

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

On November 22, 1978

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NARRATOR: KINICHI KIMBO YOSHITOMI

INTERVIEWER: Marilyn Jones

DATE: November 22, 1978

LOCATION: Anaheim, California

PROJECT: Japanese American

MJ: This is another interview with Kinichi Kimbo Yoshitomi by Marilyn Jones for the California State University, Fullerton, oral history interviewing class, Japanese American Project, on November 22, 1978 at 7:15 p.m. Kim, let's talk some about the feelings about the evacuation of the Japanese Americans as a result of the war. You were expressing some of your opinions and thought maybe others had other ideas. What were some of the opinions you wanted to—

KY: Since I talk to you last time, I just thought about what would have happened if we were not evacuated and stayed in San Francisco. Feelings were running quite high at that time, and, of course, there's a lot of discrimination. In some sense, I feel as though, due to evacuation, it opened a lot of avenues for us to get into various types of employment: professional fields, scientific fields, and also in the teaching field. Because I do know, speaking for myself, that if I'd stayed in San Francisco, I would have still been working in Chinatown as a sales clerk, and I don't know if we would have had a chance to get into some other fields. I do know since we were evacuated, many of the fellas had established themselves back east, were doing very well, becoming professionals in colleges and universities, starting their own businesses. And like myself, I don't think I would have had the chance to become a golf professional because I was the first Japanese American in the United States to be accepted in this field. And despite the five-year apprenticeship and the endorsement by five PGA professionals, I was turned down by the PGA for the simple reason in this constitution they had a clause stating that a non-Caucasian could not become a member. But since then, this has been deleted, and me and the boys have become accepted, as you can see in the sport pages.

MJ: *And women.*

KY: And women, that's true. So, the boys were quite upset at the time because one of the fellas that endorsed my application, a fellow named by Luke Ross who was the

personal caddy to Bobby Jones, he thought I was very well qualified. So, I told him, "Don't worry about it," that I could still make a living. So, I decided to come back to California, and I started to teach in the city of Anaheim. But, of course, at that time, Disneyland was not open yet so it was sort of a starvation period. Also, when I did speak to the membership of the Southern California Japanese Golf Association, which at that time in 1955, had a total of approximately nine hundred members, I had explained to them that we were now getting into the period where we should have our own country club because we had so many affluent Japanese Americans, but they felt that they still couldn't tackle it. In talking to a couple of the attorneys in L.A., Japanese American attorneys, we made a bid for the Inglewood Country Club, which at that time was about a million dollars, and we were trying to negotiate to a point where we could get it for \$750,000. We couldn't swing it. Some church group bought it, I think, and then they sold it again a few years later for five million dollars for an apartment complex.

MJ: Good grief.

KY: Then I met a lady broker. I asked her if she could help us, and she said yes. And she had mentioned a couple of the more exclusive country clubs. I said, "Well, don't bother because I don't think they can ever be bought." And I always remember her saying that, "Young man, everything and anything in California is for sale for a price, even another man's wife." (chuckles) And I cracked-up. But anyway, I feel, too, that despite the fact that I was down here and the publicity I received in the papers, even the Japanese Americans felt that I would not be accepted because of the fact that I was a minority. However, the years have proven them wrong because I was accepted. I think that if a person had the ability, you can be accepted anywhere. Of course, a lot of places have a closed mind. I think, too, it's fear in their part that perhaps their jobs will be taken over. I think this is true in our corporate set-up where all the executives are worrying about what's going to happen next. It's not a very healthy situation. The other thing too, I think that even before the war, in San Francisco, some of the fellas I knew that had masters from Cal and Stanford, their job opportunities were very limited. And I remember a Dr. Fred Koba said that I should try to get into the stock market and mark up those prices on the board. I don't know what you call them, but he felt that that is something that I wouldn't be discriminated against. However, when I made an application, I was not accepted. And having a sort of wanderlust nature, I even tried to apply for a seaman as a cabin boy job to tour Tahiti and these romantic places, but we were never accepted because we didn't have the experience.

MJ: Did you have to go into the seaman's union or something?

KY: Yeah, we tried to apply for it.

MJ: You think it's because the union had a closed shop?

