life. She came with us and so we had her and then we had a twelve- I guess our son was about twelve year old. We put everybody in the station wagon and we went to Arizona. And we found Poston and there was very little to see there.

Then we drove on to the east and to Gila and the camp where Dave's family went. And we asked those Indians where it was because they were the only ones there. And they said that the town was the next town in Arizona to the east. And we drove to there and found an elderly man. And he said, "I'll show you," he said, "I helped build those barracks." And of course now it's freeways and everything. And we found our way, we found Gila.

CC: This is Tape 2, Side A. I'm Chuck Carrillo interviewing Margaret Masuoka regarding her internment experience at Poston Camp and we were discussing her relationship with her husband Dave. And we're recording. You were discussing going to camp and your experience in relating it to the next generation, discussing the 442 guys and their experience in the war and that's pretty well documented in history. But it's the experience of people like yourself that we're worried about losing and I'm glad you're here today to talk about that. Please go on.

MM: The whole family visited Arizona and even our son James who was twelve years old. I think it just kind of opened everybody's eyes and since that day we've been able to talk about it and we talk to our visitors and let them know that there are things that hurt; that being put into a concentration camp, that never goes away. But we feel like talking about it so that it doesn't happen again. That's the main reason why we feel that volunteers ought to educate the public. So we look forward to coming.

CC: We've got a couple of minutes. Do you think just from your personal observations that Americans are aware, that their attitude towards Japanese Americans might have changed for the better over time; that most Americans, most other Americans, are aware of the problems of the past and how unfair it was?

MM: We both feel that we talk to so many people who knew nothing about what had happened to us. That mainly meant Middle Easterners or the Middle West here and those people were farmers and this and that. They were really shocked. So we feel that you just have to educate the public and let them know that this has happened and so it doesn't happen again. And even our daughter was saying, "Okay, what's happened to the Arab Americans in Guantanamo Bay?" You know, we really have to move real fast. And yet we hear people, the Nisei say, Oh, why talk about it? You mean you're still talking about it? And we have to correct them and we have to say that we have to, or else, you know, it's got to be spread around. So we're happy that we've got the students coming here and they hear about and see and they're more aware of it; whereas because it wasn't in the textbooks all these years, those of that generation weren't able to touch it. But when these kids go home at least they know something and we've attended museum dinners, Senator Inouye's auction to collect for bus money and that has helped students busload by busload. And these kids, I mean, were so happy that they're able to come and at least learn about what things

have happened.

I did want to say one thing, that our grandson David Orme has been a volunteer. He was born in Mexico and was a volunteer at our museum, in Japanese American National Museum, from nine years old to twelve years old. When he was, there were times when we come Wednesdays but he'd say, "Grandma can we go to JANM on Saturday, on Saturday morning?" And I say yeah, okay. So we were gone. All the time he was teaching origami, when done he'd go upstairs to the exhibit on *Japanese Americans in America's Wars*, the veterans exhibit. He was up there watching all the time so we never had to tell him you better stay and see it, this is history. But when he was in the eleventh grade, when he was in Boston, the teacher said they were studying American history. So he says the Japanese Americans were concentrated away from the West Coast and sent back east and in the Middle West and some of those boys volunteered for the U.S. Army out of the camp. And David said, "4-4-2," and the teacher was surprised. Well, he knew everything, "How do you know about the Four Hundred Forty- Second Infantry Combat Team, the most decorated team during World War II?" You know their campaigns in Italy and France. He said "I was a volunteer for the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, California from nine years old to twelve years old." And so the teacher said, you know, "That's how you know." And then David said, "And my grandparents are survivors of these camps." And he said, "My grandfather was drafted into the U.S. Army after he got out of camp. He got married and got out of camp." And then he said, the teacher said, "When can your grandfather come and speak to our class?" David said that they were here recently.

