CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with KINICHI KIMBO YOSHITOMI

Interviewed

By

Marilyn Jones

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CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: KINICHI KIMBO YOSHITOMI

INTERVIEWER: Marilyn Jones

DATE: October 17, 1978

LOCATION: Anaheim, California

PROJECT: Japanese American

MJ: This is the second interview with Kinichi Kimbo Yoshitomi by Marilyn Jones for the California State University, Fullerton, Oral History Japanese American Project on October sixteenth.

KY: Seventeenth.

MJ: Seventeenth, 1978 at seven o'clock in the evening. Kim, we covered a lot of things in the interview last week, and there are several things that I would like you to talk about more in detail. One of the things you spoke about was your association with the Mikados in San Francisco when you were in high school. Tell me more about it.

KY: Well, Mikado was a basketball team that we formed between the Buddhist and the Christian boys. Prior to that, there used to be a big rivalry in San Francisco, but our thoughts were that rather than play among ourselves, we should try to enter into competition with the Caucasian group. Thus, we formed the Mikado Club with the coach Fred Koba who was an outstanding coach at that time. And we entered into the AAU in San Francisco and played with fellas at that time like Hank Luisetti, who is considered one of the best basketball players of all time. And we did rather well, except for the fact that our tallest boy was about five foot eight, and naturally, the other boys were well over six foot. The average height of our players was about five feet five inches, but what we lacked in height, we made up in speed and cleverness. And we did very well. We also entered the Japanese American Union League. At that time, we were undefeated playing teams in San Jose, Berkley, Oakland. Then, eventually, we had our coastal championship with the Pacific Coast. We used to come down to Los Angeles, or either their best team would come up to San Francisco. Then we beat them, and then we made a trip to the Northwest, which was the first time any team ever went up that far, especially in Oregon and Seattle. We played four games in Seattle, and at that time, there was a center tip-off. And each time a bucket was made, well, we had come to the center again for a tip-off. We said

we're not accustomed to that type of play because that was passé, and we wanted to incorporate the fast break. So, the second half, we played our style, and we ran them off the court. Naturally, we got a lot of publicity, and they thought that we were an exceptional team. We played four games then, and then went down to Portland, Oregon, to play the All Star team there, and we beat them also to be proclaimed the champion of the coast from Washington, Oregon, California. At that time, I was made the basketball commissioner for the basketball league, and we had roughly about thirty teams involved, including the girls. We played all over California, and we have retained our friendship ever since. So, it's been very nice. And like any group that gets together, why, we always get together and reminisce about the old days. And, of course, the wives are put out because they feel that we're are grown-up kids that we are always talking about the good ole days, but it was a nice feeling and a good time because at that time, we weren't interested in girls, we were interested in sports. (chuckles)

MJ: Things changed.

KY: Things do change as we grow up. And after we found girls, well, basketball became secondary.

MJ: You forgot about basketball.

KY: That's right.

MJ: How was the team financed? Who paid for or sponsored the travels?

KY: Well, we had raffles, the usual things. And then, of course, we used to get some of the companies to see if they would donate basketball. Uniforms, of course, we had to buy our own shoes and things of that nature. But, of course, it left a lot of animosity with the other teams because they felt that we had collective All Stars from the Christian churches and the Buddhist church. But, that did break the tension, and we began to talk to each other.

MJ: Oh, yeah.

KY: Yeah, prior to that, well, it was pretty heated.

MJ: And the rest of the Japanese American teams, I'm sure, supported the Mikados when they became famous.

KY: Yes, I think that was entered into the book of Mr. Bill Hosokawa who wrote *The Quiet Americans.* He made mention of the fact that at that time he played for one of the Seattle teams.

MJ: And he played?

KY: He played, yes. He left them flat footed so—

MJ: (laughs) How much support did the team have from parents within the family? Were there a lot?

KY: Well, it was a big thing for the parents to come out Sunday to our stadium and watch us play, and there were avid fans. We used to meet at one of the fellow's place. In fact, Dr. Hara that I met in Arkansas, his home. The mothers would buy us cookies and refreshing. And our big thing was after a game, we would go down to a place on Fillmore Street and have our milkshake; it was a big thrill. And surprising, all the boys continues playing until they were about twenty-five years old.

MJ: On the Mikodos?

KY: Yes.

MJ: They were still not a professional team?

KY: Oh, no. I think the youngest person we had was about sixteen years old, and when we went up to Seattle, I think it was the first time some of the boys ever went to a burlesque. (chuckles)

MJ: Sixteen years old?

KY: Sixteen years old. (chuckles)

MJ: That's one way they learn about life, isn't it. (laughs)

KY: Right.

MJ: Through athletics.