- JY: I don't think that so much as the fact that we were not experienced. So, I can accept that, because we used to line-up the union hall at three in the morning and visualize a long, long trip, but it never came through.
- MJ: (laughs)
- JY: But nevertheless, Marilyn, I do think there are things to be said about this evacuation, because I don't think we have the discrimination as severe back east as we did in California. And much of this I think is due to the fact that it was economics because maybe the better pieces of properties were farmed by Japanese. And I was told later that many of the envious farmers, that they converted the—well, they wanted the farms so this was one way to do it.
- MJ: That was a part of it.
- JY: Yeah. But, at the same time, I could see where people do get carried away with war hysterics. And recently, I was watching this TV series called *Pearl* and sort of relived the tension that we went through because I know the people in Hawaii went through it because they were right there.
- MJ: I wondered how that affected you?
- JY: Yeah, I watched it, and I thought that it was very well presented. I also watched *Tora! Tora! Tora!*, which gave you both versions. But, at the same time, I don't know whether—well, I think it's authentic. But, of course, for an audience they do try to make it more exciting so maybe some of the facts could be bent. On our part, when Pearl Harbor was bombed, I just couldn't believe it. And then, not being Japanese in the sense of being a native Japanese, my thinking was strictly in the Caucasian American way.
- MJ: Did you have any fear?
- JY: No, it's just that I thought the whole thing was crazy. The fact that we were born and raised here—I was in my early twenties, but I think the older boys felt that the smartest thing to do was not to antagonize the population and go with whatever the government had stated because they felt that that way, we would be cooperating with the government—
- MJ: And it would prove your loyalty.
- JY: Yes, in that sense at that time. But, at the present time with the third and fourth generation, they felt that, that was a big mistake, because we do have a saying that it's best to be humble, but that doesn't go anymore. They're all—
- MJ: No.

JY: No, they felt that you if stand up for your rights, you're going to be stepped on

MJ: Everybody's standing up for their rights now.

JY: True but I feel like what we have accomplished by cooperating, and proving our loyalty, and, at the same time, our ability to be more readily accepted than any other minority races.

[00:10:00]

MJ: Probably one of the reasons there was greater acceptance back east, too, is that there wasn't a history of discrimination against the Asians that there was in California.

JY: Frankly, I think it's because there were hardly any Orientals back east. There were quite a few Chinese. And when I think about the Chinese coming over here not knowing the language and starting restaurants and laundries in the remotest part of the United States, I'm simply amazed. Because I understand they went down to Georgia and Arkansas, and they just opened up.

MJ: And with very little money.

JY: It was all backbreaking because I know they used to iron these clothes strictly with a flat iron, and you had to heat with a fire. Well, it all came about now where their kids are going to college and have become real professionals.

MJ: Well, many of the Japanese did the same.

JY: Yes, they did.

MJ: Or do you think as much—they don't disperse as widely.

JY: No, I think they stayed mostly on the coast. But, the Chinese, I mean, I think they are more adventuresome. And I think by nature they are that type because—well, when you think about Vegas or Reno, the modern Chinese that go to gamble—by nature, I think, they are gamblers. I think the Japanese are a little bit more conservative. But, it's really interesting to see how the various types of people have come along in the United States as a melting pot and how well they've done, really. But people are people, and, in any race, you might find a few bad eggs. That's to be expected.

MJ: How do you feel about the retaining of cultural traditions instead of just completely dispersing into a different kind of culture and giving up all of your traditions? How do you feel about retaining some of your heritage in sense of tradition and customs?

JY: Well, I'll buy some of that, Marilyn, because I think beauty is always admired, and I like the philosophy of simplicity. The thing that stays on my mind—I read an article one time in the *Readers Digest* that the Emperor of Japan looked over this vast field

of chrysanthemums and proceeded to chop every one down but one. And he admired it, and he said in this way it was lost when you have a whole field of it. The expression that he used is *shibui*, which is simplicity, and it speaks well for itself when you look at things in that manner.

MJ: Um-hm.

JY: But, of course, some of their philosophies I don't go for because, like I think I explained to you in other chapter, to be humble was to accept a way of life. But, I thought it was rather hypocritical, at the same time, to say that your food tastes terrible. "I don't got much to serve you," when you have a whole table. I've often thought that what if someone did say to my mother, "Yeah, it is terrible." Or, "It's not enough."

MJ: It would hurt her feelings.

JY: Oh, she would have died.

MJ: She would have been crushed.

JY: This is why I say I like the American, well, the way we do we it here when you say, "Here's the food. Just jump in and have some. It's great."

MJ: If people appreciate it, they will express their appreciation.

JY: That's right.

MJ: If they don't like it, they'll keep quiet. Hopefully!

JY: Absolutely, if they're tactful. (chuckles)

MJ: Well, are there traditional holidays and festivals that are developing or that perhaps are just continuing both in Los Angeles and San Francisco that you know of that are promoting evaluation of the culture and the traditions?

JY: Well, I think this is mostly true of the Japanese people here from Japan directly, because if you take note, the major Japanese corporations that are here, it seems like every time I turn around, they are closed for some kind of a holiday or festival. I think the Nisei or Sansei here don't observe these as much, except for the Buddhist church when they had their Bon Odori or things of that nature. There again, it's a festival—a carnival effect—and it's to raise money for the church, but I don't think we are going into it as deep as they have in Japan. We have enough to do right here, actually.

MJ: What was the festival in Los Angeles not too long ago?

JY: Oh, that's the Nisei Week, and that is to promote the merchants, promote beauty contests, promote flower arrangements, Kendo, Judo, and things of that nature.

MJ: It's more of a business promotion—

JY: I think it's a commercial development, yes. We have big dances and talent shows, and I always look forward to it. And I think it's a nice way to keep the community close. It's just like in Anaheim, we used to have—well, we still have Halloween, but it's not as exciting as it used to be when I first arrived. I know at that time, the Anaheim High School was *the* high school, and the whole community helped them out. We got to know each other. So, I'm seeing the same thing happen now. This year, I started to go watch the Esperanza team, and the boy's mother, I've known for several years, I've always thought she was a very well controlled lady, but at the game, well, she's acting like a maniac. (chuckles)

MJ: (laughs) Lost control.

KY: Oh, yes. She was not a sports fan, but now she appreciates that her son is a very good ball player. It's very interesting to watch. Well, typically to a lot of these kids today—well, they have the opportunity to learn so many sports like baseball, basketball, the funding is much easier than in our days. We had to really stretch to even get equipment. So, like, in starting the basketball league here for the Orange County Japanese American, I even went to Voit Rubber, and they said they would give us all we want free, if it was blemished balls. Things like this were not possible in our days. Of course, living isn't as expensive as it is today. I mean, you think about these kids buying ski outfits running into the hundreds of dollars, well, that was unheard of. Because we were talking the other day about the old days when we were growing up where milk was eight cents a quart. I'm dating myself. Of course, even the movies and watching Charlie Chaplin was like five cents. Well, I think comparatively speaking, we are paying—even though we do earn more money, so I think it all evens-out. But, I know some of the persons that are frugal, why, with this high income, they're sure putting a lot away.

MJ: It's true.

JY: Say the ones putting away \$2 a week, compared to say \$500 a week, well, that's a big difference.

MJ: Yeah, inflation hasn't grown that much.

JY: No, when I think—you know, someone did tell me at the time when war broke out, we were discussing this because we were thinking about coming back to our business in San Francisco. He said, "Generally, wars do last three years." And, at that time, as I explained, we went around Chinatown trying to buy all the silk we could get a hold of, bolts of silk, and storing them. And we even put the price double for what we were retailing it for, but in six months it was all sold out. There again you never

know as far as what is to be expected because I think now silk is coming back again—

MJ: Yes, it is.

JY: Because during wartime, nylon came into production.

MJ: It killed the silk market.

JY: It did. So, they told me, “If it lasts three years and the war is over, the American people, as a rule, are a forgiving people. They easily forget, and then they are on to the next thing.” I think that if you look back and reflect on First World War, where the Germans took such a beating, I think it was in Pennsylvania that they were stoned—

MJ: Uh-huh, yes.

JY: Whatever and we were in the same position. And I knew the Chinese people were so elated when war broke out because they would come by our stores and spat on the windows—

[00:20:00]

MJ: They’d been the victims for so many years prior to that.

JY: They’d cut our windows with diamonds, you know. It was terrible. But then, the younger kids, why, I don’t think they held that hatred, so we used to go to dances and date together. Of course, if our parents found out, why, they would frown on the fact that we were mingling with the Chinese or the Koreans, and the Koreans were, I think, the most abused cause they were looked down as fourth class citizens.

MJ: By everybody.

JY: By everybody. At that time, Japan ruled over Korea. So, I do know that in my sister-in-law’s case, her husband was in the Japanese Army, and from Manchuria, he went to Korea. When Japan surrendered, they all had to march to the boats, and the Korean people just lined-up and threw everything at them. Even the fact that he was sick, because all these years of hatred, of being subjugated, I said I think they just came to forward and used their opportunity to express themselves. So, it’s just ashamed that in this world that we live in, that with all good heads and good minds, and things that we have, that these things do still happen.

MJ: You mentioned, too, that you had a Filipino working for you.

JY: Um-hm.

MJ: And that you left your house in his charge.

JY: Right.

MJ: What was the general feeling between the Japanese and Filipinos at that time?

JY: Well, that wasn't as bad because the Filipinos were dependent on the Japanese for much of their income, you know, field hands. And, well, if my memory serves me right, why, I do know they were good workers. Of course, they wanted a big car, so their characteristics was to have eight fellas chip in to buy a big Cadillac—or whatever it was in those days—and then rotate the use of the car.

MJ: (laughs)

JY: They lived in _____ (inaudible) or run-down places, but the car was a badge of distinction, sort of speak. And they used to dress very well because their figure is so light, so slender. They are not big, and they used to dress real sharp.

MJ: Were there any affluent Filipinos?

JY: Not at that time, no. There were some Koreans, I think, that was in the grocery business but other than that, no, it wasn't as big as it is today. And then, in looking over what's happening here, with the Vietnam people coming here to the United States, they are starting out the same way as our parents did. Say the boys are coming over first or a few families, and then bringing the rest of the families over here. And there again, they're forming their own neighborhood. Right now, we are having Garden Grove Boulevard in the city of Garden Grove being overtaken by the Korean people. Then, if you go down Olympic in Los Angeles, that's all Korean.

MJ: Korean or Vietnam?

JY: They're Korean. And then today, when I was coming back from Los Angeles, I noticed quite a few on Western Avenue. These were Vietnamese. The signs were Vietnam food and restaurants and TV places. Then Atlantic Avenue in L.A., that's being slowly taken over by people from Formosa and Taiwan. So, here again, history repeats itself. But, of course, they're in a better position now because financially they got a lot of money. They're buying hotels and motels and places of business.

MJ: Well, Vietnamese refugees don't have a great deal, do they? But, if they don't, they can go on welfare, I guess. Or can they?

KY: Well, I don't know. Since they're not American citizens, I think the United States government is making some concession.

MJ: They are helping.

KY: They're helping, but their way of life is to stick together, so I think they are pulling their resources together to get something started. I don't think they are asking for handouts. If they can, they would want to go to work. And since they can speak French fairly well, and English, too, why, gets a head start as far as I think the Japanese people are concerned—or the Chinese. But, I'd like to see what's going to happen in the next hundred years. It should be very interesting.

MJ: You were speaking about Halloween festivals in Anaheim and all. Let's talk for a minute about Anaheim's downtown development, and your ideas about whether that's something that is going to work and whether it should have happened and whether it's going to be successful or what's going to happen to this redevelopment of Anaheim.

JY: Well, I think it's needed. It can't deteriorate because it's an eyesore. Of course, the most difficult thing about downtown Anaheim is it has so many absentee owners, and it's hard to get them together. This is true in Pomona. Uh, the other place I saw was Riverside. All the downtown areas are slowly deteriorating because the people are moving to the suburbs: newer homes, newer shopping centers, more convenient, parking is more accessible, so they do have to do something about it. But, I think the trend is land is so precious and so scarce now in Orange County, it eventually will come back towards the downtown area. I think this is true of even Los Angeles that this is happening.

MJ: It is happening.

JY: Yes. And San Francisco is a classic example, too. Many people have known San Francisco, but now they feel San Francisco will always be San Francisco and are buying into these older sections, renovating, tearing them down.

MJ: Downtown San Francisco hasn't been as blighted, though, as Downtown L.A. or Anaheim has it?

JY: Well, San Francisco is limited in space. It's not as spread out as Los Angeles, so they have to go up. You know, you can't go horizontally like L.A. can. I remember coming down here for the first time in my life, why, people said, "Let's go eat." We get in the car and would be traveling in the car for two hours. I couldn't believe it.

MJ: (laughs)

JY: Because in San Francisco we just hop on the cable car or something, just go a place to eat and come back. So, I think things are changing. I remember attending a convention or conference in L.A. one day. They figured someday the space above the freeway is going to be used as well because that's air space, wide open. They're talking about restaurants over overpasses and having ample parking. Who knows. But, I think it's slowly come to pass because with more and more people, we just have to do something about it. The other thing, too, is the factor of the coast where

you have an ocean view. We have so many miles of it in California, and that's it. So, that's going to be at a premium as well. And once that, well, let's say, Orange County to San Diego is saturated, well, they will have to go inland towards the desert.

MJ: They're even starting that in San Diego, sprawling out, I think.

JY: Yes.

MJ: Going inland.

JY: But, I think San Diego is hurting for water. That's why that has hurt a lot of development. I talk to a lot of Japanese farmers and say, "Why don't you go down there? The land is cheap." They say, There's no water, and that's been a problem. But I think Orange County, by all indication, shows one of the tops counties in the United States for the simple reason that it is well planned, mainly your Irvine company, and then Mission Viejo where they have about—(phone rings)

MJ: I'm going to stop the tape a minute. [recording paused] You were saying about the Mission Viejo area—

JY: Yes, in talking with the officials at Mission Viejo, and also at Irvine, Irvine has a seventy-five year program for master planning so it's not a hodge podge of development. It's well planned, and I think it's an excellent idea. Because like in most of our new areas—well, take for example, even Disneyland, it's not as well developed, which would be conducive to a Disneyland. You got all kinds of business there. I do know they didn't want any drinking places, alcohol places, but they got a lot of that there, too. So, I think it pays. And fortunately, Mission Viejo and Irvine are the only two places where they have control of their property.

[00:30:05]

MJ: Is there any property in Orange County that is not held by large developers or large landholders?

JY: You mean vacant land?

MJ: Yeah.

JY: Well, vacant land is controlled mostly by—well, I mean, the Japanese farmers do control quite a bit. As a classic example, we have Mr. Sakioka who is deemed to be the wealthiest Japanese in the whole United States, and he has approximately two hundred acres flanked by Newport Freeway and the South Coast Plaza along the San Diego Freeway. That's really choice property. And I know he has private property up in Oxnard. He has quite a bit in Fountain Valley. Which fortunately, these fellas can derive an income from the vacant property while progress works up to it. So, they're lucky.

MJ: Do they have close property, do you think?

JY: I don't think they have any close property, but I did talk to a Chinese syndicate that has some property in Half Moon Bay with three-and-a-half miles of ocean front, but there again, they were curtailed by the coastal commission. And in talking with one of the owners, they told me that the State of California is going to buy the ocean frontage for California use, I guess. And then, the inland property inside of Highway 1 can be sold eventually. Now, as I understand it from him, it's a group of people from Hawaii—it's a syndicate. They call it _____ (inaudible). There are 150 members in this one, actually. And they bought this on speculation. But, I do know when I met these fellas about eight years ago, they were hurting because the taxes were killing them, you know.

MJ: I bet.

JY: And still making payments. But, I think in due time, they'll come out smelling like a rose, I guess.

MJ: Yes, if they can hang on.

JY: And, of course, some of your bigger ranches are held by big people, say towards Paso Robles and Salinas Valley and all that. I think the bigger corporations from back east are coming in here, realizing that maybe one hundred years from now we are going to need all that property for more development. So who's to say? When we think about Orange County how open that was—when I came out in '55, there was so much land here. It's unbelievable that you can pick up these properties for say, \$1,000 dollars an acre. A lot of Japanese farmers bought theirs for around \$200 - \$500 dollars an acre, and eventually sold it for around \$50,000 an acre. And not taking the cash position, they traded for more land, so that's how they made their money. I know, in one instance, this fellow had forty acres in Venice, and he traded for a hundred acres in Huntington Beach to farm without taking the cash, hit oil. Then progress came up to his property so he traded for, say, four hundred acres elsewhere. But, I don't know if these boys are going to stay in farming. A lot of the younger generation feels that it's too much of a strain because of working day and night. It's backbreaking. I noticed some of the first generation ladies, well, they can't straighten-up any more. Through the years of toil, of raising strawberries, they got a permanent bend in their backs, you know? Like they're crippled. Because now with this affluent society, I guess these boys figure, well, might as well live it up and buy some fast cars and live luxuriously if you have the money. Why break your back?

MJ: The hard work isn't really the important—

JY: Well, then, a lot of these boys have left the farm and go into professional fields.

MJ: Or been educated.

JY: True. Yes. So, I think that—I know there's a program going on now, where they're trying to get Braceros back again, because they're the only ones that can work that hard for so long and for so little money.

MJ: Yeah.

JY: I don't know—well, I guess while there's always trade with the Far East, they will always have a Little Tokyo, Little Chinatown, or even Little Italy, because they can buy the food that they are accustomed to. I would say on my part that my diet is about 70 percent American food, 30 percent Japanese food.

MJ: I was amazed when you said when you went to Tanforan they served you food that you weren't used to, and what you wanted was rice and baloney.

JY: Yeah, or eggs.

MJ: Baloney meaning it's very American. (laughs)

JY: They thought that we could handle that, but ran into things like tripe that I never heard of. "What is tripe?" None of us knew. And heart and liver and things of that nature. So, the fellas that were in charge there, I guess, they were just taking the meat and black market the food sugar and whatever you can get your hands on. And I know we had a difficult time trying to get tea, as well because a lot of the old folks like tea, and it just so happened that we were able to get some, but I really didn't pay that much attention because there, we had it. But, at the same time, I know I went into camp with about \$50 cash, but they said, You won't need any money. That was in Tanforan, and when I left Tanforan to go to Topaz, I had \$100. And when I left Topaz to go out to Cleveland, I had \$200. Even if I was only making \$19 a month—since I was putting anywhere from twelve to sixteen hours a day, there was no place to spend the money. And, of course, we were only given \$2.50 in script to buy clothes from Montgomery Ward.

KY: So, we had some poker sessions in camp, too, where some of the guys really cleaned up; dice games, things like that.

MJ: Is that where you get some of your \$200? (laughs)

KY: No, I didn't have a chance to do that. So, it was amusing.

MJ: Kim, you mentioned starting a Japanese American basketball league in Orange County. When did you do that?

JY: Let's see, I joined the Suburban Optimist Club. When they learned I had experience in the basketball field, I said, "Well, I'll volunteer to get it going." I think at that time, I figured if we had four boys teams and one girls team, we would be doing good the first year. So, I went to see Mr. Ken Wine at the Anaheim School District, and he

said that I had to go through the recreation department. I think I talked to a fellow by the name of Trap—

MJ: Oh, Lloyd Trap?

JY: Yeah, Lloyd Trap, and he said, “Sure, there’s some gyms that are available at so much an hour,” especially on weekends when the school was closed. And surprisingly, we started with the eight to sixteen-year-old group. We broke it up into two years differences. And we ended-up with fifteen teams the first year, and four girls teams. And we scheduled games with the people of a Japanese American group in L.A., and I knew many of the fellas from here from the pre-war days that were basketball players. And then, the second years, I think it jumped from fifteen to twenty-five teams, and I was having an awful time trying to get a gym because courts were very hard to find. A lot of these janitors didn’t want to work on weekends, to open-up the gym and close it up. In San Francisco, we used to use Kezar Stadium quite a bit. We would bribe the guys with whiskey or something on Sundays to come out and open up the place. Then in talking with the boys in L.A., they had, oh, I don’t know, maybe ninety teams in the greater Los Angeles area, and they said maybe the Chinese and Korean families were asking Japanese kids to see if the kids could join the group because they didn’t have the time to organize or even be bothered. You know.

MJ: Um-hm.

JY: But, they felt that no, they had best do what they can with the Japanese American group if—well, if they were mixed marriages, well, they would except it. But they felt—

MJ: They anticipated that.

[00:40:00]

JY: They felt that why should we do all the work and let them dump their kids on us, and let us handle all headache because we had to worry about insurance if they got injured. I think now, too, that in watching these kids today in various types of athletics, ah, they’re getting bigger. But, as far as college level is concerned, I don’t hear of too many Japanese kids playing college football or basketball because they just don’t have the height just yet.

MJ: How about volleyball?

JY: Volleyball? Maybe you would find one on a team if you’re lucky.

MJ: Cause they’re pretty tall, too.

JY: Yes, they are. But, I think the only thing—well, as you can see on the pro-golf tour there a few Japanese coming out of Japan. They're not very big, but still they're very skillful.

MJ: Ben Hogan wasn't very big.

JY: No, he wasn't, but that's a different era.

MJ: That's true.

JY: Because right now I think you'll find a lot of kids playing pro-golf are from good families, affluent families where they belong to country clubs where they could practice, because that's what it takes, a lot of practice. Well, even the blacks; they are getting into it on their own, too.

MJ: Into golf.

JY: Into golf, because, when I first came back from Ohio and played at Western Golf Course, I was so surprised to see so many blacks playing, and that's what it takes. Just like in swimming, eventually the blacks will get into that, too. But, through these many hundreds of years, there weren't any pools available to them. We were using YMCA pool in San Francisco or the Sutro Pool. We didn't have that kind of discrimination. Although when war did break out, I heard in Sacramento at McClatchy Pool they were discriminating against blacks and Orientals. And Mr. McClatchy was the owner of *The Sacramento Bee* at that time. And, when I think about it, too, I did go to high school in Sacramento for awhile, and I never felt that much discrimination. Maybe because of that age group that I was in? I was quite a young fellow. Once you get into high school, you seem to notice things more, and then you form your discrimination likes and dislikes, because your group tells you all the blacks are no good. The Chicanos are no good, the Koreans are no good, the Chinese are no good. You know, who's to say?

MJ: Well, it's a very cliquish time of your life. Young people at that age are forming their own little private cliques whether they're by race or religion or what?

JY: Well, I think there's safety in numbers because we never participated in integrated sports. We had our own Boy Scouts troops, all Japanese American, and our churches were all Japanese American. Well, except for the reverend, you know, the minister.

MJ: Um-hm.

JY: So, at that time it was very limited as to what we could do.

MJ: There wasn't an easy mix then.

JY: Well, I think we were more or less frightened because we didn't know what to expect, you know. Because in school, well, naturally, they still had gangs, and we were called all kinds of names at that time, too. Well, we just thought it was a part of life, and we accepted it. I can truthfully say that we didn't go through anything quite as severe as blacks. But, of course, we were called yellow perils, you know. Yellow skin. I look at my skin. I don't think it's that yellow.

MJ: (laughs)

JY: Who's to say?

MJ: Hardly at all. (chuckles)

JY: But now, even in the movie industry, why, there's quite a few Japanese boys in there.

MJ: Oh, yes.

JY: While making these war pictures, they had nothing but Filipinos and Chinese playing the Japanese parts.

MJ: Did you think that all of the Japanese who played the parts in *Pearl* the TV production, do you think they were all Japanese?

JY: Yes, that was on that part.

MJ: The recent one?

JY: Yes, because I think that was taken out of *Tora! Tora! Tora!*

MJ: A lot of the sequences were, yes.

JY: Right.

MJ: A lot of the battle scenes and everything.

JY: Anyway, it was so funny to hear these war pictures with John Wayne leading a troop against the so-called, Japanese Army, and watching these Filipinos fellas trying to speak Japanese.

MJ: (laughs)

JY: I guess they didn't realize. But technically, today, with the industries that Japan has taken over, and the way they have upgraded their merchandise—because as well you know, at that time when things came from Japan, well, it was second-grade goods.

MJ: For a long time.

- JY: For a long time, because even these little toys, when you tore off these furs off of these animals, you had a beer can inside, but now they got to a point where—
- MJ: They're leading the rest of the world.
- JY: Right.
- MJ: In many things. Do you think the Japanese will ever reach a point where they will feel the need to expand as they did before World War II?
- JY: No, because, you see, right now they have colonized places like Brazil. I think Brazil has the largest population of Japanese outside of Japan proper. And, of course, the Brazilian government has welcomed them because of their money—
- MJ: Money, industry—
- JY: Right.
- MJ: So, they don't have that need?
- JY: No. So, what they're doing—well, in these Japanese corporations, I noted that the fellas that are sent over here on a four year stint. Then, after their four years are over, they move to another part of the world where they learn their culture, their customs, and the way they do business, that is if they hope to go through corporate ladder, so that they are well versed, which is very smart. I used to complain about the wages that we were getting here and being told that if you were in Japan, why, that would be 4x as much. And my argument was I was not in Japan, I was living here, and I wanted more money.
- MJ: (laughs) You're doing the same type of work that somebody else was doing.
- JY: Well, that's what these fellas used to tell us, especially, if the owners were from Japan, and that used to get me so riled up that I couldn't see straight. Of course, now things have changed. You know, it's just the opposite, where the yen has got so strong and, it's comical—
- MJ: They're making more money.
- KY: Yeah. So, I told these friends of mine, I said, "You know, if you want to get up in this world, start a war with the United States and lose and be subsidized." And you can't go wrong, because the classic example would be Germany and Japan. But, I can't condemn the German people, they've always been industrial minded, and they are very good craftsmen.
- MJ: Probably one of the things that Japanese and Germans have in common is this strong discipline.

JY: Yes.

MJ: Based on different foundations, I think because I think the Japanese philosophies are different than the Germans philosophies.

JY: Well, I think Japanese people have pride in their country.

MJ: Um-hm.

JY: And, well, like I said—

MJ: The Germans did, too, during that period.

JY: Yeah, because like I said, when I was young my mother told me, “Just don’t bring shame to the family.” I think that, in a very minor scale, I think this is very true of the whole nation. Of course, I don’t think we could ever come to the point where they were blinded by their obedience to the emperor, because right now he’s a common man were he would walk on the street and be seen and heard on television.

MJ: He’s not considered divine anymore?

JY: No, because in the old days, you couldn’t set your eyes on him. You had to put your head to the floor and not even look up. And, in that sense, MacArthur did a great job. He really did. But, they still do take pride in their workmanship in whatever they make. I think the people here are too complacent. We don’t produce as much. They are always asking for higher wages.

MJ: The production has gone down, as the wages have gone up.

JY: Yeah, because I think if you look at the old oil industry, you can see the comparison in workmanship, what a difference there is, and they can’t say that now the Japanese are getting cheaper wages because they’re not. In fact, they’re well taken care of when they retire at the age of fifty. I think they had some problem on that extent because at fifty your brain power comes to work and a lot of these people are put out to the pasture. I think they are reconsidering that. And it’s always interesting to see how the various parts of the world cope with inflation, production, politics, and the countries that have always been suppressed, they are making very slow recovery, you know, to catch up. Because although they have natural resources, they don’t have the funds or the technology to do all these improvements. I don’t know what is going to happen in Mexico now with the finding of that vast field of oil, which they say will surpass Arabia.

[00:51:00]

MJ: Well, let's hope that it does something to raise the standard of living of the average Mexican national. They certainly have not had a great economic country for a long time.

JY: True. Well, I think it's still controlled by the wealthier families, and bribery is a way of life in Mexico because I heard that when, I think it was when Datsun first went to Mexico, they had to pay a million pesos under the table to get a permit to sell the cars. And they bragged openly at these buffets about how much money they made. And listening to my friends that are trying to get abalone shells from Mexico, they got ripped-off so many times, you know, putting up \$75,000, what we call earnest money up front to an attorney, and then going back the second time and finding out the attorney is longer in business there. It's a bad scene. They don't know who to trust.

MJ: They can't. There isn't anyone they can trust.

JY: No, but you never know what's going to happen.

MJ: Well, Africa is probably the emerging nation, or group of nations. They are going to go through long and varied struggles. It's going to be interesting to see what happens in this world the next hundred years.

JY: Oh, definitely. I wish I was around to see it.

MJ: Yeah, I do, too. It's the kind of thing that is probably going to develop so much faster than countries or things that have changed in the past few years, or you know, past history.

JY: Um-hm.

MJ: It is going to be developing so much faster.

JY: Um-hm. Well, China, too, because I know the Japanese people have made some trade agreement because you got that vast country with all that human population, which is more than I don't know how many percent of the world. And I think the coolie system eventually is going to be wiped-out. It will be replaced by machinery to actually take advantage of their natural resources.

MJ: China may become the new frontier.

JY: Absolutely, because at the same time—look down at Australia. Look what they've done. It's been like a new frontier there.

MJ: Absolutely.

JY: But, when you here about these other countries in there like Japan, China, and the United States, and Germany, they are all making inroads because they feel that unless

they do that, their future is very, very limited. It's like in the old days of colonization with England owning so many colonies, the Portuguese and all that. The French.

MJ: The Spanish.

JY: Yeah, right.

MJ: That era is long gone.

JY: And I think it's going to repeat itself. It seems that way. But here again, politics plays a big part in this. You want to do business with [us]? What are you going to do for us?

MJ: I just heard on the news tonight that China has gone into business with a private corporation for the very first time in their history selling oil for a private corporation. A Texas company, Texas oil company.

JY: Well, when I was in Los Angeles last month, I was talking to a fella in the coffee shop, and he said he was a retired oilman. And what he told me really opened my eyes because he said the United States has a lot of oil, but they are conserving it. They want to use all the oils of the world first; then they'll use the oil here. Now, they are talking maybe two, three hundred years ahead. And I was amazed. He said, "That's exactly what they're doing."

MJ: I've heard of things that would bear that out.

JY: Um-hm. And it's amazing that these people will think this far ahead. Well, I guess you have to if you expect the corporations to stay alive, especially if they are dealing oil, steel, or whatever.

MJ: Of course, I think they should be making better efforts to be creating better kinds of fuels and lubricants, because, eventually, it's known that those supplies will be depleted.

JY: Um-hm. Yesterday I met with a fellow from Texas, and he has oil that they have reclaimed. He told me that most of us when we get an oil change; they drain it down the sewers, into the rivers and all that. He felt that that was perfectly good oil, once you got the dirt out and sludge out, and it's a better quality of oil than the new oil. They showed the examples, and I told him, "Well, if he has a brochure, let me have it, and I'll try to make some contacts for larger corporations in Japan because they do rely on oil." But, in talking to one of the representatives, he said that in Japan they buy the top American oil. And since they are so affluent, they feel that why substitute.

MJ: When the other is just as good or maybe better.

JY: Um-hm.

MJ: Is it very expensive to reclaim it?

JY: No, no, no.

MJ: I wonder why it hasn't been—

JY: That's what I was thinking, too.

MJ: The reason it hasn't been, obviously, is because the oil companies have resisted that and have probably kept that particular part of the industry down in order to sell their new oil.

JY: I think that's very possible.

MJ: Oh, yeah.

JY: Who are we to say—

MJ: There getting into an era that supplies will be, eventually depleted. They are buying their oil up and tapping their own wells. Well, Kim, I'd like to go on talking for a long time. It's been great sharing this time with you, and you've been more than generous both with your time and with your thoughts and sharing your memories. I appreciate it.

JY: Oh, you're quite welcome. It was very enjoyable. If you think of something else, I'll be available.

MJ: All right.

JY: (chuckles)

MJ: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW