CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with AMY UNO ISHII

Interviewed

By

Betty E. Mitson

On July 9, 1973

OH 1342.1

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NARRATOR: AMY UNO ISHII

INTERVIEWER: Betty E. Mitson

DATE: July 9, 1973

LOCATION: Los Angeles, California

PROJECT: Japanese American

BM: This is an interview with Amy Uno Ishii by Betty E. Mitson for the California State University, Fullerton, Japanese American Project, at the CSUF campus, on July 9, 1973 at 11:20 A.M. Mrs. Ishii, where and when were you born?

AI: I was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, [redacted] 1920. I'm the fifth of ten children.

BM: Oh, right in the middle.

AI: Yes.

BM: Why were your parents in Salt Lake City at the time?

AI: Well, it's very difficult to explain why my parents moved from California to Salt Lake City. First, I have to explain the following: when my parents left Japan, their reason for immigrating to America, where they were married, where they started their family, and how I happened to be the fifth born in Salt Lake City.

BM: Would you mind going through that?

AI: I think we have to go way back.

BM: Okay.

AI: My father and mother were both born and raised in Japan. My father was born in Sendai, which, I believe is in northern Japan. My mother was born and raised in the town of Kanazawa. I've never been there, so I couldn't tell you where it is. Both my mother and father were raised in their home villages by American missionary schools.

My father was either number eight or nine of fourteen children. All the members of his family were very healthy, except my father. He was like the runt of the group—pleurisy, tuberculosis, you name it, he had it as a child. This was one of the reasons they

had him in a missionary school, so they could watch him very closely.

During the time my father was attending the missionary school, the Sweet Eagle brand of condensed milk was just being made by Borden Dairy in the United States. It was shipped to Japan through the missionaries to give to sickly children. My father always maintained that this is what saved his life and enabled him to grow to full manhood. Anyhow, he grew up.

Since my father and mother were raised in missionary schools, they had the advantage of hearing and learning some English language. Therefore, it gave them an interest in going to America.

BM: Were they at the school fulltime, or was it a day school?

AI: It was like a day school.

BM: Was it interdenominational?

AI: My father was in a fulltime boarding type of school and was being cared for by the missionaries. My mother commuted every day. I think my father's school was interdenominational because they had Catholics, Buddhists, and Protestants there.

My parents were raised as Christians. They met a lot of hardship and discrimination in Japan because of the fact that they were Christians. In those days, the 1800s, very few Japanese people were Christians; there were more Buddhists.

BM: Did your parents cite for you any examples of discrimination, or did they simply refer to it as a general condition?

AI: No, it wasn't just commented about in a general way. My father has written his life story for me. In it he brings out certain instances where he was chased and beaten by children in the neighborhood because he was a Christian or because he was from a Christian family. He also gives other very specific instances where he was discriminated against because he was Christian.

In those days, there were strong differences between people. Christians were known to be radicals—or what we call radicals and militants today—because Christianity came from the white man. It didn't originate in Japan or Asia, so it wasn't handed down from generation to generation as Buddhism had been.

My father's family became Christians way back. He was from a military family to begin with—falconers, if you know what a falconer is. My father's father—my grandfather—was a general in the Russo-Japanese War.

BM: Would falconer be a Samurai family that used falcons?

AI: Yes, exactly. At any rate, by the time my father's generation came along, the same thing happened to them that is happening now to us Nisei with our Sansei and Yonsei

children: a breaking apart of family traditions and splitting up of ideas; getting away from your cultural heritage and going on your own, more or less, and becoming very independent. This is what was happening in Japan at that time, in the late 1800s, when America opened its doors to the Asians, the Japanese specifically.

The Chinese came to this country years before the Japanese had arrived here. Of course, I think most people understand the reason why the Chinese were brought here from China: to be used as "cheap coolie labor." The same thing was true with the Japanese.