Then Susan, our daughter, said later, "Why don't you come for Thanksgiving and do Thanksgiving for us?" And Dave said, "Well, it's too cold," and that Dave had lived in cold country. And then he said "Oh no, we'll go." And so we didn't know but he still had his same teacher, Mr. Flaherty. And so they arranged for us to attend. After we arrived at 7:30 in the morning and we asked, How shall we prepare? And he said, "No preparing; the kids will ask you questions." Okay, so we took a few things and it turned out that we get there at 7:30 in the morning, it is a beautiful campus and this is a school where Princess Masako went when her parents were on the East Coast. The principal said he was invited to her wedding. Going on with the story, then we walked down the hall, they said the room was too small so then we walked down the hall, and it turns out that they opened the door and it was like a lecture hall with the chair and the seats leading down to the table down there. One table, two glasses of water, and two cups of water, and two chairs, and a camcorder going already, and so we thought Wow! And so David talked about the emigrants, the first great grandparents to him, and about their coming over and he gave some history. And then the principal and the three other classes, they started the discussion going and he, David says "And here are my grandparents to tell you the rest of the story."

Then David started out and time went so fast and the teacher noticed that. So he said "Shall we take a little break right now and then you can ask questions?" Some kids are really shocked. They were all well-behaved eleventh graders and they were in shock to hear this. And they never heard about us being in American concentration camps. And so we resumed and he said, "Oh, and I hear you were

drafted." And Dave told about military intelligence and that they were drafted in October of 1944. And when he found out that he took an exam for pharmacist, and the war was going on. He said "Well, with the Japanese language" -because we had gone to Japanese school as kids in our school. He got the language qualification and so he was sent to Fort Snelling in Minnesota and for training. He had gone to Alabama for basic training then he went there. And so in January he came back and then the war ended in time. It was a nine-month course; it was at the six-month period that the war ended and so Dave was among the top hundred students that Douglas MacArthur sent over to Japan in the Army of occupation. So here he is, looking like an enemy to them. That part David wanted him to tell.

We didn't quite finish telling our story because the time ran out. So Dave and I felt bad and so we wrote a letter to the class and to the school and said that we didn't get to say that the three reasons for being evacuated were prejudice, economic reasons, and because of the produce and the farming in the San Joaquin Valley. And, quote unquote, the newspapers said, Let's get rid of the Japs. Our brothers weren't experienced enough to be legally strong as lawyers to fight it so that was the reason why nothing was done.

And so we also sent the book, Michi Weglyn's *Years of Infamy*, which is highly recommended, and we sent it to the Belmont High School library and then in tum the teacher sent us the tape. And anyway we showed it to our son in San Francisco, James, and he says, "I didn't know all that about you guys," that they had heard by way of our grandson. So we thanked him. Well, then he says, "How could I keep quiet when I knew that, from this museum?" So that's why I had the pictures. So then we put it in the paper and he's with us now, going to start UCLA as a junior tomorrow. But it's been precious for us to know that he was alerting us to bring it up at different times. And so we say seventy-five kids on the East Coast know because of him and we were glad to go. We put it in the JANM newsletter.

CC: What a great story.

MM: Well to me, I just feel that he was alerting us to bring it up. He just yelled out, I said, "Did you raise your hand?" And he said, "No, I just blurted it out." And the teacher was shocked, you know, so this is one part about camp life that he said had something to do with him.

CC: Thank you for sharing that. We're looking at a news story and photograph of David and Margaret Masuoka their grandson David Orme, and teacher, Joseph Flaherty and Foster Wright, principal of the school that David was attending when this story occurred. Thank you for sharing that with us.

MM: This is in 1999.

CC: Terrific, thanks again. You brought today something, some mementoes, with you from the camp period: some things Dave made and some things you made yourself while you were there. Could you talk about those, describe those to us?

MM: Dave made them for me- we were in Santa Anita- in his off time when he wasn't working. He found some wood and he loved woodwork, one of his hobbies, and I saw him make this and I don't know where he got the hinge but it's a little wooden jewelry box. It looks like maybe out of a cigar box or something but everybody was looking for scrap lumber at that time to make things. And then he made the inlay of an M, for Margaret, he said and he inlaid it into the cover of this little box. That's about five inches or so and he has a hinge on it and it's a jewelry box. He carved it out. On the bottom it says and I don't know where he got the wood burning set but he says he thinks the brother, Masy had brought it with him to Santa Anita Assembly, August 1942. This is a jewelry box I carry around as artifacts from the concentration camp here. And then with the sample he made an M and he made a pin out of it and it's so that I could wear it and so he didn't have regular paint so he used my nail polish to paint the edges, I'm assuming. This is something that he had given me and I had it since then.

