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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NARRATOR: KINICHI KIMBO YOSHITOMI

INTERVIEWER: Marilyn Jones

DATE: October 31, 1978

LOCATION: Anaheim, California

PROJECT: Japanese American

MJ: This is the third interview with Kinichi Kimbo Yoshitomi by Marilyn Jones for the California State University, Fullerton, Oral History Program Japanese American Project on October 31, 1978 at 7:30 p.m. Kim, there were still things that I wanted us to talk about. And one of those had to do with how you became the kind of person I see you being, a very unique individual in terms of what I perceive as being different from others of the Nisei generation, a very independent spirit, a very open, warm, generous kind of person. How can you think—or in what way do you think your personality developed, because you even spoke of it as early as early as elementary school that you were a very independent person.

KY: Well, I'm kind of flattered that you asked me that question, but I think you're prejudiced here, Marilyn, because you know me very well, more so than anyone else as a Japanese American. I think a lot of this can be attributed to many things, mostly people and places I've been to. When you asked me that question, one of the things that has stayed with me—when I was going to high school, I was smoking cigarettes, and I was in the bathroom. My mother said that she wanted to get in, I said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute." I had the windows open. With the towel, I was trying to get all the smoke out. And finally, when she did come, and I went out, why, she met me in the kitchen, and she asked me, "Are you smoking?" And it was so obvious that I said, "Well, there's no sense in lying about it," so I told her, "Yes, I was." And she asked me, "What are you smoking?" And I said, "Camels." And then she called me *bakatare*, which is one of the severest words they have in the language. "If you must smoke, why don't you smoke Chesterfield?" And I thought, Boy, this is great! And the fact that she was so understanding, I thought was a great thing.

MJ: She really was understanding.

KY: Yeah, she was. And for a lady from Japan, it was quite a different attitude to take because they are very close-minded, so to speak. The other thing was, I remember

when she was trying to talk to me about the bees and the birds. She was so embarrassed—speaking to me in Japanese, of course—finally, I stopped her and said, "Mom, you don't have to tell me a thing. We learned this in school." And she was so surprised that in the American school they did teach you this. And then, also, "You are getting to the age now, where you are becoming very conscious of girls, and you are running around quite a bit so the only thing I ask of you is simply this: that whatever you do, don't bring shame to the family." And I thought, Well, that's a lot of leeway, and the main thing is that I must always remember that, not to bring shame to the family. So, those are little things that contributed to my way of thinking. That it was up to the individual. Of course, we don't all think alike, fortunately. But, at the same time, I think I was more blessed because of the type of people that I, more or less, associated with. Then all through high school, I was going around with the older crowd, more so than my own age group. And they were so nice about teaching me etiquette. Things that in my group, why, I guess, was all kids stuff, so I did mature much quicker. They taught me how to dance, and things that I should know as I grew up. Then, of course, in those days we had to work at an early age because of the Depression, and I did learn quite a bit working for this Japanese store called Iwata. After I got out of high school, I meant to continue my education. I wanted to go to College of the Pacific because my first love was music, and that's what I wanted to do. But, of course, even during high school, I used to deliver hats, millenary, for a couple of old ladies that were very nice. I used to deliver hats all over San Francisco, hopping on cable cars and trying to balance about six hatboxes. So, it didn't leave me much time for sports either, because I did want to play, and I did play football for a little while, but I had to quit.

MJ: After high school?

KY: No, during high school, it was all during high school. I didn't have much time to play, and immediately after graduation, I went to go work for the store in Chinatown. And there, again, being the youngest member of the group, why, I had to learn from the older people. And a manager for that store happened to be a fellow who worked for my dad when he first came from Japan, so naturally, he took a liking to me. And, of course, there again, the only thing that I liked at that time was the big band music, sports, and, in San Francisco, like I mentioned before, basketball was our primary sport. Because of the weather, we couldn't be outside too often. It was always drizzling, foggy, or cold. Then to the experience I had when I was in Sacramento when I went to stay there with my friends. And having graduated from junior high school, well, of course, I tried to do houseboy work for about six months and found out that I just couldn't hack it.

MJ: Were these Japanese American friends?

KY: Yeah, these were older fellows that were members of the church that I went to.

MJ: Which was?

KY: The Baptist church. That was my first taste of religion, but I think I went there primarily because our Boy Scout headquarters was in the same church.

MJ: Was it primarily Japanese American Baptist then?

KY: Yes, that was, although the preacher was a lady—Caucasian—Miss Virginia Swanson. I think I had a crush on her at twelve years old. (chuckles) I looked up to her.

MJ: Good role model.

