CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with AMY UNO ISHII

Interviewed

By

Kristin Mitchell

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CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: AMY UNO ISHII

INTERVIEWER: Kristin Mitchell

DATE: July 20, 1973

LOCATION: Los Angeles, California

PROJECT: Japanese American

KM: This is an interview with Amy Uno Ishii for the California State University, Fullerton, Japanese American Project, by Kristin Mitchell, at Mrs. Ishii's home in Los Angeles, California, on July 20, 1973, at 1:40 P.M. Mrs. Ishii, during your interview session with Betty Mitson, you indicated that as a young girl you left home to do schoolgirl labor, returning only on weekends to see your family. I was wondering if you could amplify on this period of your life. What exactly is meant by the term "schoolgirl labor?"

AI: Well, this same type of work is now categorized as "domestic." Actually, what I did was move out of my home and moved in with a Caucasian family and became their domestic help. You become the chief cook and bottle washer, baby-tender and babysitter. If they don't have a gardener, you're the gardener, and all these various chores you have to do if you're going to earn your keep. I first went out to work when I was twelve years old. We were really having a very, very difficult time at home because of the family being so large.

It was hard for my mother to meet expenses, pay the bills—utilities, rent, et cetera—and keep food on the table, let alone put clothes on the backs of the children. It was like putting patch on top of patch on your clothes and taking shoes to the shoe repair shop. I mean, who thinks of taking shoes to the shoe repair shop these days? But back in those days these are the kinds of things we had to do. I decided, after talking to my mother, that one person less in the family would alleviate a lot of the hardships. So I went to work for this family doing household chores for $8 a month.

KM: Did you continue going to school at the same time?

AI: Oh, yes. I used to take the streetcar to school. I would get up at five in the morning, clean a certain area of the house, prepare breakfast, pack a lunch for myself, do the laundry and hang it on the line, and then run like crazy to catch the streetcar at a certain time. At the time I was working in Leimert Park and going to John Adams Junior High School over on Main and Thirtieth Street. I had to commute by streetcar to my own

school rather than transfer to Audubon Junior High School, which was located in the Leimert Park area.

KM: Why was that?

AI: In those days, they didn't have Japanese in those schools. So you used your own home address, which meant that you went to the school of that area; you couldn't use your employer's address. It was a little bit complicated.

In those days, I never thought much about discrimination and segregation as far as schools went. I didn't realize until I was in high school that, Wow, this was all happening to me and I hadn't been aware of it. I commuted for about two and a half years.

KM: What period was this?

AI: It was 1932. Anyhow, I did this work. I used to put in a full day of school, then dash back to the house and start my household chores. This entailed cleaning up the rest of the house that I didn't get in the morning. Then I would prepare and serve dinner to the family and eat by myself in the kitchen. After dinner, everybody goes off to the living room, and I would spend the rest of the evening in the kitchen cleaning up. Usually I would have to do ironing and mop some place in the house that needed to be done, so it was generally about ten o'clock before I was through.

KM: You did this for $8 a month?

AI: Yes. And then, from that time until the time I went to bed I had to study. So I was getting very little sleep in those days, and I think it got to be a habit because even now I require very little sleep.

KM: You worked for this one family for two and a half years?

AI: Yes. Then I changed over to a place where they paid me $12 a month, and I had three little girls to take care of. In the first place that I had worked, they just had one little child and she was preschool [age]. But the second place that I moved to was in the Wilshire area, a much more high class area. They had three little girls, who were in first grade through fifth, I think. At that place it was a little easier because I didn't have to do the heavy work like scrubbing down walls and woodwork, waxing and stripping floors, and doing windows, outside and in. This was a very large, two-story Spanish-style house. Each one of the children had their own bedroom, plus the master bedroom for the mister and the missus, a rumpus room, a family room, a living room, a formal dining room, and a breakfast room.

I did a lot of the housework, but they had a Negro woman come in once a week to do the heavy work. They had another woman who came in once a week to do all the heavy laundry—table linens, bed linens—and towels. So I was, more or less, hired to just take care of the everyday needs of the children.

KM: During this period, did you see your family? Did you give part of your salary to them?

AI: Oh, yes. On my first job, where I was getting $8 a month, I gave $5 to my mother. And in those days $5 went a long way. With the remaining $3 I would buy a streetcar book—a book of tickets—which gave me a discounted rate on the streetcar. I would also buy personal things like toothpaste, soap and things that I couldn't take from the family I was employed by. If I had any left over, I'd always share it with my little brothers and sister by treating them to a matinee or something like that.

When I moved to the Wilshire area and worked for $12 a month, I was able to give my mother much more. I did this for many years, from the time I was in the seventh grade in junior high school until the time that I went to City College—two years of City College.

KM: What year was this?

AI: This took me right up through January 1942.

KM: You mentioned earlier in the interview that your father was a salesman. Could you tell me something about your father's experiences traveling, and something about his experience when the war broke out? I understand that he was sent to several different internment centers.

AI: Yes.

KM: Do you know why he was singled out?

AI: Because of this vast knowledge of the English language. He was a self-educated, self-taught person. He never went to school here in America. He only went to missionary school in Japan, and I think he only went through the eighth or ninth grade. He never made it through high school because he was always a very sickly person. Yet, when he came to this country, he taught himself the English language. He could read, write, and speak it fluently. Our friends used to be jealous of us because both my mother and father could speak English. We never spoke Japanese in the home. And we children never learned the Japanese language ourselves.

KM: Did your father feel that his job of traveling had anything to do with his being singled out after Pearl Harbor by the Department of Justice?

AI: I don't think so. How would the FBI or the military police know that my father had done all this traveling in the United States? My father had stopped traveling—I would say that he stopped traveling about fifteen or twenty years prior to the war. I was a very small girl when my father stopped traveling as a salesman.

He would stay at home with us in Los Angeles and work out either as a dayworker or—in fact, at the outbreak of the war my father was working for the Department of Agriculture as an entomologist, studying the insects that were eating the crops. The United States Department of Agriculture and some chemical companies who

were making the insecticides for the bugs were working together.

KM: So he was actually an employee of the United States government at that time?

AI: Something like that.

KM: Do you recall the day of the Pearl Harbor attack? Do you recall any special feelings you had?

AI: Well, of course. I think we all went through a terrible shock. On that Sunday morning I was living as a domestic away from home, and so I was not with my own family. By that time I was almost twenty-one. I was working as a domestic out in San Marino, and I had just served breakfast to the family when the news came on the radio that Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor. It's hard to describe the shock. I know that the American people were in great shock at the time of Pearl Harbor. And they were angry; they were very, very angry at the Japanese for having been so daring as this.

I remember that I asked my boss if I could make this long distance call to Los Angeles to talk to my mother because of the war having broken out. I asked him if I could have the day off and if I could go home to find out what this was all about. I made the call to my mother, and my mother was very, very upset. She said, "I don't understand what is happening, but I am hearing the news as you are hearing it on the radio there. I can't understand Japan and what it's doing bombing Pearl Harbor." We had no knowledge of anything like this happening, and it was just an absolute shock.

We had mixed emotions about the bombing. We were thinking, Japan is committing suicide. Because it is such a small country. All of Japan could be laid out right across the whole of California, and it would be all over with. What is a small country doing coming this long, long distance to do such crazy things? And at the same time, we were very upset because the general public—even the people I worked for treated me and talked to me as though it was my own father who was piloting those planes out there at Pearl Harbor.

KM: Oh, even the people you worked for treated you this way?

AI: Yes. I remember they told me that I could go home and how I had better stay at home until the FBI could clear me of any suspicion. I said, "Why should I be suspected of anything? I've lived in your home for many years now, nursed you when you were sick, and fed you. And I never poisoned you once, and I'm not about to do it now." But they said, You had better stay at home until we can get the FBI to clear you. And I thought, Wow.