KY: It was very interesting.

MJ: Another question on—oh, how long were you with the Mikados?

KY: I think we were together for about roughly eight years.

MJ: Eight years.

KY: Yeah, and we broke up when war broke out and evacuation.

MJ: You all went to different camps?

KY: We did, yes. I went up to Tanforan, as I stated before, and became an athletic director for the camp.

MJ: Yeah, you had a lot of experience by that time.

KY: It helped. It really helped because along with basketball, our program encompassed baseball, and track was a big thing. Because climatically in Northern California, we were indoor most of the time. That's why basketball was one of the main sports. And gyms were available. Whereas in Southern California, the weather was so nice. Basketball is not the number one game. But, they did have good teams because we did come down to play the Japanese team from UCLA, and then they had a team called the Cardinals. Then they had the Midgets from Seattle, which was a good team, too.

MJ: You spoke of being basketball commissioner.

KY: Um-hm.

MJ: What all did you do as basketball commissioner?

KY: Well, mainly, I got all the managers from the respective teams together. We met about once a week or twice a month in Berkley or Oakland or wherever we decided to meet. And we would draw-up schedule for the teams to play. Of course, like today's little leagues, parents would get hot and heavy. They wanted the favorite schedule. Well, we just had to draw lots from a hat. And, of course, they didn't want to play the best team first because they would get eliminated. Oh, we managed.

MJ: Did you play your own expenses when you traveled?

KY: Yes, right.

MJ: So, most of the boys must have come from homes that could afford to.

KY: Well, at that time, back in the thirties, why, things were pretty tough. But, of course, things weren't as expensive.

MJ: Um-hm. How did you travel, mostly?

KY: Mostly by cars. In fact, we went up to our northern trip to Seattle, why, we had two cars, and the car would only hold something like six boys in each car with the luggage plus the basketball equipment. And when we met on that Sunday morning, in front of Doctor Hara's home, why, there was two other fellows, and they wanted to go, too. We didn't know what to do, so we decided to put a suitcase in the backseat and let them sit sideways so they wouldn't be left home. So, fourteen of us went. These were the sixteen year old kids.

MJ: That was important to them.

[00:10:00]

KY: It was, yes. They never forgot it. And I think we were given, at that time, a dollar a day for three meals. (chuckles) But you could buy breakfast for a quarter at that time. Of course, we were taking extra money ourselves, but the families up there were kind enough to invite us out. They gave us parties. But, we managed.

MJ: Did you stay at other families' home?

KY: No, we stayed at a Japanese hotel.

MJ: Oh.

KY: And, of course, it was the first time for a lot of the kids to leave town or leave their home, so they were rambunctious. They were bouncing all over the beds and broke one of the stands there or whatever. But, we put it all together. (chuckles)

MJ: And you're still in contact with all those fellas?

KY: Yeah, they've had reunions. Of course, some of the boys have passed away. We were just remarking, the last time we got together, that I think we are about the only group that I do get together once in a while and stayed in touch.

MJ: From those years.

KY: Um-hm.

MJ: And they are pretty well scattered?

KY: Yes, I think—well, the majority of them are in the Bay region. Well, two of the boys, I believe, are in Japan and about four boys are back east. They've all done very well.

MJ: One of the other things you mentioned in the last interview was working for the very prestigious silk company.

KY: Um-hm.

MJ: What was the name?

KY: The name of the company was Ottawa Matsuoka.

MJ: Tell me about your experiences with them and what kind of a company they were to work for.

KY: Well, surprisingly, I was working for an importer as a salesman, and I think I was only about eighteen years old. I did a little bit of traveling and also sold to all the little shops in Chinatown. And then, when I had heard about this opening at Ottawa Matsuoka, I thought, Well, I'm going to apply. And I know all my buddies were saying, "Kim, no way are you going to make it there." I didn't know this but

unbeknownst to me, they had all made a bet I wouldn't last there one month. Well, I was kind of a carefree person at that time, rather irresponsible. So, when I left there the first day to work at Matsuoka, the first day I didn't know at what time I was supposed to get a lunch. And I remember this very distinctly because at two o'clock, they hadn't said it to me about going to lunch. They said, You just stay here and fold-up all the kimonos or whatever that was on the counter. And at 2:30 p.m. now the lady said, "You could go to lunch." I was so upset. I had my little brown bag, walked down to the park there, and I threw that into the garbage can. I was just fuming. And she called me *bakatare,* which is the strongest cuss word you have in the Japanese language. It means stupid or whatever. And I think she did this to me every day for a whole year. Of course, they were quite surprised that I would stick it out. And later, somehow, I became her pet, more or less. And I was the youngest person there. There was four boys and one girls, plus the two Japanese seamstress along with Madame Matsuoka and Mr. Matsuoka. And, when the day came, when she asked me to chauffeur her kids to school, why, everyone just fell off the seat because they said it's unheard of to entrust such a responsibility to anyone. And to pick me of all persons, why, that was a feather in my cap.