KY: Um-hm. So anyway, we were talking about what again?

MJ: Well, that you were in Sacramento and that you stayed with these friends and they must have had an influence on you—

KY: Yes. Yes, well, they wanted me to stay. I know this one fellow that was going to college there, and he said, "Well, why don't you bunk with me?" I did, but after six months, I felt more less that I was imposing, that I should get back with the family.

MJ: Because you weren't working then, at that time?

KY: Well, doing houseboy work, but that didn't pay anything. I think it was about $2.50 a week. That made it hard because I needed clothing and food.

MJ: Well, I don't want to interrupt, but I'm interested in the fact that you went to the Baptist church. Have you had any other religious affiliations in your earlier life?

KY: No, I think that was my first religious attempt because, like I said, with this Ms. Swanson—and all of us went to the Baptist church. [It was] my first taste of religion. Whereas on Sundays, we were more or less compelled to stay around the church all day. It was forbidden for us to go to a movie, very strict. But, of course, we had two Bible sessions during the week, one hour. Than eventually, I graduated into driving the church bus for the kids. When I moved to San Francisco, the first church I went to was the Reform church. But, there again, it was a totally different atmosphere because the people in that church were mostly college students—and I was just starting high school—and they would talk politics. Well, this is strange because, after being so immersed with the Baptist religion and the Bible and whatnot, I felt that it wasn't for me. Besides, I was out of my league with this older group. Then I went to the Christ Church, and there again, it was more social than religion. It was a place for the kids to get together and meet boys can meet girls, the usual thing. Then I went to a Methodist church, too, but, there again, I felt was the same thing. Maybe the earlier training I had kind of turned me off. As far a religion goes, it's an endless subject. I personally believe that no matter if it be Christian or Buddhist or whatever—like I said, we had some association with the Mormon people during evacuation. They were very good to us, and I like their philosophy. And, of course, I met a lot of

people in Cleveland that were Catholic. In the old days, I think in the cities you found mostly Christians among the American Japanese. Although, we had a very big Buddhist church in San Francisco, predominately, the Buddhists were strong in the country area. I think that much of this can be attributed to the fact that these people were farmers and they had come over from Japan and they retained that same philosophy. I don't know—because even here in Anaheim, I did go to a Baptist church, but what turned me off was the fact that many of the fellows that I met were, if I may use the expression, holier than thou on Sundays. During the week, why, they were a bunch of hypocrites and so dishonest that that kind of cooled me off. So, I personally feel, as far as religion goes, well, everyone should have a religion. And basically, I feel that it's all the same, if you believe in it, and I feel that to be considered a true Christian, you have to live it every day.

[00:11:17]

KY: And one thing I've always maintained since I was a child was to say my little prayer before I go to sleep.

MJ: Where did you learn that as a child?

KY: Well, from the Baptist church.

MJ: Oh, uh-huh.

KY: Yeah. And religion, another thing I've learned from people, is that they use it as a crutch. They turn to God in times of need, but, when things are going well, you forget it. Then also I read that more and more of the elderly generation is turning toward the crutch again because they're getting old, they are getting lonesome, and they need someone or some place to turn to. It's interesting to see how these youngsters, they, too, go in for different type of religion.

MJ: Isn't that interesting?

KY: Yes, it is. So, I think it's a good thing. And everything runs in cycles, anyway, because as you can well see in the days we had the beatniks and the flower child, and all that. Why, we had the Zoot Suit in our days. So, like anything else, it just runs in cycles. Even in sports it runs the same way. I know people that run bowling alleys, they said it runs for a period about ten years and they get bored because they are confined inside of a building and then they want to break loose. Then they go out for boating. Of course, people that have boats, after a few years, why, they get tired of that. People with swimming pools, at first it's a novelty. Then it wears out when the work comes in. So, like I say, everything seems to go in cycles.

MJ: What about your family's religion? Was your mother Christian?

KY: No, basically, I think that when they came over from Japan, she and her sister—well, the sister lived in Berkley. I know my aunt was a very confined Buddhist member, the whole family was. And I remember when I was a child, I was taken there one time, to the Buddhist church in Berkley, and I couldn't get over the fact that it was too depressing to me. That it was overly laden with gold gilded furniture, so to speak. Maybe it's not the furniture but the temple itself and all the incense burning, which I was allergic to. (chuckles)

MJ: No wonder you're not a Buddhist.

KY: And then, of course, the heavy gongs that they hit. I had a vivid imagination. I thought, Boy, spooks are going to come out. And it kind of turned me off. So, I felt in comparison—not to make this lightly—I just felt that the Christian church had more to offer because of the huge windowpane and the sun coming through, and I just felt that it was more open. And it was much simpler, I guess. Little things like that.