So I took the streetcar to my mother's. We got the news of Pearl Harbor's bombing just before noon, and it took me till three or four in the afternoon to get from the people's place in San Marino to my mother's.

KM: Did you feel any animosity from some of the people you were riding on the streetcar with?

AI: No. I think everyone was in too much of a state of shock to point their finger at me and say anything. I felt like an ant. I wanted to shrivel up into nothing, and my mind was going a mile a minute, thinking, What am I supposed to do? What am I supposed to say? All I know is that I am an American, and yet now, at a time like this, people are going to say, You're a Jap. And that turns the whole picture around. I had never been called a Jap in my life. All of these things were going through my mind. By the time I got home, the FBI was at our house.

KM: What were they doing there?

AI: They were tearing out the floorboards, taking bricks out of the fireplace, and looking through the attic.

KM: What were they looking for?

AI: Contraband.

KM: Such as what?

AI: Machine guns, munitions, maps, binoculars, cameras, swords, knives, and what have you.

KM: How was your family reacting to this invasion?

AI: Well, we just stood there, blah! What could we say with military police standing out in front with guns pointing at the house, and telling us to stay right there in a particular room while they went through the whole house? They tore part of the siding out on the side of the house to see if we were hiding things in between the walls. And all we could think was, How ridiculous! It was so nonsensical. They didn't have a search warrant. They didn't have any reason to be coming in like this and tearing up our house. And when they left, they took my father with them.

KM: Did they conduct a general search of your neighborhood or was your house singled out?

AI: We were single out. There were no Japanese in our neighborhood. We were living in a cosmopolitan area; it was mostly white. Our next-door neighbors were Germans and Italians. The people across the street were from England. We had a Korean living on the corner of our block who had a little Korean grocery store. I would say that there weren't any Japanese living within six blocks of our house. So we must have been singled out.

KM: So on the very day that Pearl Harbor was bombed your father was taken away?

AI: Yes.

KM: When did you hear from him next?

AI: Oh, we didn't hear from him for a long, long time. We were getting all kinds of phone

calls from people who were very good to us and who knew us very well. Say, for instance, on a Saturday night we got a phone call saying, "It would be a very good idea if you drove down to Griffith Park tomorrow morning. Way inside Griffith Park there is a CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp. This camp is holding about 300 men, and I think your father might be among them. So you might take a run down there and take a look." We really never knew who had called and told us.

On Sunday morning—instead of going to church—we all jumped in the car. We took toothpaste, soap, washcloths, underwear, pajamas, Hershey bars, chewing gum, and all kinds of things with us, and we took a ride out to Griffith Park. And sure enough, as we got way into Griffith Park, we found military police all around this encampment. All the men that had been picked up the first day of the war were rounded up in there; all were from this particular area. The people in the stockade, as we called it, were not allowed to converse among themselves because most of them didn't speak English.

KM: Why didn't they converse in Japanese?

AI: If they did, the MPs couldn't have understood them, so they were threatened to be shot to death if they spoke Japanese. We were very brave, and very young, so we stood out there on the sidelines of this enclosure and yelled, Dad, Dad, if you recognize us, put your hands up. All of us were yelling in unison at these men. Of course, these men were dumbfounded. They didn't expect a family of young kids to come and look for them. Of course, my father realized immediately that this couldn't be anyone but his bunch of kids, so he was waving his hand, saying, Great! So then all of us took turns pitching.

KM: What were you pitching to him?

AI: Soap, toothpaste, his shaving kit and things. The MPs couldn't stop us.

KM: Did they try to or did they just turn a blind eye to it?

AI: Well, they didn't realize what was going on, because everything was happening so fast. We laughed about the whole thing later. But this was our first encounter with Dad since he was taken from us.

KM: What was the timespan involved?

AI: About three weeks. I'm sure it was January when we went to see him at Griffith Park. Then another time we received a phone call saying, "It might be a good idea—if you know where the train station is in Glendale—for you to take a drive out there and just happen to be around." This was on a Sunday morning again. So on Sunday morning we packed a lot of stuff again—goodies, clothes, foodstuff and things—and got into the car and drove out to Glendale. We had a problem locating the train station. It was right off San Fernando Road, practically under our noses, but we drove around and asked at a few gas stations. We parked a block away, and walked into the station there.

It all looked very normal, like any Sunday morning when there is very little

happening. But about ten minutes after we arrived there, here came all these Army trucks with canopies over the backs of them. And in all these trucks were all these men out of the compound at Griffith Park. So we knew that our dad must be in this group. So we hid, not letting the military police see us. But then we realized what was happening: they were going to be shipped away on a train. They got off the trucks and were lined up, but they were not handcuffed or anything like that.

KM: Did the soldiers have guns?

AI: Oh, yes! When all of the men were lined up, our dad stood out like a sore thumb. He was very tall, and he had grown a heard. They were all looking so tired; all of those men looked so aged and tired. And when we saw our father, we just couldn't help but cry because the change in so short a time had been so drastic.

We didn't want Mother to see him like this because, I think, it probably would have just killed her on the spot. Fortunately, we hadn't brought Mother out with us. We figured that if we were going to get caught, at least we would be citizens being caught. Mother was an alien. If she got caught, we didn't know what they'd do with her, so we made her stay home. It was a long wait for her.

We saw them line the men up and put tags on them with their I.D. numbers. They were all dressed in the same type of clothes, army fatigues. We wondered where their regular clothes that they came in wearing were. A lot of those men were wearing suits when we saw them at Griffith Park.

KM: How much time had elapsed since you saw them at Griffith Park?

AI: Maybe a couple of weeks. I don't think the men's heads were shaven or anything like that. All I remember is that all of the men were wearing the same type of clothing. The first thing that flashes into your mind is the movies where you see prisoners wearing prisoners' garb, so that really shook us up. The men were lined up to go on these trains, so we yelled at Dad.

KM: Didn't you get a chance to talk to him at all?

AI: No, but he saw our faces, and he recognized each one of us. In fact, he hollered, "Hi, Hana. Hi, Mae. Hi, Amy. Be good, take care."

KM: Did you have any idea where he was going?

AI: Oh, no. In fact, no one knew where they were taken until, I believe, we were in Santa Anita. The Red Cross notified my mother that Dad was in Fort Missoula in Montana.

KM: Was he in a camp set up specifically for aliens?

AI: It was a special camp for so-called "hardcore enemy aliens."

KM: Was it just for Japanese?

AI: Oh, yes, all Japanese. These camps held the men who were fisherman out in Terminal Island and Long Beach and all along the West Coast from Washington to Mexico. These men were all pulled up out of their jobs because they worked on the West Coast. They could send signals and what have you. Oh, the American government thought these people were going to commit sabotage. So they categorized them as "hardcore enemy aliens" and took these men away from their families, took them just like they took my father. There were approximately 2,500 men taken from their families in this manner—Japanese language school teachers, judo teachers, kendo teachers, Buddhist priests, anyone who worked in the import and export business with Japan—rounded up and taken away.

KM: So anyone who was considered dangerous in any sense was taken?

AI: Yes. They were not given due process or anything. They were just considered potentially dangerous. People say that families were not being broken up. That's a lot of malarkey; it happened to our own family. We know how badly the families were broken up. We've seen too many of our friends whose fathers were in the same situation as my father. A lot of the farmers up in Palos Verdes, Rolling Hills, Signal Hill, Dominguez Hills, and Huntington Beach areas were taken away. If they were suspected of anything at all, they were tagged "potentially dangerous enemy aliens" and taken. When you think of the number of Japanese people that were rounded up in this fashion, you've got to relate these numbers to the fact that each one of these men had a family, a wife, and so many children.

KM: So that's at least 2,500 families that were broken up.

AI: Exactly. So don't let anyone tell you that the families were not broken up or separated. It happened.

KM: Let's backtrack just a little bit. On the day of Pearl Harbor, did the military police come into your house or the FBI? Or did both come in?

AI: It was both.

KM: Was the rest of your family together then?