It was a good association because I learned a lot, and at that age, you're irresponsible. She taught me things that really stuck to me, and it's help me in my other business ventures. Mainly clothing because she told me that to be a successful salesperson, you have to know the moment the customer walks into the store what size dress she wears, what color would be most becoming, and in helping a lady take off her fur coat, to look at the label and to see if it was a good coat or not. Even in those days, I think the new _____ (inaudible) rich were the ones that gave us the hardest time. And I did learn that wealthy families or who had wealth all their lives, they knew how to handle money; they weren't prestigious or overbearing. They are very nice people. And we kept their measurements on file, so like for instance, Cary Grant was going to marry Barbara Hutton, we were the first to know because she ordered a sleeping coat with the monogram CG. And she said that what we would like you to do is to make this all up in the silk material she picked out and to ship it to Beverly Hills. And it was quite surprising because when she came in, she was followed in by a host of photographers, and Madame Matsuoka told me, "Kim, will you ask all the customers to leave the store." And we chased them out very politely, we closed the doors, and pulled the blinds down. We told her that while she was in the shop that she could shop at leisure without any pressure whether she wanted to but something or not. And I thought a lady of that wealth would be rather easygoing and careless with her money. Well, I found out that she was, not stringent, but she knew the value. She would feel the material and say, "Well, this is good fabric so let's make it up in this." And I think she ordered two black pearl earrings to be made up. And, at that time, when you paid something like $600, that was a lot of money.

MJ: Um-hm.

KY: And Mikimoto Pearl was the pearl company of reputation. So, she did, and the next day, she came in with her son, Lance—of course, he was a little boy then—with her governess and bodyguard. And we had people like Wallace Beery, who was very

sloppy. Walter Pidgeon, Ginger Rogers, Ingrid Bergman, Jerome Kern. And, of course, all the famous stars from the Metropolitan Opera like Ezio Pinza, Lily Pons, Helen Traubel, and a host of them. We would make things up for them and deliver to, generally to the Mark Hopkins Hotel, which was two blocks up the street. We would take our sample swatches and display it and show it to them. We had people from the musical world—I mean of modern music like Bob Crosby, Artie Shaw, Count Basie, and Henry Busse. From the golfing world, which was my favorite at that time, was people like Ben Holden, Ky Laffoon, and a host of others. Well, I didn't realize at that time until I read the story of Ben Holden that was a period where they were down to eating oranges, and, if I had known it, I would have given him my week's salary—well, not knowing what was going to happen. Well, at that time, I was only making $20 a week anyway, working ten hours a day. We worked actually from nine in the morning until ten o'clock at night; we put in a lot of hours for that kind of money. And Friday night when the bosses took off, why, we were treated to a Chinese dinner, and, to me, that was delightful because there was no pressure. And part of my responsibility in learning was to wash the windows and put away all the materials and take an inventory of all the yardage we had.

Then Mrs. and Mr. Matsuoka decided to leave for Japan, and I swear, at that time they must have filled half of the boat with all kinds of things because there was a shortage in Japan. I think this was prior to World War II. When we got down to the dock there, we discovered that one of the sons was missing. And, of course, everybody pressed the panic button. This fellow and I jumped into the car, went to the home first. He wasn't there, so we went to Sacramento Park that overlooks the Golden Gate Bridge. We thought by hunch that he might be there, and sure enough, he was sitting on the slope waiting for the boat to go past the Golden Gate Bridge. He was a typical American kid, and I guess he didn't want to go to Japan. So, we silently crept up and grabbed him, and we phoned the pier and said, "We got him," you know. And I think if it was anybody else but the Matsuokas, they would not have held that boat up. You had to pay the longshoreman off, too. It must have cost a bundle because it was delayed about two hours. It was interesting. It was really something else.

[00:20:00]

MJ: You practically had to kidnap him!

KY: Yeah, because like he said, he didn't want to go to Japan because, like all of this cowboy and Indian and whatever was our way of life, but they have done very well. They wrote to us. And, during the shortage, we would send them things that they needed, like sugar, whatever, instant coffee. And I do believe that the son is the public relation manager for Sprekles Sugar in Hawaii. They came by here one time. We had dinner.

MJ: Do they still have their business?

KY: No, what happened was, you see, were thinking about—well, one of the older fellas said that the last war lasted about three years, World War I. He felt that the thing to do here was not to panic, even if we were going in to camp, was to go around and to buy all the silk material we could get a hold of. So, we went out and converted cash into materials and jacked the price up double. Hoping that would be enough silk material left by the time the war ended.