CC: Wonderful token.

MM: And another thing he made was a handle for a crochet bag and I was making things for home, future home someday, and so I was asked where did I get the fabric for this? I think I must have ordered it from the Sears catalog because that's one thing that I made. Another thing here is something back at Poston. My father and a group of men in our block, Block twenty-one, decided to go to the mountain for a hike. They didn't worry about us running away for good because there's nothing but desert out there in that area, but the mess hall made a rice ball to take for our lunch. It was so cold that the rice balls were like rock when we got up to eat them and the men in front of you wearing a pea coat with water canteen was dripping, and the frozen ice sickles are hanging down, that's how cold it was. But besides the men, my sister Nellie and another friend, Moto, the three of us women decided to go along with them and it was quite a long hike because it took us till noontime to get up there. And then my father was looking for ironwood, which is wood that has become almost like petrified in the roots. And so many of the men brought that home with them and my father brought home as much as he could carry and then he buried some and made a sign of a stake, you know, a sign so that he could come back again and I don't know when he went, but it's dangerous to go alone in case something happened. But he came back and he was cutting something and I remember it because he was using a little handsaw and then it turns out that he made a little flower vase for my sister Gladys who was in Heart Mountain Camp. And so he has his own handwriting on the base. It was made in Poston, Arizona for Gladys Nishimura in Heart Mountain. So I've kept this, as Gladys gave it to me; so I kept this as a reminder of that one trip that we made that day in Poston. So for me that was kind of precious so that's why I brought these artifacts to talk about them.

CC: Thank you for bringing those in and sharing those.

MM: One thing about Poston: I had Poston, I mean a camp exhibit, here at the museum and it was called *American Concentration Camps*. And at that time Karen Ishizuka was the curator, and at that time she decided to have models of those barracks and ten different tables, one for each camp, and so people who came would register, and

then you write down where you lived and they gave you a little plastic barrack, and you put it on where the barrack in your own block or camp. And so on the day of the opening I went over and I signed Poston, Camp One, Block Twenty-one. So I went and placed it and all of a sudden I see the next barracks and already somebody had been there. So I rushed over to the record and I found that it was the Ishida family and I thought well, maybe they've been here. They have been here because they placed it on there and so I looked at the records and it turned out that her name was there and her married name was there and it was Hachimanji and it's quite an unusual name. But that was about all and I remembered that we have a volunteer whose name was Hachimanji. I ran over to her group and asked her, I said "Do you know of a Frances Grace?" and she said "Yeah, that's my sister-in-law." So the one that was in camp with us, is married to this volunteer brother. "In fact she's here today at four if you come to the origami table." It was crowded and everything. "Be sure that Grace comes to see you." So I got there and I made sure I was standing at the Origami table. Here comes two sisters and I said, "You're Frances and you're Grace." She said, "Yeah, how do you know?" And so I said "Well, I saw that you were registered." And that's how it was, great! I have to still thank Karen for this idea; it was her idea and so she says, "I don't remember you." Both of them said they didn't remember me and I said, "Well I have a sister named Marion and she's about your age." And she says, "Oh, yeah, I remember Marion." And then I said I was in the block office in Block Twenty-one and I said, "You used to always come to borrow the Sears catalog." And they said Yeah, Oh yeah! Now I remember you, you'd sit there typing all the time. And for me that was so great to find somebody and then they were able to relate to that vision of me sitting in the block office. And I've seen her several times since then.

And so it's really funny when some people who lived in the same block, and that's why people say, What camp were you in? to people. For just in the same camp, something, I guess, about, or reunions are the same way. And the reunions that we've been to several or more and it was Gila Reunion in 1995 and Dave volunteered to set up a booth from JANM to sell T-shirts and things like that and had a computer for getting out camp records. And the Indians said that they're going to have their property and we built on it. And then they said they're going to have special written permission for us to get into the grounds. Well they got to be too much of a thing for everybody so they finally decided well, if we come on busses then it's okay. So I think there were like thirty buses or something, hundreds of people with that permission we got there. And then a former school teacher and her husband went out before and they had a map of where the blocks were and so instead of this bare ground they were able to mark off Block Thirty-two and a different block and Dave and I saw Block Thirty-two where he lived when we got out, and took pictures of where he had lived, Block Thirty-two overlooking the desert. And so we walked up to where there used to be a tank that's where they had a memorial service for all the veterans who had died so we got up there and Father John Yamazaki our minister in the Episcopal Church, he was there and he conducted services and then the governor of the Pima Indians got us a seat. Mary Thomas says, "Welcome back" and everybody kind of gulped.