AI: Well, like I say, I was working as a domestic in San Marino.

KM: But you had come home that day.

AI: Yes. My sisters were at home. I had one brother who was in—I don't know if it's called the National Guard or State Guard—so he was away. The rest of them were all school age, so they were all home. The brother that was in the National Guard or State Guard was home in a week's time. He was given a dishonorable discharge for being an undesirable Japanese who was not to be trusted. So he was sent home. We were very happy because we needed a fellow at home.

KM: What feelings did you have as a family after they took your father away? Did you have

any idea what was going to happen to your family?

AI: Well, we really didn't know. We were in a state of shock for the longest time. We didn't know what was happening from one week to the next. The news would keep changing. There was a time when the news said, If you people will be very good citizens and stay within a certain area of your residence, you will not be bothered.

There was a very strict curfew law. We had to be in by five o'clock in the evening. We could not go out before a certain time in the morning. We could travel only so many miles away from our homes. If you worked a little further than that from your home, then you had to give up your job.

KM: How did the family feel about the absence of your father?

AI: This was the most difficult thing, adjusting to having Dad away from home. My mother and father had celebrated their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. And after twenty-five years of being married and really not being separated in any way, other than when my father was traveling as a salesman—but this was an understanding that they had with each other. Of course, mother was home with the children. But to have my father forcibly taken away from my mother—it was the first time that they had ever been separated.

KM: I imagine that she was in a state of shock.

AI: She certainly was. Her blood pressure was really high, and it was a matter of trying to keep her composure. She realized that she now had to be the head of the household, the backbone of the family. It was very difficult when the little ones would say to my mother, When is Daddy coming home? Where is he? What kind of answers could she give?

KM: Right, because she just didn't know.

AI: Yes. Could she tell the children truthfully that Daddy will be gone only a couple of weeks or a couple of months or a couple of years? She didn't even know. And the children were very close to Dad, so they worried about him every day. Of course, the mention of my father would just break my mother up, and it was just eating away at her. Then the evacuation order came.

KM: What was the next contact that you had with any governmental agency? Did anyone else come out to your house?

AI: Oh, yes. The FBI came out regularly. They were coming out to the house almost like clockwork. We could see FBI people sitting in automobiles, just within view of our house.

KM: What were they looking for?

AI: To see who came and went from the house and what we did, our activities. It's very

possible they could have been keeping us under surveillance. It's a very uneasy feeling to know that somebody is out there watching your house and your movements twenty-four hours a day.

KM: Did they ever come in and search again, or was that first day the only time?

AI: No, the first day was the extent of it.

KM: They just kept surveillance on you.

AI: Yes.

KM: Did you have any inkling what was in store before the evacuation notice came?

AI: Well, there were all kinds of hints of an impending evacuation. In those days we went to school from September to January and from February through June. We had a mid-semester break, and two semesters made a school year. In January we were all told, Don't bother to register for the next semester because you won't be here. So we, as American citizens in schools, knew that we were not going to be here for very much longer.

KM: Did you have any idea where you were going to be?

AI: Oh, no. No, that was really the biggest surprise of all. No one had any inkling as to where we were going to be sent and for how long. Of course, when the actual evacuation order was declared—President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066—posters were put up along all of the telephone poles, fences, and any public place. No one could miss seeing these posters. Those original posters should be collector's items today, if anyone saved them.

KM: How much time did you have between announcement of Executive Order 9066 and the actual evacuation?

AI: Well, we knew in February that we would eventually be evacuated. We didn't know just when, but there was a deadline. They offered us a chance to leave the West Coast voluntarily. Japanese people who had money, or businesses, and could liquidate all of their property and businesses could take their families and move voluntarily inland. Presumably, they would not be affected by the evacuation. Many of the Japanese people did this, only to find that when they got out of California and started to go in through Nevada and Arizona and the other states, the people in those states were waiting and saying, You're not coming through our state.

KM: Oh, you mean they wouldn't let the Japanese people pass through?

AI: They wouldn't let them go through or settle in Nevada and in these various other states, so it was very discouraging. So they came back and ended up evacuating anyway. Some of the more wealthy people were able to take their families on the trains and bypass these blockings along the border and into Colorado, Utah, and other places. But

our family was not able to voluntarily evacuate so we were at the mercy of the military police.

KM: I see. So they didn't notify each family individually then?

AI: No, we were all told in a mass.

KM: How much time did you have to prepare to leave?

AI: Each area was different. People that lived on Terminal Island and San Pedro had approximately twenty-four to forty-eight hours to dispose of all their personal property and everything. Other people such as ourselves—we lived in an area where there were few Japanese people—were told that we had to go to an area where there was a community of Japanese people on the southwest side of town. We knew approximately two months ahead. In February we knew that we would be evacuated, and we evacuated on the weekend of Easter Sunday, the first Sunday in April.

KM: Oh, I see. When that day arrived, did you have to go to an assembly point?

AI: Yes. First, we had to dispose of all our belongings, and this is a thing that really, really hurt. We stood by so helplessly when people who we thought were our friends and neighbors came by and said to my mother, I'll give you $2 for your stove, a dollar and a half for your refrigerator, a dollar for your washing machine, and fifty cents for each bed in the house, including the mattress and all the linens. That really hurt because we knew—I was old enough to realize—it took my mother and father twenty-five years of hard works to put together a few things. And then to have this kind of a thing happen!

We finally got rid of everything except—we had an old fashioned upright piano that we were very fond of, and there was no way that my mother was going to let that piano go for $2. She just refused. She said she would take that piano out in the backyard and take an axe to it before she'd let anyone take it away for $2.

On evacuation day, we were all told to assemble with our belongings. We were allowed to take approximately a hundred pounds per person, or as much as each individual could carry. And they told you what kind of things you should bring.

KM: What did they suggest?

AI: The evacuation poster will tell you. At the bottom it said, "Things that you will need to bring." Like very personal, private things that you need: a cup or a mug, a plate, a fork, a spoon and a butter knife—no sharp-edged knives—bedding enough for each person, changes of clothing—to be prepared for pioneer living and things like that. Those people who had any money would go out and buy these cute little camping kits. You had to think of a toothbrush, hairbrush, toothpaste, soap, toilet paper and Kleenex. Various things like this become bulky soon. Thank goodness, the girls didn't wear rollers in those days. We had pin curls so it was just a matter of getting enough bobby pins to pin our hair up. We were allowed to bring only what was absolutely necessary.

KM: Where were you told to assemble?

AI: We were told to assemble at the Centenary Methodist Church on the corner of Thirty-fifth and Normandie. There was a group that assembled at the Hollywood Independent Church on Westmoreland and Lexington, and one at the Union Church in Little Tokyo, in Downtown Los Angeles. Depending on where you lived, you were told to be at a particular place by 9 A.M. on a particular day. Then the trucks and the buses would roll up and take all your belongings. They tagged everything with your name. Then you got on these trucks and buses. From the minute we left our home to the time we arrived at Santa Anita Racetrack, we had no idea where we were going.

KM: Who was supervising this evacuation, the military police?

AI: It was the Wartime Civilian Control Agency [WCCA].

KM: Were they civilians or soldiers?

AI: Mostly soldiers, because they all had guns and wore hardhat helmets and uniforms. But there also were a lot of civilians that were involved. We didn't know who they were, but they were involved in this whole movement. We were told that they were the authority, and who were we to question?

KM: You were in no position to.

AI: Yes. So anyhow, we were taken to Santa Anita Racetrack where all of our belongings were unloaded, and then the head of the household—at that time my sister took over, being the oldest girl in the family. My brother couldn't act as the head of the household because he had his own household. He was married, and his wife was almost six months pregnant at the time that we were evacuated. So my sister became the head of the household. We were given a family number and a family barrack, a unit. Then they opened up all of our belongings, inspected everything to see that there was no contraband, and then made us tie them up again. Then we were told to go and find our barrack. If you don't think that was one big circus!

KM: What were these barracks like at Santa Anita?

AI: They were just temporary housing. Well, most of the people that were there before us were in the stables. People were living in Seabiscuit's stable. The horses were not there, but the straw was, along with the smell. The Terminal Island people and the San Pedro people were the people that really had it the worst because they had to live in the stables. We called it Dogpatch, but it was actually the stables area. It was a terribly dusty, dirty, smelly area. We were lucky; we lived in the parking lot area where they had constructed these new fabricated barracks. Each barrack was broken into six units, and each family took one unit, so there were six families living in one barrack.

KM: How big a living space did you have as a family?

AI: Gee, it's hard to say. I know that we had to crawl over and around the cots that they

provided for us in order to make the beds. In fact, the joke there was that you had to back out of your room to make the bed, because we had so many beds in our barracks. But, after awhile, after they got all the people in—we had approximately 22,000 in the Santa Anita Assembly Center—they were able to find that they could double up a lot of the bachelors and the old maids to make space. They eventually got around to giving the mother of the larger families and the real small, grammar school age children one unit, then put the teenage girls in one and the teenage boys in another. They felt we needed a little bit more privacy with ten kids in a family. But we still all went to the same latrines, mess halls, laundries, and showers. This was really what you would call total communal living.

KM: How long were you at Santa Anita?

AI: Let's see, we were there the first week in April, 1942. I left Santa Anita the first of September to go to Heart Mountain, Wyoming. My mother, sisters and brothers were in Santa Anita until November of that year, when they were sent to Amache, Colorado.

KM: Why were you sent to two different locations?

AI: Well, it's like this. When we were in Santa Anita, I decided I was going to get married. So I got married in camp.

KM: Had you met your husband in camp or had you known him before?

AI: No, I knew him before, but the thing is, the man that I married didn't register at the same church where my family had registered. He had registered in Little Tokyo at Union Church. All the people who registered at Union Church were eventually sent to Heart Mountain, Wyoming. Those who registered at Centenary Methodist Church were sent to Amache, Colorado. And those who registered at Hollywood Independent Church went to Arkansas.

KM: What was the logic in breaking up the group like that? Why weren't all the people from, say, Los Angeles sent to one camp?

AI: This we could never understand. In Heart Mountain, we ended up having people from Little Tokyo, Los Angeles, Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; San Jose and San Diego. They could have filled five of the camps with just Los Angeles people, and yet they spread the Los Angeles people to all the various areas. Then filled the rest with people from other places. The War Relocation Authority [WRA] didn't know what they were doing anyway. They didn't realize what they had done wrong until after the damage was done, and then they all admitted, Wow, we could have done it this way, and we could have done it that way, or we didn't have to do it at all. (laughs) So that's about how it ended up.

KM: How did you go to Heart Mountain?

AI: We were put on a train, right on the back side of Santa Anita. And we took ten days to get from Santa Anita, Arcadia, California, to Heart Mountain, Wyoming. We went by

way of Poston, Arizona; Gila, Arizona; Amache, Colorado; Topaz, Utah.

KM: Oh, you dropped off contingents at every stop.

AI: We went all the way to Little Rock, Arkansas, to Jerome and to McGehee, they called it. Then coming back this way, we stopped off at Minidoka, Idaho, and dropped off some more people. The train ended up in Heart Mountain, where we got off ten days later.

KM: Were you given living quarters there, or was the camp brand new?

AI: It was still in the process of being constructed, although there was one contingent of people that was already there. They came from Pomona Assembly Center, the Pomona Fairgrounds. The San Gabriel Valley Japanese were brought in about a week or ten days before we arrived there. When they got there, their barracks were not even completed. They had to finish them themselves. They had to tarpaper it and Celotex the insides. But by the time we got there, our barracks were made. We had to do the finishing up on the inside only, but not on the outside. We didn't have water yet. They were bringing water in great big tanks in trucks and putting it in containers for us. We were rationed water and things like that.

KM: Did each family have individual living quarters there, too?

AI: Each barrack was also split up into six units, a family per unit?

KM: No matter what the size of the family?

AI: Yes. It was just on a larger scale than at the assembly center, that's all.

KM: What was your first impression of Heart Mountain when you got there?

AI: Well, we knew that America was huge, but we didn't know it was this huge, to have so much barren, open space the way they had up there. For miles and miles around—you could look as far as your eye could see, and you couldn't see the first tree. No trees, nothing green, it was all brown, and there was this mountain just sitting behind us. We thought, Well, maybe the mountain will act as protection for us.

By the time we arrived there, which was approximately the tenth or the twelfth of September, they were in the middle of a dust storm. You couldn't open your mouth because all the dust would come in. You could barely see, and the only way to keep your eyes clean was just to cry and let the tears wash your eyes out. Inside your ears, up your nostrils, you could just feel the grit and grime, and when you rubbed your teeth together, you could feel all this sand. It was a horrible feeling, and there was total confusion.

For the first three days, we didn't even know where our baggage was. We couldn't find our things, and the trucks were going up and down between the barracks yelling out family numbers to see who would claim certain things. They said, Don't go looking for your things, they will bring them to you. So all we could do was to sit on the

stoop of our barrack and wait and wait and wait. Life became a waiting game, the whole time that we spent in camp. You waited in line to go to the latrines, to eat in the mess halls, to do your laundry, and to take your showers. It was just a total waiting game. The fellows complain about doing this in the Army, but it was no different in our concentration camp, the same thing.

KM: Did you and your husband have jobs? Were you assigned jobs to do?

AI: Yes, I worked in the camp hospital as a nurse's aide. My husband, a musician, was on what they called the educational program, and he was assigned to either teach or to play music. He chose to play music. So he organized the Hawaiian band and they called themselves Alfred Tanaka and His Singing Surfriders. We got a bunch of Japanese girls that were from Hawaii, and we taught them to dance the hula; some of them already knew how. I used to do a lot of singing, so I was the vocalist for the group, and I learned all these Hawaiian songs. We used to go from block to block to block. Each block had recreation halls, and in order to keep the morale of the people up, we'd have what we'd call talent night. We would do the entertaining. He got paid $19 a month for that and I got $19 a month for being a nurse's aide.

KM: Was there any place that you could spend this magnificent sum?

AI: Well, they started a canteen. The government set them up when they realized that once they got us 10,000 people into a compound that we had needs, such as soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, Kleenex, or toilet paper. The government could never keep us supplied with toilet paper. And the girls had to have certain things at certain times of the month and things like that. At first we, through sheer necessity, were using the Sears and Montgomery Ward's catalogues and ordering these things by mail. Then the government said, We have to set up canteens in our camps. Some camps were lucky enough to have two canteens; we only had one. You could go down there and buy your personal needs. And later, they stocked material, some clothing, cosmetics, and even soda pop and ice cream later.

KM: So the children had a few goodies, too.

AI: If you could afford it, you could have it. Very few people were earning $19 a month. We were considered the top level. There was another range, and they were getting $16 a month, the non-professionals. And what they called the blue-collar workers were paid $12 a month. Students and young kids were paid something like $9 a month for little odd jobs.

I remember my little brother used to distribute the camp newspaper from barrack to barrack. We had a mimeographed camp newspaper that he delivered in a particular area. He couldn't deliver 10,000 that's for sure. They hired a lot of young junior high and high school boys or girls to distribute them from barrack to barrack. They easily could have beat that by putting stacks of them in each mess hall, and every family that came through the mess hall would get it automatically. But those authority people just didn't think. So we figured, well, as long as they are willing to pay our kids for it, let

the kids have these jobs.

KM: Were you able to keep in touch with the rest of your family that was in the other camps?

AI: Yes, we kept in touch. The family knew that I went to Heart Mountain because as soon as I arrived there I wrote Santa Anita.

KM: They hadn't known where you were going.

AI: They didn't know where I was headed, because the train that I was on went to all the other camps.

KM: And they didn't tell you in advance?

AI: No, we never knew which camp we would eventually end up. When we got to wherever our destination was, it was our place to write to our family and let them know where we were. I didn't realize then that my mother, sisters and brothers had left Santa Anita to go to Amache until they got there and wrote me in Heart Mountain, saying, This is where we are.

KM: Did you hear from your father, too?

AI: My father's contact with the family came by way of the Red Cross.

KM: Oh, I see. But was he allowed to correspond personally?

AI: No, not for a long time. It was at least six to eight months before we could get personal contact with my father. My mother was corresponding with him for awhile at the beginning, but all the letters were censored.

I remember my mother sitting there with her first letter from my father. She opened up this beautiful letter that had already been ripped open and then Scotch-taped closed. She opened it very carefully, and set it down on a little table we had built. She opened this letter and pieces came out of it. She thought, Wow, what's this? Is Daddy playing some kind of joke on me? We kind of put them together and all we got was "and, but, so, how." Words. Just words. Nothing of importance came out. Nobody's name, no place, nothing. My mother sat there just completely exasperated. (laughs) That was her first contact with my father from Fort Missoula.

KM: Did he stay in Fort Missoula the entire time?

AI: No, he was sent there to Lordsburg, New Mexico, and then to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Each time he changed camps, he was sent to a port of deportation. They sent him to Seattle once to get on some boat that was supposed to take him back to Japan, and he fought them. He said, "I refuse to go to Japan. You're not sending me to Japan. My life is here; my wife and children are here. You're not sending me to Japan. You've got no reason to send me. Therefore, you've got to send me back to camp."

So, instead of sending him back to Fort Missoula, they sent him to Lordsburg. From there, they sent him to another place where he was supposed to catch a boat to Japan, and he fought them again. He said, "You're not sending me to Japan." So they sent him to Santa Fe. Then he went to Long Beach or someplace, and they were going to put him on a boat to send him to Japan. He said, "No way are you going to send me to Japan." By that time he had four sons in the service, and he said, "I've got boys fighting for this country; my wife is in camp and my children are there. I have nothing to go to Japan for, and I refuse to go." So they sent him to Bismarck, North Dakota, and then they sent him from there to New Jersey to catch another boat.

KM: He had extensive travels, didn't he?

AI: Yes. And he was going to get on the *Gripsholm* ship in New Jersey, but he fought them again. He said, "There's no way that you're going to send me to Japan; I have nothing there. I would become a ward of the government if you sent me to Japan. How am I going to be able to provide for my wife and children? And I've got sons fighting in the service here." So instead of sending him back to Bismarck, they said, Well, the only thing we can do in a case like this is to open up another camp.

KM: And where was that?

AI: This was in Crystal City, Texas. They made it into a family camp, where those men who were considered "hardcore enemy aliens" could now join their wives. So my father went to Crystal City, and my mother and the minor children left Amache to join my father at Crystal City. This was the first time they had seen each other during all that time.

KM: During this extensive process, did he ever receive any kind of a hearing or trial?

AI: Well, apparently it was not what you would call a trial. It gave somebody or some people a job to do, and that was to go into these camps and interrogate the internees. I know that my father had been interrogated almost daily for months upon months. He had to lay down his whole life history from the time he was born to the present. What they were doing was actually trying to find out why they were holding him. They had to have a reason for keeping him.

KM: So they were trying to find it after the fact.

AI: Now that they had the person behind barbed wire, they asked, Why do we have him here? So they had to find a reason for keeping him there. That is what it all boils down to. At the very end they did admit to us, though—to the family and to my father—that they really had no reason for keeping him. He was much more American than a lot of the Americans walking the main streets of any city today. He was more American politically, he knew the laws; he knew the Constitution, the bylaws, and the rights. He studied the United States government so extensively that he actually knew more about America than a lot of the men who were interrogating him. You know what I mean?

KM: Yes.

AI: At the same time, they were also coming to our camps where we were interned, to Heart Mountain and Amache. While we were in Santa Anita, it was a daily occurrence for the FBI—we called them the Feds—to come in. You could always tell when they were there because they were in suits and ties. And I thought, Oh Lordy, here they are again.

They would single out our family and ask us to come, one at a time, into a particular barrack that they used for interrogation, and they would question us. We kept asking them, What are you questioning us for? I mean, if you'd tell us what you want, we'll tell you. But they couldn't tell us what they were looking for. Nevertheless, they kept questioning us with silly questions that really didn't amount to anything. They were coming to the children of my father and trying to make the children say something about their father that they could put their thumb down on and say, Ah, now there's one reason that we could be holding this man.

You know, actually, the whole thing is so asinine when you come right down to it. It's very hard for the government to be able to explain my father's internment as a so-called "hard-core enemy alien" to the public. In reality, there wasn't another Japanese couple on the West Coast who was more American than my mother and father. They came to this country as young teenage people, married in California, raised ten children here, and never went back to Japan. And being able to handle the English language as well as my mother and father did, they were really—I mean, if they had been given the opportunity to become American citizens, they would have been the first Japanese to do so because they had the advantage of knowing the language.

KM: Did they ever give your father a hearing in front of a judge or a court hearing?

AI: No, no court hearing.

KM: No court hearing at all; they just interrogated him.

AI: Yes.

KM: How long did they keep him after he was in Crystal City?

AI: He came home to our family in September, 1947.

KM: That was long after the rest of you had returned.

AI: Yes. We had already been released from camp. I had been in Chicago from 1944 until 1946, then I came back to California to join my mother, sisters and brothers. My brothers, who had been overseas, were already back by that time. Lo and behold, in September 1947, they finally decided to turn my father loose. He came home to us while we were living at the housing project know at that time as Roger Young Village, which was the Quonset hut village out there behind Griffith Park. So he started out from Griffith Park and came back to Griffith Park.

KM: Did they ever give him or your family any reason why he was held for such a long period of time?

AI: No.

KM: They just took him, and they let him go when they wanted to.

AI: Someday I hope they'll open the archives and let us read the case history of my father.

KM: It would be interesting.

AI: It would be very, very interesting. Why they kept him is a mystery to us, and I think it has been a mystery to the government for all these years.

KM: You mentioned you had four brothers serving in the Army. What units were they in?

AI: Well, my brothers all volunteered at the same time to go into the service.

KM: Were they living in the camps when they volunteered?

AI: They were in Amache. There were bad feelings among the Japanese people in the camps. Because all the Nisei, the American citizens that were eighteen years of age and over were made to sign a questionnaire, to state whether they would be faithful to this country or not.

KM: Some kind of loyalty test?

AI: Yes, it was a loyalty questionnaire. Everyone called it Question 27 and 28. It was worded something to the effect, "Will you be willing to bear arms for this country, or will you not fight on behalf of Japan?" And, "Would you be loyal to this country?" Of course, what is the justification of the government bringing questionnaires such as that into these barbed wire encampments where we were being "protected," when we didn't ask to be protected, when we didn't feel we needed to be protected. (laughs)

They looked upon us as enemies of this country, and yet they dared to bring in this type of questionnaire asking us all to sign those questions, saying, "Will you be faithful and loyal to this country?" How could we be anything but? They had us where they wanted us, behind barded wire, guard towers, searchlights, and armed guards. So this was really a ridiculous thing. It was really an insult to the integrity of the American people, to put forth these type of questions to the Japanese internees—and we *were* considered internees. And yet, the boys still were forced to sign these questionnaires.

Many, many Japanese people said, Don't sign it. By golly, they've got us here. If they want us to be loyal Americans, turn us loose, put us back where we were, send us home, and then draft our boys into the service, then our boys would be justified to go and fight for this country and prove their loyalty to this country. So there were a lot of hard feelings.

My mother, brothers and sisters all agreed that if the boys volunteered to go into the service in spite of the fact that their father was interned in a so-called "hardcore enemy alien camp"—my mother, who had done nothing against this country except raise

ten children, was behind barded wire. In spite of all that, my mother felt, If you boys go and serve this country and prove your loyalty, maybe they will turn Daddy loose, and at least give a chance for Dad to join Mother and the children and bring back the family unit. So with this in mind, my brothers said, Yes, there's a good chance that they might allow Dad to be either completely released or at least released where he can come and join Mother and the children. So the boys decided that they would go.

When they went for their physicals, Ernie was rejected because he had a hernia. The doctors at the physical said, You must have that repaired before you go into the service. He was heartbroken because he wanted to go with his brothers, yet he knew that this was something he had to have taken care of. They had to go out to Colorado Springs or someplace to sign up for the service and take their physicals. Anyway, Ernie was rejected, but Howard and Stanley were accepted. And they went to Camp Savage in Minnesota. They entered what you call military intelligence. They called them G-2s. They went as interpreters.

KM: Did they have a knowledge of the Japanese language?

AI: No. But they went to Camp Savage, which was a language school, basic training and a crash program in Japanese language. It sounds so very funny, when you think back now, that our boys spoke Japanese with an American accent. My mother used to just roar with laughter when she heard these boys speaking Japanese with an American accent. It was like speaking English with a Japanese accent, you know. We laugh, we kind of giggle when we hear Japanese people just off the boat, trying very desperately to speak English, and they speak it with a Japanese accent. Well, it's the same way when our boys try to speak Japanese; we speak Japanese with an American accent.

Anyhow, they learned enough to be able to go as interpreters to the Pacific theater of war. Two of my brother went with Merrill's Marauders to the Philippines and then on to China, Burma, and India. In fact, my present husband also was with that group, as was my husband's brother.

KM: Oh, I see.

AI: So we're a very tightly knit family. My younger brother Bob decided, "If they're going to pull this type of a thing on us, let me give one to the government." So he said, "The Navy has never taken Japanese people; I'm going to volunteer. I'm going to volunteer for the Navy, and they can't refuse me because they want volunteers, and I'm volunteering." So he volunteered for the Navy, and he posed quite a problem to them because they weren't ready for that. They didn't think that the Japanese boys would be volunteering for the Navy—of all place! Up to this point, you see, the only Asians that were ever accepted into the Navy in the United States were the Filipino boys who came in as quartermasters.

KM: Servants?

AI: Yes, servants. They waited on the officers, and they were the cook's crew, and they did all the dirty work. And here comes a young Nisei boy out of an internment camp, yet,

saying, "Here I am. Now do with me what you wish." They couldn't make him into a servant and put him in with the Filipinos. The Filipinos would have killed him because Japan was fighting the Philippines, too. So, wow!

KM: There were some hard feelings, then.

AI: Oh, absolutely. So the only thing they could do was to say to my brother, What in particular would you like to do while you're in the Navy? My brother said, "Well, I'd like to be a medic." And they said, Wow! But they sent him through the Medical Corps, and he became a pharmacist's mate, or whatever it's called.

In the meantime, Ernie came back to Amache and underwent some corrective surgery for his hernia. As soon as he was able to, he went right back to the recruiting office and said, "Okay, I'm ready. Take me." He thought he was going to go where his brothers had gone. Instead they sent him to the 442nd. He went down to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, for his very, very rigid basic training. It was really hard basic training.

My sister Mae was engaged to a young Japanese from Hawaii, and he had joined the 442nd. About the same time that Ernie went to Hattiesburg to join the 442nd, her fiancé had come from Hawaii, along with all the University of Hawaii students. They came to Hattiesburg for their basic training before they were sent overseas. So my sister Mae asked the government for permission to go to Hattiesburg to be married, because she was engaged and everything was legal and on the up and up. So they said, All right. They gave her a clearance to leave the camp, she went to Hattiesburg and was married. A few weeks after she was married, her husband was sent overseas; he went to Italy and France.

Meanwhile, my little brother Ernie had finished his basic training, and he went on the same boat with the young man who was now our brother-in-law. So he went along with his brother-in-law to Italy and France, and fortunately, both of them came back to America after serving in Italy and France. So it was a very interesting thing to see the boys go to the various parts of the service in the United States.

KM: Didn't you have an older brother, Buddy?

AI: Yes, our oldest brother, Buddy, was a newspaper columnist. He wrote articles for the Japanese newspapers and he had a column called the "Nisei Melodrama." It was quite an interesting—I mean, he was a young fellow fresh out of high school. He had actually gone to Compton Junior College and had been a journalism major. He was quite an outgoing type of person.

During the Shanghai Incident in the 1930s, he wanted to go and cover the war in Shanghai and China. So he took a tramp steamer that was going to—this was a Danish steamer that was going to Vladivostok, of all places. He worked his way on this tramp steamer in the laundry room, and didn't have to lay out any money for his trip. He told the captain of the ship that he was a newspaper writer looking for adventure, so he thought he'd like to go to the Orient and cover this war. So he asked, "Could I get a job on your ship and work my way over without having to lay any money out?" They said

they were happy to have him, so they gave him this job, and he worked his way on this tramp steamer to Vladivostok.

After arriving in Vladivostok, he worked his way down into Manchuria, China, and then down to Shanghai where he had relatives. We had an uncle who was a shipbuilder in Shanghai, so he went to the uncle in Shanghai and said, "I came all the way over here on my own, and I'd like to cover the war." So he was introduced to various dignitaries in the Japanese Army, the military, and they sent him in as a correspondent. He got a special uniform to wear that they only gave to newspaper people—correspondent's uniform. They wear a special hat and a special armband designating them as press. And, at the same time, well-known writers from *Life* and *Time* magazines, *Reader's Digest*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Christian Science Monitor* were covering the war. All of them went as a group, and my brother was in this group.

KM: Oh. Were any of the other correspondents Japanese?

AI: No, but because of the fact that my brother was Japanese, he was given high priority and he became the leader of all of these correspondents. They looked to Buddy to show them the "in" places, the best hotels to stay at, where they could arrange things ahead of time, and things like this. So Buddy was a war correspondent, and he was in Japan and China from 1937 straight on through to 1939, 1940, and 1941. He was still in China when the war broke out between Japan and the United States. So there was no way he could get back to the United States.

KM: Oh, I see. So he was an American citizen stranded in China.

AI: Well, he lost his American citizenship because of the fact that, during the time that the Japanese in America were being interned in concentration camps by our American government, the Japanese government was also interning Americans who were prisoners of the Japanese. This put my brother in a very, very peculiar category because he was a Japanese American. You see what I mean, he wasn't a Japanese national.

KM: Did he have dual citizenship or was he just an American?

AI: No, he just had an American citizenship. But the fact that he had married a girl—a Japanese national—in Japan, put him in a very peculiar classification. So he was conscripted into the Japanese Army as a newspaper person.

KM: OH, so in a sense he served in the Japanese Army.

AI: Yes. It's just like saying that he had to fight in the Japanese Army, you know what I mean? He served the Japanese military.

KM: Yes. So you had brothers on both sides, then.

AI: In fact, one of the most peculiar things and a very unusual thing—I think it only happened to two or three Japanese families—is when brothers fought brothers. My brothers actually saw each other, met each other toe-to-toe overseas.

KM: He lost his American citizenship, then, for serving in the Japanese Army?

AI: Yes.

KM: Did he ever try to regain it?

AI: No, my brother died. He was taken prisoner of the Americans in the Philippines, and he was in the American concentration camp in the Philippines. This is another peculiar thing. My brother Howard was in the Philippines as an American at that time. He was with Merrill's Marauders, and they had gone to the Philippines. They happened to go to the camp where they had all the POWs and, lo and behold, he saw his own brother behind barbed wires there. You can imagine the emotional upheaval that he went through. He hollered at Buddy. He said, "Buddy, do you know who I am?" And Buddy said, "Sure, you're Howard, you're my brother. How come you're here? What are you doing way over on this side of the world?" He said, "I'm in an American uniform." It was just one of those very, very tragic times when they saw each other with a fence between them, you know.

Howard had promised Buddy that he would be back the next day, and he couldn't go back. He was to bring him some personal provisions like shaving outfits, some soap, and stuff like that. He had a lot of work that had to be done on the ship that they were on, and he went back to his ship.

He was directing the crane operator who was loading and unloading things from the dock into the ship and vice versa. The crane operator made a mistake, and instead of moving the crane a particular way, it swung toward my brother. My brother fell down into the hold of the ship, which was about eight floors down. His body was totally crushed, and he was unconscious with two broken legs, two broken arms, and a broken back. That put an end to his seeing Buddy. So they put him in a hammock type of thing, flew him on a helicopter, put him on a plane, and brought him all the way from the Philippines to a veterans hospital in Oklahoma, where they mended his body.

KM: Did he fully recover?

AI: Yes, he recovered. He stayed in the Army for twenty years and then retired.

KM: Did your older brother, Buddy, go back to Japan after he was released from the POW camp in the Philippines?

AI: Yes. He had a family in Japan, so he went back to Japan. He never regained his health. He had malaria and jungle fever and all kinds of things when he was in the Philippines and in the camps. As a result of all that, he developed tuberculosis and had to have surgery, and a couple of ribs were removed. Then he had had asthma the better part of his life, in childhood and adult life he had asthma very bad, and that didn't help matters any. So in the end—I believe it was about 1953 or 1954—he got to the point where he was completely bedridden. His wife really took good care of him right up to the bitter end.

My father went to Japan to visit him and took a lot of medications to him with the hope that it could help, but the doctors had already said that there was no hope for my brother. So it was a matter of, "Do you want to come to America to die, or do you want to stay in Japan to die?" My brother said—well, my father made the decision for my brother. He said, "You're married, you have a family, and you belong here in Japan with your family. You don't want to come to America again."

By that time we had several incidents here in America, such as the Tokyo Rose incident. We also had a thing called the Kawakita Case. A man called Meatball Kawakita, who was an American citizen, a Nisei, had served in the Japanese Army in Japan during World War II. I understand that he was an MP in one of the internment camps in Japan. He had mistreated a lot of American GIs. And a Caucasian, ex-GI saw this Japanese fellow and pointed his finger at him, and said, "You're the guy that I remember from the days that I was in a POW camp in Japan." As a result of that, the man was thrown into jail and tried for treason here in America. He received a life sentence. I understand that instead of serving his life sentence out, he was deported and sent to Japan not too long ago.

So things like this were happening about the same time that Buddy was very, very sick. And there was little hope for his recovery. My father said to him, "You don't want this type of a thing, you don't want scandal, you don't want trouble. The best way to die is to be with your family, your wife and your children." So Buddy said, "Yes, my preference is to stay here in Japan and die." So that's where he died on December 10, 1953. His three children were very small then.

KM: So you still have relatives living in Japan? Is his family still there?

AI: Yes. Oh, yes.

KM: Have you had any contact with them at all?

AI: We were in constant contact with them after the war was over and when we realized that Buddy was very, very sick. We were sending provisions to them all along. Then, after Buddy died, we supported his widow and three children for many, many years. I think fifteen or twenty years we supported her and the children, because the children were so young and she wasn't able to work.

My father tried to arrange it so that all of the Uno brothers and sisters would put up $5 per person each month, which, with nine brothers and sisters, would be $45 American. We would send that to Buddy's widow, and she would convert it into yen. They could live off it. They could really live well off of $45 of American money per month. It would pay their rent, their food, their clothing, and see that the children went to school. And because my brother was so well liked and so well-known in Japan, all of the Nisei news people who were in Japan set up a fund for Bobby's oldest boy to go to university and become a journalist himself.

KM: Oh, that's nice.

AI: So they set up a scholarship for him, and he went to Rikkyo University for four years. He graduated and is now a journalist.

KM: So he's following in his father's footsteps.

AI: Yes.

KM: I'd like to backtrack a little bit. While you were at Heart Mountain, I'm sure there were some grumblings of discontent among the people about the regimented living, the conditions, and the fact that they were being interned and all. Was there any kind of organized protest about the conditions, or did the people pretty much live each day as it came?

AI: Well, I look at Heart Mountain as one of the luckier camps. We were so darned remote from everybody and everything that, by the time the news of rumblings in Manzanar and Topaz and other camps got to us, it was already three or four weeks later. That's how remote we were from what was happening at other places. We were very fortunate because we didn't have what you would call an out-and-out riot in our camp. We didn't have any killings. We didn't have anyone try to escape from camp and have the MPs kill them. Where the dickens would they escape to?

We had what we called self-government, and I think we set up a very good self-governmental organization in our camp. We had almost 20,000 at Heart Mountain, whereas Amache had only 8,000. Some of the camps were large and some were small. Ours was one of the larger ones, but it was very remote, too. We had Japanese from so many different areas. But we just figured, We are all Japanese Americans, we are going to be here for awhile—we don't know how long—and we might as well make the best of it, and live in peace and harmony.

However, the other camps had a lot of problems. I think one of the biggest problems was the fact that Japanese people are very class conscious, very, very class conscious. If you come from a Samurai type of family, you're far above, way above in your attitudes, your way of thinking, and various things like that. It makes you so far above the average person that you look down your noses at them. And then you have the laboring farmers, real stoop laborers who do nothing but squat down and work the earth. Then you take all of these various classes of people—still basically the same Japanese—and you throw them all into one confined area. You're bound to have some kind of friction.

KM: I see. But these were most likely with the adult population. What about the children?

AI: The young children, the young people didn't have this problem. People are people, we're here to stay for a long time. We don't know what the government is going to do to us, but while we're here, let's make the best of it, they thought. They went to the schools and social affairs. There are many, many young people who went through this whole evacuation phase and say, "It was the best years of my life. I had the most fun in those three years that we spent behind barbed wire," because they were carefree. They had not a worry in their lives because they had a roof over their heads, they didn't have

to cook, wash dishes, clean house, or work for a salary. The government took care of everything, and if you didn't have clothes, the government would even furnish you with clothes.

So some of those younger people, kids who were in grammar school, junior high, and high school, during those evacuation years, really had the best years of their lives. A lot of kids met their future husbands-to-be in these camps. So for many people the evacuation does not hold any bitterness.

But for people like ourselves, who were older, who had to share the responsibilities, the heartaches, the hurt, and had to stand by so helplessly watching what was happening to our parents and brothers who were being sent overseas—it's the older people who are bitter. I didn't consider myself that old, really. I was only twenty-one at the time of the evacuation, but I aged a lot, too. Of course, thirty years have elapsed between then and now. But even during the evacuation years, I remember being very bitter with very, very mixed emotions about the whole thing. I couldn't be happy about the evacuation, in spite of the fact that I was married in the camps. I wasn't happy about the marriage; it's a hell of a way to spend a honeymoon.

KM: Right.

AI: Ten days on a stinking train.

KM: And then in barracks.

AI: Rickety old train, ten days with no place to sleep. We were in straight, hard chairs. So crowded. And then we arrived at that desolate, remote place in Wyoming. We got off that train and looked up there at the camp that was to be our home for the next—I don't know how many months. And most of the people who got off the train shed tears like you've never seen before. This is one of the reasons why so many people refuse to talk about their evacuation experiences, because it brings all of these terrible, terrible emotional memories back to them. Many people can't talk about it—even myself. Many times I have trouble talking about certain incidents about the evacuation.

The time my uncle died in Heart Mountain is an example. My father's youngest brother came from Japan as a young boy, just at the time World War I was going full tilt. He, not having any knowledge of the English language, volunteered to fight for this country. He went with the Rainbow Division to France, fought and came back, and gained his citizenship. He always held that over my father, saying, "Aha, you may have been here in America before I came and you may be older than me, but I am an American citizen. And American will always be closer to me than it is to you."

Yet, at the outbreak of the war, the fact that he was an American citizen and had fought for this country made no difference to this government. They interned him, his wife, and his three children, innocent children. They were interned at Heart Mountain. And on January 21, 1943, he had a heart attack and died. That was one of the most tragic times of my life, and I wasn't even that close to my uncle. I knew him; had been to his home; knew my aunt, and I knew my cousins and all. But just the fact that he was

an American citizen, an immigrant who came and gained his American citizenship—

KM: And had been so proud of it.

AI: And was so very, very proud. He was so proud to wear his Veterans of Foreign Wars uniform, put that little hat over his forehead and march in the parades and things like that. And then, to see him die in the camp, it really broke me up. That's when I said, "Where is the justice? This is my country, just as it was his country." These are injustices. I've always sworn that someday someone should write a book about my uncle. Someone should write a book about my family, my father, my mother, you know.

KM: That would be very interesting.

AI: All these various things. Many attempts have been made by many people. Various people have tried, and it just gets too elongated. They don't know where to start, and so it has never been done properly.

KM: How long were you and your husband in Heart Mountain?

AI: I think we were in Heart Mountain just about two years, because we arrived in September 1942, and we left in April 1944.

KM: Where did you go when you left?

AI: We went to Chicago.

KM: What were the circumstances of your leaving?

AI: Well, there were some very peculiar circumstances. Before we even left Heart Mountain permanently, my husband, a bunch of his friends, and I left Heart Mountain to go to the small town of Billings, Montana, to top sugar beets. This was when the government and the people on the outside realized that all the young people had fled the country and gone to the big cities to work in defense plants or had gone into the service. Who was there to harvest the crops?

KM: So they decided they had a ready source in the camps.

AI: They recruited us to go to these various farms and top sugar beets, which we did. Then I came back from that, and my daughter was born in Heart Mountain, in June 1943. Then in 1944, when I was going to have another baby, I said, "I don't want the second child born in the camp, and I would like to leave." So the government, at that time, realized that they had made a big mistake in rounding us all up. It was costing the government a lot more than they could afford to keep us behind barbed wire, so they were encouraging us to leave the camps. They told us, If you know anyone on the outside who would be willing to vouch for you and can guarantee a place for you to stay and can help you find a job, then you may get a release to go out from the camps, provided you do not go back to the West Coast. At that time the West Coast was still closed to the Japanese.

We had friends in Chicago, and they were writing us in camp, saying, Chicago is a real nightlife kind of town. If you come to Chicago, I'm sure you could get together an orchestra of your own, get into a musicians union, and find a job. So you can come out here, and you can stay with us in our basement apartment until we find a place for you. So we asked permission from the WRA for a release and they said yes. They gave us a one-way ticket to Chicago and $25.

KM: To get started?

AI: That was it. And that was our goodbye to the camp.

KM: Did you find any racial discrimination when you went to Chicago?

AI: No, in Chicago we didn't have any problems. It was amazing because we had expected—I mean, we were told that people will be after you with sticks and stone. Well, for one thing, by the time we went out to Chicago, there were quite a few Japanese there already. They had all gotten good jobs and were all in universities. The Japanese had a very good reputation in Chicago. All the manufacturers and people in industry and places like that were saying, Boy, we never saw such good workers, such fine workers; we'll hire a Japanese anytime over any other kind of people. So there were jobs to be had. And our biggest problem was housing. But we were used to the worst kind of living possible.

KM: Anything was better than living in camp.

AI: So we thought nothing of living in walk-up tenement buildings; we thought nothing of living in rat-infested basement apartments—and exactly that.

KM: How long did you stay in Chicago?

AI: I stayed in Chicago until the fall of 1946. I decided I had seen too many winters. I like the California winters much better, so we decided to come back.

KM: Where did you go when you came back? Did you move to Los Angeles?

AI: Yes, we came back to Los Angeles and joined my family at Roger Young Village. Then in September 1947, my father came back from Crystal City, so our whole family was back in the place where we had originally started, Los Angeles.

KM: What was the attitude of the people here on the West Coast to the returning Japanese?

AI: For us there was no problem because we were formerly from Los Angeles; we knew the people. Our only problem was we could not go back to our own house. The house that we had lived in on Thirty-eighth Street was not available to us when we came back. But we talked to the landlady, the Mexican family that owned the property. They wanted us to come back so badly. They were so happy to see us; they came and embraced my mother.

Mrs. de la Puente never spoke any English, but she knew when it was the first of every month, and in spite of the fact that she could never speak English, she was there with her little receipt book.

When we were forced to leave our home there, the de la Puentes were very, very nice. They helped us; they asked if they could store some of our things for us. They promised us that if we ever came back, the house was always ours to rent again because we had taken such good care of it. We had done such a gorgeous job with the yard and kept the house in very good condition. We had painted the interior. We had lived in that house for eighteen years, so it was their livelihood, the fact that we were living in their house. So they were real happy to have us come back. But at the time we came back, the government had frozen the business of housing and things. The people that were living in the house had a lease on the house because they worked for the government, and the government would not allow the de la Puentes to throw them out. So, until their lease had expired, they could not be made to move.

In the meantime, we lived out at Roger Young Village, and it was while we were living there that my mother had a heart attack and died soon after my father had come back to us. After my mother died, the de la Puentes felt so badly because my mother never got a chance to come back and live in their house. They had really wanted my mother to live there. When they found out that my mother had died, they said, The people's lease is almost up now, and in another two months you will be able to come back to your house.

So two months after my mother died, they called us and told us that the house was now available. The people had moved out. They'd gone back to Oklahoma or wherever they came from. So we went back to take a look at our house, and it was terribly run down. They had painted the bathroom black and yellow enamel, yet, high gloss enamel. And they had painted a couple of the bedrooms purple and orange. They had painted various rooms such nightmarish colors that we told the landlord, We'd like to come back to this house, but it has to be completely renovated. It will take us at least three months to get it into condition. So all of us pitched in, my brothers, sisters, and myself.

KM: Were you all planning to move back to the house as a family?

AI: Oh, yes. It was going to be our family house, and we all came back to the house every day after work and school. Anyone who had time would go to the house and start scraping off all this paint. We used a torch and a spatula to scrape off the paint.

KM: Acetylene torch?

AI: Yes. And we used sandpaper, blocks, everything imaginable, solutions of all types to get all this paint off. so we could repaint and redo the whole house before we moved back. Finally, by the end of summer, we were able to move back into our old original house. To us, that house was just like it was ours, just as if we owned it from the very beginning.

KM: You had lived in it for so long.

AI: My little sister was raised in it, and here she was able to go back there and graduate from high school in the same old house that she had started in.

KM: Were you working at that time?

AI: Yes, I was working in the credit approval department at Bullocks, Wilshire.

KM: When did you get interest in the Japanese American Citizens League [JACL]?

AI: My older sister had always been active in the JACL. My oldest brother, Buddy, was very active in the JACL before the war started. In fact, JACL sponsored him as a lecturer. He would go from chapter to chapter throughout the country to speak and lecture on his experiences of the Shanghai Incident, the fall of Hangchou, Peking, and all these various places. They were very, very much interested, being Asian, in what was happening in Asia.

Actually, Buddy was the first of my family to be involved in the JACL. My father was always a member even though he wasn't a citizen. And then, my youngest brother, Edison, became involved. In fact, he was the first one in our family to become a chapter president. He was president of the East Los Angeles Chapter many years ago, and he served as president of—I think it's called—the Bay Area Community Chapter in San Francisco. He has served on the district board, and he has been very active in the JACL for many years.

KM: So it was kind of a family heritage that you grew up with.

AI: I had been a member of the JACL for at least twenty-years before I really went into it wholeheartedly and decided that I wanted to be involved.

KM: Well, Mrs. Ishii, on behalf of Betty Mitson, myself, and the entire Japanese American Oral History Project at CSUF, thank you very much for your careful and considerate attention to our questions.

END OF INTERVIEW