MJ: Um-hm.

KY: And despite the fact that the price would double, I think in six months everything was sold. And we had a Jewish couple that was doing some of our tailoring for us, we asked him to take over the store and watch it. So, once the silk was gone, well, naturally, it lost the influence of Matsuoka's name, so he asked the boys if he could but the store. And I think he managed to make clothing out of, uh, what is it? Denim.

MJ: Oh.

KY: Sports clothes. But, while we were open, we were selling Chinese lingerie and silk shorts that were made, but we used to monogram for all the movie stars like Ben Blue. His would be two bumble bees. And Fred Waring was a cigarette with smoke coming out cause at that time it was sex appeal. It was really funny the kind of combination that they would pick for the Chinese brocade silk men's shorts. And I made the remark to Ben Blue, I said, "Hey, this is too pretty to be hidden. You should show it on the outside." (chuckles)

MJ: (laughs) Did he think that was a good idea?

KY: But he was quite a fellow.

MJ: Oh, good. That must have been fun.

KY: Um-hm.

MJ: Was that by any chance the time when you developed your interest in the big band music?

KY: Well, I've always liked music, since I was a young kid.

MJ: You have spoken about singing.

KY: Well, I did a little bit.

MJ: Talk about your musical interest.

KY: Well, I used to sing at all the local Japanese dances. Then I emceed quite a few of the events there. And then, at one time, I had persuaded the Japanese American newspaper there—they had an hour program every Sunday night. I said, "Why don't you cut that in half? I'll bring the talent for the first half hour in English." And we did that. We tried everything. But, we formed a three piece band; we played in Chinese restaurants. And, of course, at that time, Jack Soo was Goro Suzuki. We went to try in all these amateur tryouts. And I think we won first prize at one event; we did very well. He had a terrific voice. Then we used to have these talent shows inviting all the clubs in the Bay region for fundraising. They had trios. In fact, they had boys that could play harmonica, some would play guitar, and some, of course, played piano. Then the older girls got into this choreographed dance routine, very smart, well done. We often reminisce about this. It was very nice.

MJ: That must have been a lot of fun during that time.

KY: Um-hm.

MJ: From that to Tanforan and Topaz, it was a very different period of your life. One of the things in your last interview that you mentioned was having your appendix out while you were at Topaz.

KY: Um-hm.

MJ: What were the medical facilities like?

KY: Well, this wasn't in Topaz. It was in Tanforan.

MJ: Oh, *that* was in Tanforan?

KY: Yes—I mean, this was—that's right this was in Topaz.

MJ: Oh, it was?

KY: Yes. Well, actually, these were barracks, and in the barracks they had about two ends, four other rooms in-between, so that will be one, two, three, four, five, six rooms to a barrack. It was just one empty room, and, like I mentioned before, we use to partition for privacy. The only thing that we had in there was a potbelly stove, so we would make cocoa or whatever. We could make tea for the elderly. As far as obtaining food was concerned, why, naturally, the mess halls was the only places we had, unless you knew the boys in the commissary, and then they would sneak some things out. And there was a block manger for I don't know how many buildings, and they had to look after the welfare of the people living there.

MJ: Were they Caucasian?

KY: No, they were all Japanese. Everything was done with the Japanese people. The only ones that were Caucasian were in the administration building in the supervision positions, and they would delegate responsibilities to all of us. We had the garbage crew; that was another group. The gardeners group. And the Japanese people, like for gardening, they started growing their own flowers, make Japanese rock gardens and all that, with the material on hand. It was quite limited, but they did a good job because they like greenery. And unfortunately, in the desert with no water, it's rather hard.

I don't know if I mentioned this before, but, at that time, the morale of the families kind of broke-down due to lack of furniture. Why, whenever they could find scrap lumber lying around, they would sneak it home and start cutting it up and making table or benches or whatever. And, when the kids saw their parents doing that, they said, Well, geez, if they could do that, then I could grab something too. And there were some selfish people that were hiding and hoarding the lumber underneath the barracks. And actually, as far as eating was concerned, well, I think we managed pretty well. Because eventually, the chiefs admitted the type of foods that the people wanted—basically, rice. It wasn't what you call first class food, but it was all right to get by. Then clothing was another factor, too, because the majority or almost everyone there never saw snow in their life. And then to run into this cold weather and type buy this type of clothing with a 250 ration book, well, it was pretty hard to buy. And they had—I don't know if we had formula for babies back in the forties.

MJ: Well, yeah.

KY: They did?

MJ: Yeah.