Here we'd gone on with our lives and they're still there, thoughtless. And then she says, "Look around; all the greenery, there's this and that, and alfalfa here, and com. You people taught us; thank you very much." And everybody talks about the Gila Camp reunion and then they say, Were you at the '95 one? Wasn't that the highlight when she thanked us for teaching how to land manage afterward?

CC: Remarkable.

MM: That was so beautiful. We just couldn't get over the fact that I think most of us have more- we feel for other minorities who have gone through so much.

CC: I asked questions that I need to ask but if there is more that you'd like to tell, please go on.

MM: Well, right now there is something. Dave's saying "Oh you're too upset about this," and I feel is that volunteers here, the gallery docents since February 1992-- Dave and I have been volunteering for over thirteen years. When we donated pictures of Issei that Dave's father, when he was a photographer here in Los Angeles in 1916, three of his photos were selected to the first exhibition, *Issei from Hawaii to the Mainland*. So we were invited to an update when the museum was going to open. Then we were handed volunteer forms and so on the way home Dave says well, "Well what, don't you think we should volunteer?" And I said, "We've just retired, we're taking care of the grandson and you told me we're going to travel." He said just on Wednesdays, so on Wednesdays, we do come every Wednesday, and on special occasions when there's things going on. Well, then we volunteer for special occasions and it's very rewarding for us to be able to talk to our many visitors from all around the world about the exhibits, about being survivors of the concentration camp.

We tell them our Issei parents, the immigrants, came to America for a better life and how hard they worked in spite of prejudice, that it all prohibited them from becoming U.S. citizens until 1952. In the meantime they worked so hard sending their children to college. World War II put them and their children and even grandchildren into American concentration camps having to be uprooted and leaving or giving away their possessions. Our parents had to give up their nursery and flower shop business and Dave's father and brother had a drugstore that they had to close and to be sent to the camp in Arkansas. And so with our parents' values that they taught us Nisei, the second generation, we came back as conquerors, yet with our parents values, about three of them that we had: the one value is *gaman*, that means to endure; and *shikataganai*, it can't be helped and do the best to go on with your life; and then the last one was haji *kakasanai*, don't bring shame or embarrassment. We sent our children to college so that they too can have a better life and in 1990 we received from the government a letter of apology and were given reparation. But it is so sad that those who deserved it most, our Issei parents, had passed away by that time.

The government made a big mistake. They apologized and sent us checks. So for us, we are here at JANM to educate the public so that this will never happen again. And unfortunately there are things happening like the Arab Americans in Guantanamo Bay and such; this is how we feel. That's why every week when we go home, on the way home and more, we talk about who we visited with and who has other things to say. And we're not here just to preach; we listen to people. There are tears many times. And one thing I do want to say is that Mary Saito who has been our best friend since we were five years old and we'd see each other all the time, she has lost two brothers in World War II. One was in the volunteers from a larger camp, and when Calvin was killed he was only like twenty-three years old. The older brother, George, who was also I guess about twenty-five years old, he wrote a letter to his father who was in camp and said, "You know, we still think we did the right thing," by volunteering out of camp. Even though he lost his kid brother he wrote to his father and said that he did the right thing. That letter was saved and now is in a book called *Letters of the Nation* and it's in the National Resource Center right here and it tells more details about it. So then two months later, that was July, George was killed, the one that wrote the letter, in Brunyere, France. And so Mary lost two brothers and she never talked about it and then it juts out at the stairs, a display in the museum.

- CC: Interviewing Margaret Masuoka: I'm Chuck Carrillo, it's September 28, 2005; discussing her friend Mary's experiences and her family's loss two of her brothers in the 442nd in World War II.
- MM: We talked about George's letter. I had to say that it was so sad for her and he wrote letters but we never discussed it personally with each other, about her brothers. It was in 1995 the museum was having an exhibit, *Japanese American Soldiers in America's Wars* that was coming up. The curator was Dr. Kaoru Oguri and she asked Dave and me if we could help her get memorabilia and pictures and then she says, "I'm a Sansei from Hawaii and I never knew anything about anything," so she said, "Help me." So we had agreed to be on her committee and we had already contacted some of the 442 soldiers to make appointments with them but a week later, this was Christmas, a week later I made some pickles and so I told Dave I'd be back in a minute. Right away I take them to share with Mary and Tom. I drove to Gardena and I got out of the car and the garage door was open and she and Tom and daughter Gail had opened their trunk and they were pulling all these things out of there, the American flag that folded into crescent shape. All these things are coming out of this one trunk that their father had left. He told Mary this is it. I don't think she ever opened it and so she says "You've got to come in; let's take it in the house; let's look at this; this is Calvin's purple heart and this is the dog tag; this is all his things." And then she asked who should she contact, so I told her and she contacted her and her daughter took off from work and they came to bring them. And I at that time felt she was going to loan them. But she donated everything to the museum and nothing more was said at that time.

When they said it was ready to go, the opening, we docents were in for training. Dave saw this map and he yells out loud in the whole meeting. I asked, "What's the matter?" And he says "Wow, the exhibit." It was such a big display with Plexiglas and everything. We started with them when they were children and their children all the way through an adult. And so I asked the curator Dr. Ogura, "Do you think I

could ask Mary to come to see before the public opening?" It might be too much for her because I know her quite well. We knew each other since five years old and we lived across the street from each other that's why I knew the family and this is long ago. And so Mary said, "Well, don't worry, the only one left is another brother." So she had given all the captions for who it was and all the dates that went on the titles.

And so that day the news media which leave at 11:00 AM was to get in before the public. A thousand people came to see this exhibit, and so I met them in the lobby of the old historic building and when they walked in Dr. Ogura, she said, "They're here." She came down, took them, showed them the display and Mary read everything and she was happy that it was now open to the public. And the first thing she said to me was, "I have to take Dr. Ogura to lunch." That's how happy she was and then she invited her church people, thirty of them, they all came. He gave them the VIP treatment and had bags with all the other things and explained the whole thing. Mary said, "I'm able to help make closure." And so she was so proud of it and so it was moved to the Pavilion building. And so they put it the display in the *Common Ground* section of the Pavilion. Mary gave Mr. Saito's wedding outfit that he had when he came from Japan. So this is it for Mary and then now this new part that she hasn't seen in the historic building is the *Democracy Preservation* and it's going to open on October 28.

They got a preview of it, the docents did, and they have panels and we're going to this old room and I saw this exhibit, the word *George* and I thought Wow! And then I saw about five other names. I saw a name, an American name, George, her brother the older one that died in France, representing all the Nisei. And it said they had selected him. I had loaned my scrapbook to show to JANM because I've been collecting photos, and that's another hobby of mine, and I have articles and things like this. So I loaned the one that had to do with the 442, that exhibit. So I showed it to the curators who work and they took some of the photographs and so Mary heard about it when I sent her some stuff. She hasn't seen it yet and to think that she and I have been friends that long and then it all might still be in that trunk. But I'm so happy and she is, too, that she's now open about it. For Mary, and there couldn't be a truer friend, she says, "Well, It could have still been left in the trunk," so I had to tell you that.

CC: Well thank you. Thank you very much for sharing that. I don't know how to express this. I feel very lucky, very privileged to listen to your story today. You're extremely good with your memories, amazing! And you've been extremely good about relaying and sharing it with me and on the tape for the Center for Oral and Public History at Fullerton. And what can I say besides thank you very much.

MM: Well thank you very much because, like I say, it's been on my mind and you know it's been- my whole family knows this- it's been bugging me that I need to get it in something like this. Every week they tell me "Have you documented what you just told me?" And I said "No, some day," and that's how it was. But thank you very much for letting me share it with you, and my kids will be glad that I'm finally making contact with you in order to do this. And I think Marie and I wanted to have a picture (takes photographs).

CC: We'll shut off the tape and this concludes the interview. It's 12:38 on September 28, 2005: interview with Margaret Masuoka.