Many Japanese people were starting to come to America and giving up Japan as their home. I think this has a lot to do with the fact that Japan is such a small country with overpopulation—people had to expand and go someplace—at the time, one of the places open to them was America. My father explained to us that by 1906, when he came to America by way of Seattle, on the slow boat, quite a few Japanese had already arrived here and were pretty much settled in.

BM: Do you know what catapulted him into making the move? Do you know if he was recruited as part of a labor gang?

AI: Yes and no. he did work as part of a labor gang on the Great Northern Railway. But he was, more or less, encouraged to come to America by the missionaries. You see, they had told him, America is the land of the free and the home of the brave, that money grows on orange trees in your backyard, and that the land is vast, not like Japan. They told him, With your intellect, your knowledge of history, and your ability in handling the English language—even to the degree that he did at that time, which I guess was considered quite a bit—you will go far in America, so go to America, go to America. It will be good for your health. Health-wise, climate-wise, you can't beat America for building your body up.

BM: Are you saying your father actually learned some English in the missionary school, and was familiar with it when he immigrated to America?

AI: Oh, yes. He was nineteen years old when he came. When you're raised in a missionary school from the time you're four and a half years old, there's no excuse for not learning some of the English language. So he had the advantage of learning a lot of English while he was cared for in the missionary home or school, as they called it.

When he came to America, he had the advantage of being one of the few Issei—first generation Japanese immigrants who came to this country—with a running knowledge of the English language. He "made it" very fast in this country.

He arrived here in 1906 and worked on the railroad gang from Washington through Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Nevada, back into California, south to Arizona, across and through New Mexico, and all the way through Texas and Louisiana. They really worked a lot of the railroad. The reason why my my father traveled extensively with the railroad was the fact that he knew the English language. They made him foreman immediately, because the boss could tell my father what to say to the

people who were to do the hammering and the pounding on the railroad ties. He would then translate from English to Japanese the instructions for the laborers. He had this advantage in knowing the English language. Of course, later on in his life the English language became a bitter enemy to my father as it was turned against him. But, during the years he was raising our family, it was very advantageous to him and also to my mother.

BM: I'd like to ask you on thing before we go on any further. In respect to the circumstances of his immigration, did he ever go into detail as to whether or not he was recruited in Japan to emigrate, or had he come into the United States illegally? Did he ever tell you about taking the boat, or how he got financing to take the boat?

AI: I'm sure he has described it to me in his writings. I have pages and pages of manuscript that he's written to me, and it's just a matter of deciphering all of it and typing it up. I've had it put away for many, many years. I've reread it time and again, but sometimes things don't stick—the important things, especially dates and numbers and things like that. So I really couldn't tell you whether his immigrating to America was through recruitment by the railroads, invitation of the government, or encouragement by relatives. He already had an older sister, who was married and living in Oakland, California, and doing very well over here in America. His older sister's husband was doing very well. He had an established business.

BM: Do you know when his older sister came here?

AI: She came here in the 1800s. I have the complete autobiography of my Uncle Dōmoto, who owned the North American Mercantile Company in San Francisco. Their home was in Oakland, but the company was in San Francisco.

Many years ago, *Time* magazine ran pictures of my uncle and aunt, their life history, the story of their immigration to the United States, and the building up of this large import-export company. In fact, he was the first Japanese person to get a patent in the United States for his method of canning fish. They canned crab, lobster, tuna, sardines, and things like that.

They called their company the North American Mercantile Company, but they cut it to NAMCO so it would fit on a label to be put on these small, flat cans. NAMCO is just a combination of the initials of the company name, a trade name. They were one of the very biggest import-export businesses in the United States, right up until the outbreak of the war.

BM: Do you mean the First or the Second World War?

AI: Before World War II. This was all developed shortly after World War I. I think it was after World War I when my uncle developed this method and got his patent. Later on, my father left the railroads to work for this uncle in San Francisco. He lived in Oakland with them in their big home. They had a huge mansion that could accommodate many, many people. Remember, this was back in the early 1900s, about 1910 or 1912. And for Japanese to be able to live in a great, big, whole-block mansion was really

something. The house had special floors, mosaic-patterned hardwood.

BM: Oh, parquet floors.

AI: Yes, beautiful, beautiful floors, marble counters, the whole thing, you know. They had tennis courts, volleyball courts, and a swimming pool in their own yard for their children. Their children couldn't go swimming in public swimming pools, play tennis on public tennis courts, and so on. So Uncle said, "Who needs it? We'll build our own." They built everything themselves. This is how my father's younger brothers were brought from Japan, after my father had arrived here.

BM: Did all fourteen eventually come?

AI: No. Five under my father came; approximately four above my father came. More than half his family came from Japan to America. Most of the ones that were recruited to work came from the Dōmoto side of the family. There were not as many on the Uno side of the family; they also didn't get as high in positions in my uncle's company. But my father worked there for quite a few years. In fact, he was working for Uncle Dōmoto in 1911 when he was able to call for my mother in Japan. They were married in Alameda, California, on October 30, 1911. My two older brothers, Buddy and Howard, were born in Richmond, California, where my folks had been living.

BM: Under what circumstances did your mother and father meet and marry? Had he met her before he left Japan?

AI: Yes, they were childhood sweethearts, neighbors for many years. My mother also came from a very strong Christian family, so the ties were very close. When my father came to America to make this his new home, my mother expressed a desire to come. If it was possible for her to come later and marry him, and also to make her home here, she would like it that way. This was her way of thinking at the time. So, my father, more or less, promised that if he made enough money and could send for her, she would come to America.

Around that time, many of the men who were working on the railroads were saving their money and sending for what was called "picture brides" to come from Japan. My mother was not one of these. This is one thing my parents were very, very happy and proud of. They always told us, Our was not what you call a 'picture-bride' marriage; we were very well-known to each other; our families were well-known to each other, and we were childhood sweethearts. So their life together was a very happy one.

The happiness of my parents was proven to us many times. Although we didn't have material things to make us happy when we were growing up, like a lot of other people who were able to have the most modern, up-to-date things, my mother always said, "We don't have a lot of money and we don't have material things other people have, but I know one thing: we are very rich in happiness and contentment because we have our children. Later on, the years will be nothing but happiness and contentment for us. The material things will come later. God will take care of things. If we can raise these children so they're old enough to be on their own, then our happiness and

contentment and material things will come later." This was the way my mother and father started their lives. They were very, very much in love. My parents never held back any punched as far as talking to us children.

The only time my parents used the Japanese language in our home was when they had secrets to tell each other. We would say, Ah, something's cooking someplace. Sometimes Dad used Japanese when he was very upset with one of the children—especially myself because I was the black sheep of the family. If I got in a fight with one of the kids in the neighborhood and left somebody with a bloody nose, and we knew that the parents were coming over to tell on me, then my dad would say something very harshly in Japanese to my mother. He would say something to the effect of, "Amy should be reprimanded." I could tell from the tone of his voice that he was very upset or angry. But other than that, they never used the Japanese language.

We were raised in the true American way of living. People used to envy us because, although we lived in many Japanese communities, we always said Mom and Dad. Everybody else was saying *Oto-san* or *Oka-San*, or Mama and Papa. We never used those expressions. It was always Mother or Father, or Mom and Dad. We could speak so much English in our home without using any Japanese.

Sometimes I think it was a setback not to know any Japanese, because one of the things we—my mother and I—have always been sorry about is that we didn't have enough money to send the children to Japanese school, to learn Japanese cultural things, like flower arranging for the girls and judo for the boys, like most of the Japanese families were doing. But my father always used to say, "That's not necessary. That doesn't make a good American. We must be Americans. This is our adopted home."

I remember very strongly that my parents said many times, If we had been allowed the privilege of taking out naturalization papers and becoming American citizens as people from Europe were allowed to do—this was in the early 1900s—we would have been the first in line. We would have been the very first Japanese people to be American citizens because of our knowledge of the English language.

My mother would have no problem taking the test and answering, "The sixteenth president of the United States was Abraham Lincoln." The two of them studied and wanted very much for America to be their home. They wanted their children to be full-fledged Americans. I'm sure if they had been given the privilege of becoming American citizens, they really would have been the very first Japanese to be citizens of this country.

BM: Was your mother from the same kind of family as your father, a Samurai family?

AI: No, my mother wasn't from a military family. I really know very little about my mother's family, other than the fact that she also came from a fairly large family. I believe there were eight in her family. My mother died in January of 1949, of a heart attack, while visiting a very ill friend of ours in the hospital. My girlfriend called to say, "My mother is now able to have visitors at the hospital, and she would love to have your

mother visit her." We told mother to get ready so she could go to visit this friend in the hospital. Five minutes after she arrived at the bedside of her friend, she toppled over and died of a heart attack. It was that simple.

BM: How old was your mother?

AI: She was fifty-nine years old. It happened on January 18, 1949, and on January thirtieth my mother would have been sixty years old.

BM: Is your father also deceased?

AI: Yes, my father died on Christmas Day, 1965, also of a heart problem. He had an aneurism, which is known as a form of heart disease. We have heart problems on both sides of the family—we weren't aware of this until after both of my parents died. Three of my brothers also died of heart conditions. Two of my brothers that are living today have had very severe heart attacks. I myself have had several heart attacks and am under the intensive care of a team of doctors. This is also a part of my history.

Now, to go back to where my father and mother were married in California, and the two older sons were born in the Bay Area. Just before World War I, my parents decided to go to Salt Lake City where we had other relatives, who owned a dry goods store. They told us, Salt Lake is a good place to live, so why don't you come out to Salt Lake?

Meanwhile, my father, who was very artistic, had learned to be a floral designer. He had learned floral designing from an Italian flower shopkeeper in the Ferry Building in San Francisco. This is where he used to get off the ferry every day when he returned from work at my uncle's canning factory. He was always attracted to these beautiful flowers. He would stop—even if he didn't have much money—long enough to pick up a small bouquet of flowers to take home to my mother. The shopkeeper saw how much my father appreciated and enjoyed flowers, just from talking to him, he knew my dad had a very artistic eye. He said, "Why don't you learn to become a florist? I think you would do well around flowers." My father said, "You teach me, and I will." The man was very serious, so he taught my dad. All his spare time was spent at this little flower stand, where my father learned to make beautiful bouquets and corsages.

With the little knowledge he had of flowers, he was brave enough to write letters to Salt Lake City to ask the Mormon Tabernacle if they could use a Japanese florist. They replied that they would be happy to have him. My father, mother, and the two boys packed up and moved to Salt Lake City. He took care of all the bouquets and all of the flowers in the tabernacle, in all the various offices of the officials of the church, the foyers, and everywhere else in the tabernacle he arranged the flowers. He said the tabernacle was a vast place that required a lot of flowers—the Mormon people believed very strongly in live flowers. This was a very wonderful livelihood for my father. And this is why my family moved to Salt Lake City.

BM: This is very interesting. Since people of Japanese heritage are known for their flower arranging, I wonder, did he concentrate more on the Japanese art of flower arranging

than the Western style?

AI: He did both. In fact, we still have many of the trophies my father won in various international, national, statewide, county, and city-wide floral arranging contests put on by the United Floral Association. My father had the most elaborate and unique floral arrangements. He always won something: a trophy, gift certificate, or commendation of some sort. He was very happy and very proud of it.

BM: Did he pursue this right through the Depression?

AI: Yes, through the Depression he was a florist, right up until the time he developed a bad case of the flu. There was a flu virus going around after World War I.

My brother Buddy was born in 1913. My brother Howard in 1915. So around 1916 or 1917, my parents moved to Salt Lake City. In 1918 my sister Hana was born; in 1919 my sister Mae; in 1920 I was born; in 1922 my brother Stanley was born; and in 1924 my brother Ernie was born. It wasn't until after Ernie was born—we had seven children in our family at this point—that my parents decided that Salt Lake City was no place to raise a family because of the extreme changes of climate. They decided to move back to California and settle in Los Angeles.

BM: What year was this?

AI: It was 1926, before the Depression. My father was still a florist at the time. A few years after we came back to California, my father was working in a flower shop, on the corner of Beverly Boulevard and Western Avenue, called the Pacific Rose Company. It was owned and operated by Mr. Nishi, who now owns the Pacific Rose Company in West Los Angeles, which consists of acres and acres of nursery land. His son is carrying on the nursery business.

My father worked in the flower shop section of this place until he became very ill. When the doctor examined him, he saw all the scar tissue in his lungs and said, "Look, Mr. Uno, you've had pleurisy and tuberculosis as a youngster. Around flowers you're exposed to dampness which is not good for you. If you want to live to see your children grow up, you must get out of the flower business and into a line of work that will take you outdoors, into the sun. You have to regain your health."

For a few years, my father was a traveling salesman, which took his outdoors. But being a traveling salesman also kept him from home a lot. He would take runs on the Southern Pacific train. These were in the years before the jet age, so travel was either slow by train or automobile. He traveled up and down the West Coast; he visited the various Japanese communities and took orders for custom-made men's suits. I can't remember the name of the company that he worked for. He would go to the farmers and merchants in all these small towns like Santa Maria Guadalupe, Pismo Beach, Monterey, where there were Japanese settlements. He would measure these men and have a suit of clothes made for them. This was good for him, and he enjoyed the work. It brought him in touch with a lot of people. He really enjoyed being a salesman.

BM: Did he work for the manufacturer?

AI: Yes, absolutely.

BM: Did he carry around a big case?

AI: Yes, he carried around this big black suitcase with the various swatches of materials—in those days it was strictly wool, no synthetics—and the samples of ready-made suits available in small sizes. It was quite a big ordeal. In his other briefcase, he carried all his bookkeeping material. There was a file on each person with all the measurements.

I was a very little girl at the time, but I remember my dad going on these little trips up and down the West Coast and then coming home. My brother Robert was born in Los Angeles, as was my brother Edison, and my baby sister Kay. This gave us ten children in all.

BM: Do you recall if your father was able to make a fairly good living? Was your family able to get along reasonably well during the Depression?

AI: What were the Depression years?

BM: The Depression was really bad from 1932 to 1933, and then there was a slippage back around 1936 to 1938. But it really wasn't until the war started that we pulled out of it.

AI: Yes. We had barely recovered from World War I when the Depression came along. I remember, because in 1932 the Olympic Games were held in Los Angeles. My baby sister was born then—number ten of our family. We said to Mother and Dad, We hope it's the last! And it was, thank goodness. I think my parents decided that they could still have a lot of compassion between them without having any more children. (laughs) We've always been ashamed of the fact that there were ten children in our family because we've been made to feel ashamed. People ask, How many brothers and sisters do you have? And I'm sorry that I have to say, "I have ten brothers and sisters." But remember, this happened in the days before contraceptives. My parents didn't know these things could be prevented.

My mother's big excuse has always been that when she was raised in a missionary school, they told her, A woman is only as good as the number of children she can produce. (laughs) Just like a cow is only as good as how much milk it can produce.

In those days it was nothing to see a family with six to eight children, but ten or twelve children was going a little too far. We had many friends with ten children. Somehow it has always been a sore spot with me. We had such a hard time because of the large family. If my mother could have stopped when she had my older sister and not had me and the five below me, I think they would have been much better off. Today we marvel at how beautifully my parents came through those Depression years, as well as the aftermath of World War I. Many times my sister and I marvel at how my mother was able to feed all ten of us.

BM: Do you ever remember going without food?

AI: Well, many times we had to go to the neighbors to have them help us out, but we never went without food. We have always been grateful to the Salvation Army, who came to our aid when no one else would.

I remember that, from the time of my grammar school days on through my junior high school period, my mother was invited by the Salvation Army to go to their Fresh Air Camp. It was two weeks at Redondo Beach, where only the mothers and children could come and spend two weeks, all expenses paid. Everything was cared for. You lived family style in dormitories. You'd go to the dining room to eat, where you had to dress properly for meals. After dinner, you would sing at worship services. We had worship services in the mornings, then crafts, then to the beach. The older girls would help in the kitchen—set tables and wait the tables. The boys would do the dishwashing.

BM: Was the racial situation mixed?

AI: No, this was the Japanese contingent. They had two weeks for each minority: blacks, Japanese, Chinese or other Asians, Mexicans, and whites. All the help was Caucasian: the counselors, cooks and everybody. It was run by Caucasians. Let's face it, the Salvation Army was all Caucasian! (laughs) There was a contingent called the Japanese Salvation Army in San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and I think Fresno. We became familiar with the one in Los Angeles. Friends of our became salvationists, and it was through their gracious help that we were invited. They took the poorer families, families who couldn't afford the luxuries of sending their children off to a YMCA, Boy Scout or Girl Scout camp.

My two older sisters were very quiet, bashful, reserved young ladies, and very proper. I was real gung-ho, the black sheep of the family, and I ran with the boys. It was un-thought of for girls to ride on a two-wheel bicycle, but I was riding a bicycle before I was ten years old. I was roller-skating on public streets with all the boys in the neighborhood. We grew up at Evergreen playground, in East Los Angeles, and I remember that time as being the best years of my life. I had freedom, while other girls in the neighborhood would watch me from their windows and say, Look, Amy can run out there and play with all the boys. I knew all the Indian, Mexican, and black kids in the neighborhood, and they all knew me.

BM: Did your parents give you more freedom than the rest of the children?

AI: Well, I was given freedom because I was the overseer for my four little brothers. I fought all of their battles for them as they were growing up, all the way through high school. I watched over them. When somebody was picking on my little brother Stanley, the kids would run over and say, Hey, Amy, somebody's picking on Stanley. And I'd say, "Just show me who it is." Then I'd go over and beat him up. I really would! Many times I took the boy's pants off and hung them up on the fence. He'd have to walk home without them, or else climb the fence to get them. (laughs) I used to protect my younger brothers. I thought it was all part of growing up.

I was twelve years old when I finally left home. But it was a different way of leaving home. I sat down and talked to my mother and said, "Look, this is 1932 and I'm in junior high school now, the seventh grade. You're having a hard time feeding all these mouths, putting shoes on feet, and putting patch upon patch on the clothes, so would it help any if I moved out of the house and worked as a domestic, or as a schoolgirl?" We used to call it schoolgirl work. "If I worked in a home and went to school away from here, I would come and see you on my days off." Tears just rolled down my mother's cheeks and she said, "It would really help. If it's one less mouth to feed, one less person to clothe, to worry about, it would help so much." So I said, "Then I will look for a job."

BM: I would like a little later in the interview to review your schoolgirl experience at some length, but first I want to talk a bit more about your family. Your one brother, Edison, has an interesting name. Is there any family story connected to it?

AI: Well, Edison was born on October eighteenth, which is supposedly Thomas Edison's birthday, or something like that.

BM: Is there any background behind the other children's names?

AI: The girls names were Hana, Mae, Amy, and Kay. Hana comes from the Japanese word *hanako*, which means flower. Meiko is the Japanese word for Mae. Mine is Emiko. My little sister Kay is actually Keiko in Japanese. We anglicized our names so we wouldn't have two names. Why have an English and a Spanish name? We said, Ah, let's make them all simple. So we called ourselves Hana, Mae, Amy, and Kay. We changed Mei to Mae, and I change Emi to Amy, which is much simpler and more American. My little sister decided to change hers from Kei to Kay. We just dropped the *ko*, which designates a girl. A girl's name always ends with a *ko*.