KY: Well, not being a father, I didn't know at that time.

MJ: They were probably not as highly developed or varied as they are now.

KY: Um-hm. Yeah, we had some Caucasian ladies married to Japanese in camp as well. I was quite surprised—I mean, of course, if they are married and their kids are going there, they had to be in there, too, and we got along very nicely. But, I do know there was a case where a fellow had gone out of camp—or before coming to camp had his face changed hoping he could stay outside, but he got caught and brought into camp. Of course, the constitutional aspect of this is being debated that as a natural born citizen, that this was unconstitutional.

MJ: Was there any plan at the time for restitutional payments for land or properties lost?

KY: Well, at one time, they did make some restitution, but they said you had to have proof. And that made it very difficult because a lot of the fellas, with the shortage of

time, stored all their personal belongings into a friend's garage. Well, that was broken into the same night. So, then they'll say, Where's your proof? It's hard to do.

MJ: Um-hm.

KY: Because in my case, too, we left the house as is with a Filipino friend of ours that worked for my mother, and the first night there, he was hit over the head. They even stripped the aluminum off the floor. And the person is dead now, and they said, Well, you have no proof. There's no claim. But, there is a movement now where they are asking for compensation, and there's pros and cons about this. They felt that rather than stir-up animosity among the American public, let it be. On the other hand, the boys are saying we should get the money because of some of these loses and whatnot. We shouldn't be passive. That's one of the things that the new generation are saying that "Why didn't you fight the government?" Well, at that time, we thought the best thing to was to cooperate rather than be militaristic like they are now. And I think, somewhat, when you look at it today, there are a lot of Japanese Americans being arrested, the young kids. I would say the fourth generation because the morale of the household has broken down. Much as to do with economics where both parents are working, and they are not home to supervise the kids. In our days, of course, the parents were law. They were god. When they said something, you jumped. But, in some sense, they are getting more and more Americanized and losing a lot of culture.

[00:31:15]

MJ: And they're probably adapting more of—less desirable Caucasian customs, certainly in terms of the juvenile problems.

KY: Um-hm. Yeah, I think so, and it's unfortunate. But, at the same time, they are accepted into society much more easily than we were. Jobs were very limited. There was a lot of discrimination. I guess there is some yet, but, you find discrimination within your own race. So, we can't say that. But, I think among all the minorities, the Japanese Americans have been accepted the most because they did it by deed rather than talk, not by demands. But, of course, there again, there's a difference in opinion. Because they feel since we are minorities, we should associate ourselves with the Mexican group, the blacks and form this group and demand—well, personally I'm against that because I feel that if you can make a niche in the world by honest effort, you would be more readily accepted than by asking for a hand-out.

MJ: You mentioned that your parent's word was the rule. Was there much punishment?

JY: Oh, yeah. (laughs)

MJ: Tell me about it. I remember, as a kid, being a brat. Well, they would put this little thing on my arm; it like a little incense and it burns. You don't dare touch it. I think I was the most scarred kid in the neighborhood because everyday I was getting in trouble, and she would throw me in the closet. And I remember when I was sixteen

years old, it was the first time that I ever talked back to my mother because I knew she was wrong. I think the shock itself was the thing that kept my mother keep quiet because, up to then, even if she was wrong, well, I would say "Yes, Mother," you know, "You're, right." And, of course, at that time we didn't have a father, so I had to act as the man of the house.

MJ: Um-hm, you were the number one son.

JY: Oh, yes.

MJ: Um-hm.

JY: They never let me forget it.

MJ: Um-hm.

JY: But, at the present time, my mother is eighty-six years old and, she's living in a home in San Francisco with the Japanese people, which I'm glad for cause she's getting a bit senile and the main thing in the Japanese home, why, they do feed you the type of food you like rather than going to a rest home. Well, my dad is ninety-two, and he is still alive in Japan. I was supposed to go visit him three years ago, but his present wife didn't like the thought of the first son coming to Japan so. I said, "Well, that's okay because I didn't care for the Japanese type plumbing anyways. I'll stay here." And I've never left the country. I think the furthest I've been from the mainland would be Catalina Island. On the other hand, I lived in New York, so I've gone from one side to the other.

MJ: Pretty much covered this country.

JY: Most definitely and I like it.

MJ: We are almost at the end of the tape so, let's stop here, and I'll turn it over. [recording paused] Okay, you were talking about not going to Japan to visit your father for one thing, and I was wondering, when you were in high school, and you said that for two years you went to different high schools were you living with your father?

JY: Yes, I was. In fact, that was during the Depression time, so I recall living with him in a shack on a farm in Cupertino, which is near San Jose. We were picking apricots at that time. That's where he had made stew, and we ate stew for a whole week. And I swore if I ever grew up, I would never touch stew again. But, I like it.