MJ: Maybe more inspirational.

KY: True.

MJ: A different atmosphere.

KY: It wasn't quite so heavy. Plus, the fact that this mumble jumble of the Japanese language, I couldn't understand anyway. And I guess you have to learn that chant. But there again, we didn't have any difficulty, the fact that our two respective families were of different religions. Of course, the only time when came into confrontation was when we played basketball, you know.

MJ: Oh.

KY: Christian against the Buddhist, but it was no big thing.

MJ: That was off the court.

KY: Right, right. So, I think it just happened. No, I think—I read a lot about religion, and I had a smattering of knowledge of the Jehovah Witness, the Christian Scientist. Basically, I think it's what the person wants. And I like the thought about the Christian Scientist where they do think that much of this is sort of your thinking. And I like that. Well, one time, too, I remember I was asked by a dear friend to deliver a eulogy. I had never done anything like this, so I asked this young lady that was working for me at the store—I knew that she and her sister were Christian Scientist, well, the whole family was. She said, "Kim, what I'd like for you to do is talk to a practitioner." I said, "Well, what is a practitioner?" Then she explained to me that it's just like a reverend or a pastor, so I made an appointment to see this lady. She was about eighty years old. And I said, "I need your help." I didn't know what to say. And she told me that—well, basically she said that to mourn for a person is a

very—what was the word she used? Not personal but let's see. Not personal. Not greedy, but in that vein. Because, as she mentioned, to have the person be with God, the person could be with a better friend, and I said, "Yeah, I see your point." And the fact that if you mourn for a person, it holds their spirits back, so let it be free, think good thoughts and let the person go. And then, too, as everyone grows up, they realize the same thing when the person passes away, they'll say, What a shame, the person passed away so young. They had so much to live for. They were such a nice person. But then again, I read this thing in a *Reader's Digest* that stayed with me, that when this man was dying, he told his wife, "Please tell my friends not to send me any flowers after I'm gone because I won't be able to smell it. Don't shed any tears for me because I can't see it, and don't say nice things about me because I won't be able to hear it." So, that moral of that story is that, if you love someone, you should show it now, not later, and I think it's a good thought. Because we are so busy in our daily lives that we don't think about people, except to think I have to see that person to give her a call, or him a call and you just don't get around to it. But I think you should allocate time if you really care for the person and show it to them. Because after they're gone, why, it's just too late, you know.

And I do read a lot. I think that getting that library card at the Anaheim Library was one of the greatest things that ever happened to me because, (chuckles) thanks to you, I think, there is so much to learn in life, and it just seems a shame that in a lifetime a person can't know everything. But, at the same time, it enriches your life because, when you read, you learn so much about different things. Whether it be in business or personal life, sports, or religion or politics or whatever. But basically, Marilyn, I think I like people. I'm fascinated by people because I feel that I can turn off on anyone that I don't care for, because I don't like anything unpleasant. And, if need be, I would just run away from it. Unless, I am the instigator of that situation, well then, I'll try to rectify it. But, it's interesting to see, when people ask me, "Kim, as a Japanese American, how do you feel?" Well, I don't feel any different than anyone else here, except that we just came from a different background. So, whether it be from Europe or Asia, I don't think it makes that much difference. Although, we make look different, our hair, our face, or whatever, thought wise, I think I'm as Americanized as anyone here in this country. And of course, we've gone through that discrimination, but we still have discrimination, even I think, among our own races. So, I don't think that could ever be erased. It's just a matter of understanding and having compassion for your fellow man. I don't know if, through the course of our lives—well, I made a lot of friends because I'm very patient, I like to listen, I'm very curious, and I feel like I could learn a lot from other people. Of course, our ethnic backgrounds are different. We're all brought up differently. And somewhere along the line, that might be a determent—at time, you know. Who knows? And then, the other time I think it's a plus sign. But, it's a one-on-one relationship. And, of course, when I talk to different people with different interests, why, I listen to them. And then, of course, I express my own feelings, too, and we manage to get our thoughts across and put it together.

[00:21:05]

MJ: Good rule.

KY: You have to. I know there's a lot of people that I know real close that are stubborn, but who is to say they are wrong? I don't have to like it.

MJ: You speak with no accent whatsoever, and yet, you indicated that when you were young, you spoke Japanese at home.

KY: Um-hm.

MJ: At what point did the English language become your first language?

KY: When we started going to elementary school. I think you pick this up through your teachers, your fellow students. I marvel at these people today that come from these foreign countries without any knowledge of English, and I wonder how our parents ever got by because they had no schooling whatsoever. But like any minority, they have the tendency to group together. In any city you have your Little Italy, Little Tokyo, Little Chinatown—

MJ: The security.

KY: The security of being with your own people, your custom, and your type of food. Well, even today, you'll find this is pretty predominate in most of the bigger cities.

MJ: Your mother and father must have spoken English?

KY: Well, my recollection is that their English was so bad, so poor, I think—well, let's see now. When I think about it, when they would try to do business, they would try to say a few basic words and then kind of laugh, you know, to get by.

MJ: Um-hm. Well, that's what most anyone does in a foreign language situation. You know that the person in that other language will help you out.

KY: Yes. Well, I think they did quite well after the kids went to school here, and they talked to their parents because like anything else, we were talking mostly English at home. So, I do know that these people from Japan, when they come over and they hear me talk, why, they kind of shake their head because—so, I asked my father once, "Really, if I went to Japan," I said, "Would I be accepted?" He said, "You will be, but you will stand out."

MJ: You have an American accent.

KY: Well, not only that, but he said the way we dress. We're more flashy. You know, they are more conservative in Japan.

MJ: Even now? Even today?

KY: Even now. Because if you note, when these people come from Japan, they all wear dark suits.

MJ: Yes.

KY: And another thing that just came to my mind, was when they used to come over in my day, they used to have a shoe that used to squeak, and they thought that was very stylish. And it used to drive me up the wall because when I had to walk with them, why that constant squeaking of the shoes was—oh, god, mind boggling.

MJ: (laughs)

KY: But there again, I'm seeing today that about, oh, I think the last percentage that I heard in San Francisco was that two out of three marriages were intermarriage. Whether they have some true, 100 percent Nisei, I don't know.

MJ: It will be interesting to watch.

KY: Yes.

MJ: For as long as we can.

KY: Right, right. Of course, we'll always have a trade relationship with Japan, and the people from Japan will be here. So I don't know about the Japanese Americans because I would say the second generation now, on average, is around sixty or so, sixty-plus. And, well the first generation, they're slowly dying away.

MJ: Another question that occurred to me was whether your mother and father had been educated in Japan? Or how much education they had?

KY: Well, they had high school, but I don't think English was one of the courses in those days. Because I believe they came over here in 1906, in that area.

MJ: Your mother did?

KY: Yeah—no, my dad.

MJ: Your father had been here before.

KY: My dad came in 1906.

MJ: Oh, okay.

KY: Then I don't know exactly when she came. I think she came here—well, I was born in—

MJ: You were born in 1916.

KY: Yeah, so it must have been a couple years after that.

MJ: Yeah.

KY: I never did ask her when I was conceived.

MJ: (laughs) You didn't go into that subject.

KY: No. That was a no-no.

MJ: Also something that you mentioned earlier in one of the interviews was that you were from a Samurai family. Was this your mother's family or your father's or both? DO you know?

KY: I think it was mostly on my mother's side. Yes, there was four categories in those days. And the fourth was the lowest—

MJ: Samurai was the highest—

KY: The highest, yes. I know she used to tell me that if I should ever get to the point where I'm going to start considering marriage, to make sure that I do have the proper girl and the proper background because if you marry the fourth category it was a no-no. But in today's society there's no such thing.

MJ: In modern Japan?

KY: Well, in modern Japan and then I think much of this—

MJ: Certainly not in this country.

KY: Not in this country, but I think in Hawaii the fourth class was predominately Japanese. So, who's to say. And, of course, I have—well, my sister May is two years younger than I am. She's in San Francisco. She just recently lost her husband who was in the dry cleaning business. My sister is a bookkeeper. And then, my other sister, Nori, is two years younger than she is, and she and her husband have a dry cleaning plant, and they're very well off. And my younger brother Tommy, he would be eight years my junior, and he is a manager of a dental lab. My wife and I are the only ones that don't have any children because of the high blood pressure that she's had. My sister May has two, boy and a girl. Her son Glenny is with the IRS, and daughter Joanne is married to a fellow from Hawaii who works for the California State Highway. And Nori has four kids, and they're all doing really well. My brother Tommy has three kids. It's hard when I go back out. I don't know whose kids is who.

MJ: Do you send them all Christmas presents?

KY: Not anymore, I can't afford it. But, my sister always kids with me when I get to a family get-together, they say, Don't you know you know your own nieces and nephews? Well, I don't see them every day cause I'm the only one in Southern California.

MJ: And you see them about once or twice a year?

KY: Yes. And one thing I notice is they're getting much taller than the second generation. I think this is due to diet, manly. Well, my parents, in their days, use to sit on the floor so their legs were very stalky and very strong. But, now the kids today, especially the third and fourth generation, why, they're long legged. They're beauties, they're good looking kids.

MJ: Do you all get together at New Years?

KY: We try to, yes, but my mother is eighty-five. She's a bit senile now.

MJ: Is she?

KY: Yes. That was the custom, too—

MJ: Did she work—excuse me for interrupting?

KY: No, I said it was the custom among the Japanese family that the eldest son has to look after the parents. I think it's a good thing, but it some cases, due to economics, it's very difficult. Because I know in my brother-in-law's case, the mother is very senile, but they didn't want to put her into a home, so the four brothers used to rotate one month at a time to keep her. And it puts a strain on a family. I think in that respect, it differs with the Caucasian society here. I don't know if they do that as much because that's one of the things—

[00:30:22]

MJ: Some do.

KY: Some do? Yeah, because I think it's kind of sad, too. I know four instances where the eldest daughter has never married to take care of the mother, and life has passed them by. They're in their sixties now. So, who is to say that that is the thing to do? But, of course, that is up to each family individually.

MJ: You said that your mother worked when you were in Sacramento. Did she work during your growing-up years to support her family?

KY: Yes, she did. When we were in Oakland, we were very well to do. She operated one of the four stores—

MJ: What kind of stores were they?

KY: Retail store. One was a nursery store.

MJ: One was a nursery store?

KY: Yeah. And I used to drive the truck—actually, it was a Model-T Ford. I was only ten years old, and I remember driving from Oakland all the way to Richmond. When I think about it, it's frightening, because, you know—well, traffic, in those days, is not as heavy as it is today.

MJ: Not much, but in that area it must have been considerable.

KY: Yeah, but there again, you just asked me about my mother. When they separated, she went to work for a cannery in Sacramento.

MJ: Del Monte?

KY: Del Monte. And she was peeling tomatoes. I would wait for her outside the cannery to walk her home, and her hands were bleeding because she never did any manual work.

MJ: That must have been awfully hard on her.

KY: Yes, I don't see how she did it. Because I think in those days, it was only about, what, twenty-five cents an hour? And to raise four of us kids? Then eventually she saved enough money to start a little Japanese restaurant in Sacramento, so she was a cook and a waitress. And then, when she went back to San Francisco, she was doing the same thing, and we would never see my mother until maybe two in the morning because that's the hours—

MJ: Um-hm.

KY: This is why I say we were left on our own to do our homework and more or less, do the things at home to make sure she didn't have to worry.

MJ: This kind of intrigues me because I think she must have been a very independent spirit also.

KY: I think she was; she had to be.

MJ: Maybe that's where you get some of—

KY: I think so, too.

MJ: You sort of inherited that.

KY: Um-hm.

MJ: It took a lot of courage for her to leave with four children.

KY: Especially when it was taboo—

MJ: Yes!

KY: —in those days in the Japanese society—

MJ: Um-hm.

KY: And that did give me a little complex for a while because, in trying to date, as I mentioned before, the parents of the girls would ask, "What does your dad do? What does your mother do?" And when I told them they lived in two different cities, they wanted to know what happen. So, I thought, if this is the kind of hassle I'm going to get into, then forget it. I didn't want it. But, I know she did go through a lot for us. Another thing that I remember, too, is that we had a Filipino friend that came over from the Philippines, and he couldn't speak any English. He had come to my mother to ask for a job. She hired him to do the kitchen work, washing the dishes, pots, and pans, and he slept in the storeroom. Eventually, he got to do pretty well as far as speaking the language is concerned. One day I saw him out in the street, in a Japanese town, selling newspaper. The next time I went out—one Sunday morning—to meet my friends. He had made up a little shoebox, and he was shining shoes. And then, through his efforts, he was able to buy a little cigar store. There again, I thought in this country we do have the opportunity that if you don't wish to stop, if you—well, if you don't start at the top and you start at the bottom, you can be anything you want. It's a matter of your own initiative and swallowing your pride.

MJ: And being thrifty.

KY: And thrifty. I give him a little of credit. So, when we evacuated, we told him, "Just watch the house." But, the first night that we had left, why, someone broke in and hit him over the head. They stripped everything out of the house including the linoleum on the floor, which was glued down. I couldn't believe it. I don't know what else happened to him because it's been quite a few years. Yeah, that brings me up to a thought that I just read the other day that said that when a person loses wealth, you lost nothing. When you've lost your health, you lost a little something. But, when you lose your self-respect, you lose everything. I think that's true in life today. But again, I look at some people; the all-mighty dollar is the god. They don't care how they get it. And it seems a shame that in this short life span we have on this earth

with our life, why, we can't do more for each other. Not that I'm a goody-goody, but that's just my thought.

MJ: Yeah. Well, why don't we pick-up some of the loose ends that I mentioned—thoughts that I've jotted down. As I listened to some of the other tapes—some of our other interviews. When you were basketball commissioner—did I get the right title?

KY: Um-hm.

MJ: Basketball commissioner?

KY: Yes.

MJ: That was when you were in high school. Was it all the team in San Francisco?

KY: Well, the Bay area.

MJ: Or in the Bay area that you organized and that's the way, with that experience, they probably picked you to be the receptionist and organizer at Tanforan.

KY: Um-hm.

MJ: Because of your experience with organizing groups of people.

KY: Well, athletics.

MJ: And athletic in particular. And then, at Topaz, you were activities director, which it included more than just athletics didn't it? Didn't you indicate—

KY: Well, we had a joint directorship with—well, I had a joint directorship with a man name Tak Matsmoto at Berkeley. He was on the board of directors with us with the Japanese American Athletic Union in the Bay region. Well, we branched out into social activates, organizing dance groups or craft groups.

MJ: Now, was this on your own or was there a Caucasian director, authority, or someone—

KY: Yes, there was. The War Relocation Authority had sent someone down, and the fellow that we had in Tanforan was a Mr. Thompson from the University of California, Berkley. Very nice fellow. And then, when we got to Topaz, we had a fellow by the name of Mr. Lamb. He was from Oregon. He was a social worker, and I know that he tried to impress on me that I should continue in that line of social worker. But, of course, when you're behind barbwire fence, you don't think about—

MJ: _____ (inaudible).

KY: So, we did the best we could.

MJ: Did you have a lot of difficulty making arrangements for your basketball games? Or did you have a lot of freedom? Did he have to open doors for you, or did he just say, "You go on and make your arrangements for the ballgames and the shows, so forth?

MJ: Well, he gave us a freehand. So, what we did is we got some of the leaders from different communities that were in camp, and we said, "Well, this is what we want to start." And just like being on the outside, you had to get organized. Of course, each member of their own community would naturally try to fight for their community for the best scheduling and home court advantage.

MJ: Um-hm. (chuckles)

JY: But nonetheless, things went very smoothly.

MJ: Well, that's another one of your assets, attributes, whatever, this leadership quality that you evidenced really early.

JY: Um-hm. Well, like I said, I was associated with the older groups growing-up, and I'm always interested—

MJ: Sometimes they dominate and they take over, and, even if you had the leadership capabilities, they would not have allowed you to express them or—the way I would see it.

JY: Well, I don't know.

MJ: But, you learned from them and used what you learned from them.

JY: Um-hm. Well, I've been blessed in that respect that so many nice people helped me out and made some lasting friendships. Well, it's been a good life, really. Every day I'm learning something through people I meet. It's very fascinating.

[00:40:09]

MJ: When you were in Cleveland, you went there as a volunteer worker in order to leave Topaz.

JY: Well, we were told that, once we were screened by the FBI, we were free to go anyplace—

MJ: Oh, so you weren't assigned to Cleveland?

JY: No, I was told—I was recovering from my appendicitis, and I thought that I had done that I had done enough for the Japanese people. It was about time I start thinking

about myself and the future, and one of my friends said there's a job opening in Cleveland working in a plastic factory making parts for the Navy. And they said, We will give you $100 plus the transportation fare. So, we thought, Well, let's go out and see what's in the outside world.

MJ: Yeah.

JY: Well, when we were put in camp, I think we were making, in camp, $80 a month, which was pretty good money in those days. On our way to Cleveland, we found out we were going to make seventy cents an hour. Well, we thought we struck gold. (chuckles)

MJ: Well, you didn't really, in Cleveland, have any connection any longer with the WRA?

JY: Well, they did have these places where we had to go. The War Relocation Authority did have these friendship houses were we gathered. Much of these, I think, were run by not the Mormons but another religious group.

MJ: Friends? Quakers?

JY: Yes, right, the Quakers. Well, we used to get together every Sunday. Of course, since we are brought up on rice, why, we used to go to Chinatown and swarm. At first the Chinese didn't like us, but one day they realized the economic advantages, why, they welcomed us with open arms.

MJ: Well, did you have a feeling that you—and was it imposed on you—that you go to the friendship house? Or did the WRA keep tabs on you, or did you have any feeling of probation or having to check in?

JY: No, no. I think what they were doing is looking after our welfare. They were settled there in settlement houses, and they tried to tell us what would be the better way to win community acceptance. Of course, like I've mentioned before, too, when they told us to leave the hotel, to walk in pairs only—not in groups of ten—in intervals of five to ten minutes. But, we are going to end up in the same residence _____ (inaudible).

MJ: (chuckles)

JY: And they were Chinese people there, so it was very difficult for the average person to tell the difference.

MJ: Did they help you get located when you went to Cleveland?

JY: Yes, they did, and we would enquire before our wives came out whether there was a place that we could stay. And, of course, there was a critical shortage of housing so

many of the ladies—or wives—they worked as a maid or cook or whatever, to help in housing and the husband would go out to work.

MJ: They lived in?

JY: Yeah, well, we lived in with the wives. And we would be working the factory. And, of course, we started the Japanese grocery store there.

MJ: Then how about your experience in New York? You went to New York—

JY: Well, this friend of mine from Los Angeles came by one day and said, "Why don't you come to New York and work for me raising bean sprouts." And I thought, Sure, why not? I've always wanted to—well, I've been to New York a couple of times. So, we went to stay with him in Brooklyn, and then we also found an apartment later.

MJ: When you say we, was this you and your wife—

JY: Yes.

MJ: Or friend?

JY: No, my wife and I. But, my wife had very high blood pressure, and one day she was going to work—and I think in the subway they had a short, explosion with these railings or what not. And she did at Rockefeller Center, but when she came home that night, she told me she wasn't feeling good. She went into a coma so I had to take her to the hospital. And after that, well, we decided to come back to Cleveland with some friends. Of course, we had a medical bill, too, so I thought that I should pay the family off and came back.

MJ: So then, your association with the bean sprout business was in New York?

JY: Yes.

MJ: But then, you went to Colorado as part of that with that man's company?

JY: Right, yes.

MJ: With that business.

JY: Yeah, because she felt that—well, he had a contract with one of the canneries at Grand Junction, so this other fellow named Gerald Kamiatsu, dear friend, his wife and kids were living in Chicago so we traveled from New York to Chicago on Christmas Eve. We got into a wreck when we hit an Army convoy.

MJ: Was that during the Korean War?

JY: No, no.

MJ: This was still—

JY: Second World War.

MJ: So, that was in about 19—

JY: Forty-five. Just about before—yeah, before V-J Day.

MJ: How long were you in Cleveland?

JY: Eleven years.

MJ: From—

JY: Forty—well, let's see, we went to Cleveland in '44

MJ: Forty-four.

JY: Yeah. Yeah, that's right because we came back in '55, one year off in New York, in-between. We were in New York in 1950.

MJ: And when were you in Grand Junction?

JY: Grand Junction was '45.

MJ: Oh, okay. And then you went back to Cleveland?

JY: Yes. Well, I went to San Francisco from there because we were so close to visit the family.

MJ: That was just for the visit then?

JY: Yes. And we stayed there one month and we went back to Cleveland. That's where we started the Japanese grocery store.

MJ: Oh, okay, that was after the bean sprout business.

JY: Right.

MJ: So, it was during the Second World War. And that is when the shortage of tin—

JY: Right. Yeah, they felt that we should use bottles, but we learned that once the sunlight hits the bean sprout, why, it turns yellow and green, and it didn't look appetizing on the shelf. So, we had to quit it. Incidentally, this friend of mine that

invited me to New York, is still in New York. And I understand he is a very wealthy man; he went into a partnership with a Chinese firm that controlled the bean sprout business for all of New York. Yeah, very interesting. Before the war, he used to be a no-gooder, so to speak, but now he's very successful.

MJ: When you said—this is really jumping around.

JY: That's quite all right.

MJ: When you told about the Matsuokas going back to Japan—

JY: Um-hm.

MJ: Was that before the outbreak of the war?

JY: Yes.

MJ: Were they, by chance, going back on a vacation or were they definitely going back to stay.

JY: They were retiring.

MJ: They were retiring?

JY: Yes.

MJ: Did they sell their business then?

JY: Yes, to the four boys that were at the shop. The three boys.

MJ: Did they go back on a Japanese ship or an American ship? Because when you talked about them holding the ship—

JY: It was a Japanese ship.

MJ: —I was wondering whether it would have been a Japanese ship.

JY: Well, it was a NYK Line, and they were the biggest. I think they filled half of the boat themselves with the merchandise.

MJ: (laughs)

JY: This was a very astute person. But, of course, who is to say that their feelings were—I think—this is just my opinion—he had some inkling that there was going to be a war. Or I felt why would he take all these things like typewriters and garbage cans and whatnot. Some fellow did make a study as to what was in short supply during

World War One—very sharp man—and I know that a lot of fellows made money on the fact that they knew certain things were going to be short. Typewriters, tin cans, and rubber tires and whatnot.

MJ: How old were they at that time? Because they retired so were they—

JY: I think they were in their sixties, and I think he lived to be ninety.

MJ: Oh, goodness.

JY: Because I know when the war ended, and we found out that his son had come over to work for Sprekles in Honolulu, came by told us about the parents that they were in need of a lot of things, so we used get together and sent things over to them.

MJ: Then they didn't retain their wealth?

JY: No, I understand that once they landed in Japan, everything that they had was confiscated because maybe they thought it was war mongering or whatever; or profiteers or whatever.

MJ: That would be sad.

[00:50:00]

JY: But, in wartime so many things does happen that doesn't make sense.

MJ: Um-hm. When you were teaching golf in Cleveland, when you were teaching the paraplegics and the wounded that you mentioned, was that for USO or YMCA?

JY: I don't know, I think my boss volunteered the service to the _____ (inaudible) Hospital there. That is part of their rehabilitation. It was a good challenge. It was quite an undertaking. On the other hand, we should have the whole Cleveland police force there gathering for golf. But, it was a nice experience. The people were very nice; he was a Scotsman. We still write to each other.

MJ: Do you?

JY: Yes, once a year we write, keep track of what we're doing.

MJ: Have you ever thought about traveling back east to see the friends that you had are still there?

JY: Yes, I'd like to, but, with the situation that I have at home, it's hard to get away. And I've never left the States. Like I said before, the furthest I've been from the mainland is Catalina. I do have a lot of friends in Hawaii, I have a lot of friends in Japan and they asked me to visit them. But, personally, if I had a choice, the first place I'd head

for is Tahiti where there's no people, (chuckles) because in my work, I'm talking to people all day long, and I'd like to connect with nature, have a little piece and quiet, put your thoughts together.

MJ: Everybody needs to do that.

JY: Um-hm. Well, I must admit, Marilyn, I think at this stage in my life, I have the best time really.

MJ: Do you?

JY: Yes, because I think I've been through that stage to prove myself—prove myself to other people. I don't need that anymore. I take comfort in whatever I'm doing; reading, writing, or traveling in my car or whatever. And there's no restriction anymore. I don't have to account to anyone. (chuckles) The more I learn about life is that society says that you can do this and you can't do that. Well, I've learned that I'm society, too.

MJ: Exactly.

JY: I don't have to listen to anybody. Of course, I won't break the law but—(chuckles)

MJ: But, some people never learn that. No, it's unfortunate that they have a very closed mind that they go to work, come home, watch TV, get up and go to work, and that is the extent of their life. It's so pathetic cause there is so much to learn about life. There is so many people to talk to. Of course, there's a lot of flakes, too, but you don't have to be friends with them. But, you learn from experience. I guess, if you look for bad, you'll find it. At the same time, you look for good, you'll find it. So, why make it hard on yourself?

MJ: Why look for the bad?

JY: Yes, it's so tiresome.

MJ: Absolutely.

JY: It takes a lot out of you. So, I like people with a sense of humor. That keeps everything light.

MJ: And yet, you have a lot of depth to you. You have feelings, and you have thoughts that I think are more profound than you would indicate. As you say, you want to keep everything light.

JY: Well, yes. I would admit that. I don't want to go that deep. I feel it, yeah, I feel it. And I'll always be compassionate to people I like, but I don't have to wear it on my sleeve. I want every day to be a little light because so many people are dying from

heart attacks and strokes and stress. Well, why go after that if you don't need it. So, like I said, I'm walking with my neighbor every night, or trying to. Trying to get her out, and take her on a four mile walk. It's great. I know she commented last night, "Gee, look everyone's asleep already." I said, "They're sensible. At 12:30 they should be asleep!"

MJ: Did you go walking anyway?

JY: We did. I've trying to get her out early, but she said she got to watch all her programs.

MJ: She ought to be walking *instead* of.

JY: Um-hm. But she's nice. Very nice person.

MJ: Well, I don't want to discontinue talking unless there's something that you really want to add yet, Kim.

JY: Well, I can't think of anything tonight, Marilyn, really because, ah, I've had a pretty busy schedule. Then too, it's Halloween, remember?

MJ: Oh, goodness, yes. Fortunately, we missed the trick or treaters.

KY: So, anyway, I'd like to continue this.

MJ: All right. There could be some other things that we could—

KY: Yes, it would be fun.

MJ: Okay—

KY: Enjoy.

KY: Well, stop for tonight.

END OF INTERVIEW