Now, for the boys in our family. There was George, who we always called Buddy, a pen name for him—he was a journalist. But he was always George, junior, after my father. All of the boys—George, Stanley, Ernest, Robert and Edison—had typical American names, but they also had Japanese names. All Japanese boys must have Japanese names, according to Japanese custom. My father's name is George Kumemaro Uno. The *maro* is part of the family name; it's to carry on the Samurai tradition from his side of the family. My father said that all the boys in the family must have *maro* in their names as he had in his. The first was Kazumaro. *Kazu* means first born son, and that was Buddy. The second was Yasumaro, Howard. Then Toshimaro, who is Stanley. Nobumaro, Ernest. Akimaro, Robert. And the last one, Tomimaro, Edison. The six boys had six American names and six Japanese names, which have stuck with the boys. They used their Japanese names because this is traditional.

In interviewing or talking to a lot of Japanese people, you will find most of the boys have a Japanese name. In most cases, the girls also have a Japanese name. But in our family we said, We're so American, the girls don't need Japanese names. So we dropped our Japanese names. However, when older people talk to us, they always call us by our Japanese names because they automatically know Amy is for Emiko, Mae is

for Meiko, and Hana is for Hanako.

BM: It was quite traditional to register births in both Japan and the Unites States. Do you know if each of you children were registered in both places?

AI: In our family there was no such thing as dual citizenship. You're talking about Japanese people who were married in Japan and came here, or people who married here but had children born in America and registered in Japan.

BM: Yes.

AI: Well, this was done by many families, but just to keep family genealogy, the family tree in order and up-to-date. Actually, their birth is not registered as a citizenship-type of birth in Japan.

BM: So, it was only registered in the family records.

AI: Yes. Our family didn't feel that was necessary. My father and mother said, We're Americans; we came to America; we were married here and this is where we're having children, and we hope to die here, not in Japan.

BM: They never intended to go back to Japan.

AI: Oh, no, they didn't want to go back. When they came to America, they were cutting off all ties with Japan. This included not registering the births of their children in Japan. We were never registered in Japan. All of us are registered here, in the United States of America, and nowhere else.

BM: So you never had to go through and eliminate any records?

AI: No.

BM: Does your birth certificate show your Japanese name?

AI: Yes.

BM: Do you use Amy as your legal name?

AI: Oh, yes.

BM: Is the name Amy actually on your birth certificate, or is it Emiko?

AI: It's on there as Amy. We had all of our birth certificates revised. We dropped our Japanese names and had them changed to the way we wanted our names to appear on records. This happened at the time of the war.

BM: When?

AI: When we registered at the outbreak of World War II. It was necessary to have our birth

certificates to prove whether or not we were born and raised in this country. My parents wrote to Salt Lake City for five of our birth certificates, and to Sacramento for the five births in California. In those days, people were registered only in the state capitols, not in the cities of their birth. Now you can go to the Hall of Records and dig up your children's birth certificates.

In any event, for fifty cents it was then possible to have the state send you a copy of your birth certificate, so we sent immediately for birth certificates for the five born in Salt Lake City. By this time, my father had already been taken away by the FBI. I remember one of the last things my dad said to my mother was, "Send for the children's birth certificates. Change all their names to American names. Drop the Japanese names." So my mother wrote to Salt Lake City, "I am hereby requesting five birth certificates. They are under such and such names. Would you please issue them under such and such names in place of them?"

BM: So she didn't have to go through any court proceedings?

AI: No, none whatsoever. Our birth certificates were issued posthaste, because we needed them for emergency purposes, security purposes.

BM: Yes, at the time you didn't know what you might run into.

AI: We didn't know whether they were going to deport all the Japanese people, drown us, or shove us into a hole. We really didn't know what they were going to do with all the Japanese people.

BM: Mrs. Ishii, I think we will bring this interviewing session to a close now. Naturally, you have only related a portion of your fascinating life story, so we will want to continue the interview at a later time. Would this arrangement be acceptable to you?

AI: Oh, certainly. I look forward to the opportunity.

END OF INTERVIEW