MJ: In despite of that.

JY: Despite of that, yes.

MJ: What do you remember about your father?

JY: Well, he was a very busy person and—actually, I can't remember too much because they separated when I was about nine years old. He had a mustache, smoked a cigar, and a rather stout person. But, I think like in all families, kids do go to their mother for love and affection.

MJ: When you were living with him, was it awfully hard for him having lost his money and everything and his family?

JY: He looked kind of lost, yes. Well, naturally, there was a gap—so-called generation gap—that he was from Japan and I was raised here. About the only thing we talked about was what we had to do the following day and the type of work that was involved. Then he started a flower shop in San Jose with the money that he made there, but then it was rather depressing for me because he asked me to read the obituaries to see who passed away and try to contact them for arrangements. Then we moved on to Watsonville, and we did the same thing. We sold flowers, and it was very bad. I didn't like it.

MJ: Yeah. Have you seen him in later years?

JY: I did see him once before he went to Japan.

MJ: When was that?

JY: I can't recall, but I know it was just after the war when I came back to California by myself to see if there was any possibility for employment as golf professional. I had heard that he was in Los Angeles, and I came to visit my friend so I made a point to visit him. And I think he told me at that time he had saved about $8,000 and that he was going to go to Japan and retire. So, that was the extent of it.

MJ: Yeah.

JY: He lived in a shabby, room house near downtown L.A.

MJ: That was pretty sad then, having had great wealth at one time.

JY: Yeah, but at least he had his health. The fact that he is still alive today shows his health.

MJ: Oh, yeah. Well, tell me more then about your business ventures. You spoke only briefly about your teaching golf and having your driving range and the Kim's import?

JY: Well, yeah, talking about business, as I mentioned before, we did open up a grocery store in Cleveland.

MJ: Oh, yes.

KY: The three of us. And Moishi used to have a confectionary store in San Francisco. And the other fellow, Mitsiodo, used to run a floral shop, so we just pooled our resources together. And with my contact with Mr. Wesley Oyama in Denver, we started to cater to the Japanese residents in Cleveland. I remember another incident where on New Year's Day, it's a big holiday for three days for the Japanese people, and they eat this thing called mochi, which is pounded from sweet rice. You steam it and you pound it and you mold it. Lacking equipment, why, we improvised a kind of what would look like a wok today. We put that on a bed of sand, and we would steam the rice and we would throw—I don't know, maybe about twenty-five pound of whatever it was—and Mo would turn it around while we all hit it with a baseball bat. And it was such hard work, and it was so hot in the basement of this old store we had. I got all the golf members to come over and help us, girls too, and we were pounding the rice all night long because we had to deliver on January the first. Well, I think we broke up about two in the morning, we all went home to sleep, and we got back there about eight o'clock to start delivering. And when I walked in that store, every label on the cans on the shelves had fallen down due to the steam. And we couldn't remember what was what in the cans, so the boys said, "Well, let's take a chance and _____ (inaudible) in the can. So, we piled it up in the middle of the store and sold it. But, it was so funny. We did that for about three years, and eventually, the population in Cleveland started to decrease because they all started to come back to California, and we felt, too, that we should come back here ourselves. And we used to drive, I remember, all the way from Cleveland to Chicago just to pick-up bean cakes because they were the only ones that had it. And, of course, I got involved in raising bean sprouts, and I went to Grand Junction. Other than that—

[00:41:00]

MJ: Did you lose money? No, we made money, but if the government hadn't stepped in, we would have been sitting pretty well.

MJ: Well, that's too bad because we might have _____ (inaudible) Grand Junction.

JY: (laughs) No, thanks. Grand Junction is a good place to visit but not to live.

MJ: (laughs) I sort of feel that way, too.

JY: So, anyway, when I came back here, I bought this property on Lincoln Avenue, and we started the driving range. Bought twenty acres, and at that time it was the ridiculous price of $4,000 an acre, and I had been looking for acre for about a $1,000 an acre. And they said why don't you go where Disney is being built for $6,000, and I thought, Oh, that's too high. So, we bought this property and, at that time, there was a bunch of speculators in Orange County that were tying-up properties for a $1,000 deposit—non-refundable—in hopes of selling it a little bit higher. And I think the boys made out pretty well. So, anyway, we removed ten acres of the orange trees,

and I started building the driving range. And what skills I acquired as a greens keeper at this private club in Cleveland, Ohio, came in very handy. But there, again, the type of grass we have here in California is somewhat different from back east. And I know this fellow that was going to sell it to us—I think he was a professor at Long Beach State—he wanted to renege And say that he would give us our money back because at that time, prices were jumping up about $2,000 an acre, every three months. I remember sitting one day at the driving range, and a fellow drove-up and asked me would I consider selling it. That was three months after we bought it. I said, "Well, what would you give us?" "I'll give you $6,000 an acre." And I thought, Boy, if it's going to jump this quick, why, there is no sense in selling it.

MJ: Um-hm.

JY: But after having a property for four year and building a swimming pool that we leased to Sammy Lee, and then eventually to the Anaheim School District, why, the Anaheim Assistant Superintendent at that time, Ken Wines, came in and said, "Well, Kim, we have to condemn your property before the making of the high school, which turned out to be Savanna High School. So, we were left with five acres, and it was just one of those things—

MJ: Did you have a right to fight that?

JY: Well, you can't fight condemnation, dominant condemnation, for public use.

MJ: Did they give you a fair price?

JY: Well, at that time the fair market was $12,000 an acre, so we tripled our money for that part, which wasn't bad. But later on, we sold it for about $50,000 an acre. Of course, if we'd held on longer than that, why—but that's what happened.

MJ: They just condemned the five acres then?

JY: No, fifteen acres.

MJ: Oh, fifteen acres.

JY: That's what they left us with the five acre frontage.

MJ: Only five acres.

JY: Yeah, so eventually, we sold it to an apartment developer, but these things you never know. The hindsight, like they say, is 20/20 vision. And some of these people that had property they sold much too early. Because right now, being in the real estate business, we find that acreage in Orange County is almost non-existent, unless you want to pay a premium price for it. But, it has changed from '55 to the present time. And, well, life has been very kind to me here. People have been very nice. And

when that happened, I took my portion of the profit and started a store called Kim's Imports. Naturally, I wanted to try what we did in San Francisco like the Matsuokas. Actually, I designed the store exactly the way we had it in San Francisco. There again, I didn't realize about the temperature differences, so when I had nothing but silk, well, no one would buy it. In fact, in that short time since we were using substitute material like nylon, well, no one knew about silk. And, I finally unloaded it and converted to a Hawaiian shop. I had that for about nine years old until I sold it. Got too much of a headache, especially fighting women all day long.

MJ: You didn't have to look at the labels on the fur coats?

KY: No, not here. It was more casual women here.

MJ: Where did you get your silk?

KY: Well, I went to San Francisco to the supplier that we dealt with and whoever had it, I bought it. Actually, they knew of me from prior to the war. But there, again, it's all timing in life.

MJ: Silk is coming back in now. You could probably—

KY: Oh, yeah, it goes in cycles. We used to sell a lot of silk stockings. Today, girls don't know about silk stockings.

MJ: Tell me some of your experiences teaching golf.

KY: Well, when I first started here, it was rather difficult. I remember the president of the Southern California Japanese Golf Association came to see me one day, and he said, "No way are you going to be accepted by the American community." And I said, "Well, I don't think that's correct because in Cleveland I had no problem." But there, again, in California, one never knows. But then, at that time, I remember the first person I met was Al Kopler, and he used to come over daily to hit some balls. We got to talking, and he asked me to join the Chamber of Commerce. He introduced me to quite a few people. Then, of course, Doctor Calvary used to come by and Hal Greg. And I had five ladies from Willowick come by one day, and I taught them all. Three of them won their respective championships in their categories, so then that helped. They spread the word around. Then what I did was every year, I used to pick four students from Anaheim High School that I thought had possibilities, and I would tell them to come every day after school and hit any amount of balls you want daily, and it would be no charge. At that time, Anaheim High School was the only high school that was here. It got to the point where, since I don't have any children, why, I used to have a New Year's morning breakfast for all the kids starting at midnight until six in the morning. The parents used to be quite pleased knowing where the kids where. We would cook breakfast like, pancakes or waffles, sausage, bacon, and eggs from midnight to six in the morning. I think I did that for about four years, and then I felt that I was missing out on Rose Bowl games because I couldn't keep my eyes

open. Then the kids were spreading out. They were getting married and what not. And I'm still in touch with a couple of those kids.

MJ: Oh, great.

KY: They did very well.

MJ: Any of them golfers now?

KY: Not so much because, once you start raising children, you don't have time, so that makes it hard. But, they do write and ask about my health and wellbeing. Very nice, yes. Very nice. Well worth the effort.

MJ: And you're teaching now?

KY: Yes, I'm teaching now at Lazy B Golf Range out in Orange Park Acres, not steadily, just by appointments. I did teach for the Anaheim recreation department at Pearson Park for a community project. During the war, too, I was teaching these boys back from World War II that were amputees, blind soldiers; it was quite a challenge to teach them.

[00:50:05]

MJ: Where was that?

KY: In Cleveland.

MJ: Oh, in Cleveland?

KY: Yeah. And we used to fix the golf club, well, especially for fellas that lost their hands. And they would have a stump or they would have a cover over that, and we would fix that up. Surprisingly, they did very well. That's why I tell my students today that, "If you've got two good eyes, two good arms, two legs, there's no reason in the world why you can't hit that ball." But, I guess a person that is blinded does not have any distraction so they can concentrate, and it was a good experience for me to learn human nature as well.

MJ: Right. Did you actually design some of the clubs to fit the handicapped soldiers?

KY: Yes, we made some alterations.

KY: Some fellow would have, say, one leg shot off the knee, why, he would have to stand there on his good foot with a crutch and do the best he could without losing his balance.

MJ: How were you able to teach someone like that? Did you actually practice by standing on one foot yourself to see how—

KY: No, we could see what was in store for the individual, what he had to do or what we had to work with. So, it was a matter of just common sense. I know they still have a tournament for the blind where they have a caddy line up the club and tell then the exact distance and select the club for them, and line-up the club in the direction the ball is supposed to be hit. Then on a putting green, why, they put a bell over the hole, and once they are lined up, they're supposed to listen for the bell to see how far the distance are and put accordingly. They break one hundred, which is good. Very good, in fact. One of the girls I got started here, Jill _____ (inaudible), her parents brought her over one day and said, "Will you teach my daughter?" At the time, I think she was a 4-H club girl, husky, and about fifteen years old. And after watching her hit the ball a couple of times, I said, "There's no problem; I'll teach her as much as I can without any charge because I thought she had a future. Then I lost track of her, she went to Arizona State. They had a big party for her at Alta Vista Country Club and asked me to come as a guest speaker, and I was so delighted to see her after all these years; to see her as a charming young lady. And she told me that she was teaching school, but she always had this bug to see how she could do professionally. So, the members had raised some money to send her on a tour, and she got a green card. Her mother was elated, so was her father. I've been watching her, but from what I hear, She's having a little putting trouble. But it makes you feel good to see someone like that grow-up.

MJ: You should get in touch with her and invite her back to give her a putting lesson. (laughs)

KY: Oh, she's doing all right.

MJ: You have any good techniques?

KY: I said to her after her first tournament I'd take her to a swanky Japanese restaurant. But in recreation, you do meet the nicest people because they're there for recreation. It's not business. And, of course, it's quite an obsession with them that they do improve. I remember one time I was at the pro shop over there on Lincoln, and a lady came in and said, "Hey, have you seen my husband?" I said, "No, I haven't." And she said, "I think he left the house for good and all he took was his golf clubs." (chuckles) And then there was another fellow that I sold a new set to, and he took it to bed the first night. (laughs) It takes all kind of people.

MJ: Um-hm. Some of the strangest ones are golfers.

JY: I think so. I really do. I tell them the hardest six inches in golf is between the ears—

MJ: Yeah.

JY: Because physically we're not all not built the same, so it's up to the individual. I find that through the course of thirty-one years of teaching, why, you find the character of the person very easy. Because if they're going to cheat, they'll cheat. But, of course, if the score goes well over ten or twelve, it's hard to keep track and it's forgiven. I've had the case where I played with this fellow one day, and he hit the ball into the woods, and I said, "Well, hit it back." He said, "No, I'm going to hit it between the two trees." I said, "Impossible." Well, he went and proceeds to hit the tree and it ricocheted. I think I must have heard about seven ricochets or strokes. He came out, he said, "That was my first stroke." I said, "Boy, it must have been a lot of echo in that forest." (laughs) But, the funny thing was, when he went to take the second swing, the club broke in half. (chuckles) I think he dented the club or the shaft on one of the tree trunks, but I think like in fishing, they do tell tall stories.

MJ: Um-hm.

JY: Human nature is human nature. But it has opened a lot of doors for me because I do know in the real estate business, when I do go see a client—they used to be a client of mine or student—when I announce myself, they'll ask me to come right in. And rather than talk business, they would tell me their problems, you know. Well, like I said, it does help. I remember one time, I think it was Judge Owens—I didn't know he was judge at that time—he was having a hard time, and I start cussing him out. I said, "That's not the way to do it." And later someone told me, "Kim, do you know who you're talking to?" I said, "No, I don't." He said, "That's a judge." I said, "Oh, my god." (chuckles)

MJ: (laughs) It didn't bother him any, did it?

JY: No.

MJ: Well, you to call it quits for tonight?

JY: Well, if have no other questions? I would be glad to continue this.

MJ: Well, let's save it for another time.

JY: I'd be glad to.

MJ: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW