CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with FRED TOMIYOSHI

Interviewed

By

Maria Quezada

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NARRATOR: FRED TOMIYOSHI

INTERVIEWER: Maria Quezada

DATE: May 24, 1994

LOCATION: Long Beach, California

PROJECT: Japanese American

MQ: Okay, this is an interview with Mr. Fred Tomiyoshi by Maria Quezada for the California University, Fullerton Japanese American Project at Whittier Elementary School in Long Beach. Mr. Tomiyoshi, can you tell me something about your background before the war?

FT: Before the war, my parents were farmers near the city of Seattle, Washington. Let's see, there's three children; I have one brother and one sister. That's about all I can make out right now. My dad is from the old country. He came to the United States when he was about sixteen years old. My mother was born in northern California, but they went back to Japan—gosh, she must have been about six years old or so. They went back, my father married my mother in Japan, and then they came back to the States. And they farmed in that local area.

MQ: Okay. What do you remember about your community?

FT: Where I was before the war?

MQ: Uh-huh.

FT: It was a small farming community. There were a lot of Japanese families around. In fact, the grade school that I attended, I'd say, two-thirds were Japanese children.

MQ: Did they have any Japanese language schools where you lived?

FT: Japanese—

MQ: Yes, because, during that time, a lot of Japanese Americans would send their kids to Japanese schools.

FT: Oh, yes, yes. I attended Japanese school every Saturday. I believe—no, it was a full day school because I used to have lunch. My mother used to make me lunch every Saturday morning. It was a Japanese lunch. When I went to the American school, they gave me sandwiches, of course. When I went to Japanese school, she made me a typical Japanese lunch, rice bowls, things like that.

MQ: Can you tell me any characters of the community? Was it a unified community? Were there some main Japanese leaders, for example, the priest? Do you have any special religion? I mean, a temple that everyone attended?

FT: Yes, there was as I recall. I don't recall attending church every Sunday or anything like that, but I do recall going to the church when they had some festival or something like that. I forgot what community—it was a big community in that area. It might have been in Auburn, Washington, I think, in that area. Yes, we did have a Buddhist Church, Buddhist minister, as I recall, because every New Year's we used to pound rice to make mochi. All the families got together, and they made the mochi and had potluck feast that I recall.

MQ: So, it was a close community?

FT: Yes.

MQ: Do you know if there was any anti-Japanese feelings or did you realize that you were Japanese?

FT: Myself, personally, I did not experience any feelings of that, prejudice or anything like that, possibly because there was a lot of Japanese students or children, et cetera.

MQ: On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. What was your reaction? When did your family hear about it if you remember?

FT: I don't recall, other than they were discussing that the war had started, that the Japanese had attacked. Of course we heard it on the radio.

MQ: Do you remember what was the atmosphere in your home?

FT: I think, as I recall, there was uncertainty of what's going to happen to them because we're in the United States and the Japanese attacked the U.S. They were just concerned what was going to happen to them as I recall.

MQ: Did you feel any fear coming from them, any anxiety, from your parents?

FT: Yes. Well, I know there were fears because, as I recall, my dad had a weapon, a pistol, that was just to protect [against] the burglary. Because as I recall they were telling me, we had Pilipino workers at that time; they were pretty violent. So we had a weapon that I remember he threw it into a river. We lived really close to the river.

He threw that into the river. And I don't recall him discarding any other material or anything. Just the weapons stuck to my mind.

MQ: What about your mother? Did you feel any fear from your mother?

FT: No, I really don't recall my mother—oh, okay, well, when we were farming, we had four other young single Japanese men working with us or living with us. One of them did not have his citizenship paper, was not legally in the United States. As I recall, he was very frightened, didn't know what to do. And there were rumors that the FBI was coming around arresting people.

MQ: That was on December seventh. At Christmastime, did the family continue like they had done after that or even during Christmas or did you experience was different?

FT: No, I think the Christmases was the same. Except the family, as I recall, we never celebrated Christmas. It was just another day. New Year's, the Japanese, of course, we celebrate the New Year's Day.

MQ: So, everything went as—

FT: As usual. My parents never gave me a gift. I'm thinking Santa Claus, you know. Yeah, nothing changed, as I recall.

MQ: Okay. I was wondering, were you in anyway Americanized or assimilated in certain American ways. Did you practice—you were doing a lot in Japanese culture. Was your culture more forced than the American ways?

[00:10:00]

FT: No. In fact, no, there was nothing forced as far as culture or anything, except, my parents, of course, spoke Japanese at home. And Japanese was spoken among—

MQ: Community.

FT: Community, anyway. No, as I recall, there was nothing forced on the—of course, I think I was attending school. Yeah, it was December seventh. In fact, they spoke so much Japanese that when I attended school, of course, I was speaking Japanese more than English and had a little difficult time there. But, as time went along, there was nothing culturally saying you have to do it the Japanese way or anything like that.

MQ: No pressure at all?

FT: No.

MQ: On February 1942 the executive order was issued. How did your family, if you remember—did they feel any anxiety in regards to it?

FT: To the Executive Order?

MQ: Yes.

FT: No, as I recall, we had very little time to dispose of our belongings. I know we just purchased a new washing machine and that my mother was giving it to our neighbor. We had a tractor. I don't recall what we did with the farm equipment, but I remember them saying we had to go. They were packing clothes, just what we, I guess, were allowed to take.

MQ: What was the atmosphere in the house during that few days you had to get everything ready? Did they take it calmly?

FT: Yeah—well, you kind of panic wondering what's going to happen. That man that was living with us, that didn't have his legal papers, he turned himself in.

MQ: He did?

FT: Yes. And we didn't hear from him so we were kind of worried or frightened I guess.

MQ: Did he turn himself in after the Pearl Harbor incident?

FT: Yes, um-hm.

MQ: Immediately after it?

FT: Yes, because we heard that the FBI was looking for people like him. There was just uncertainty, panic.

MQ: When your family was packing, did you see any changes in the community at that time?

FT: No, as far as what I remember, I don't recall—I was attending school, but—what happened, it's kind of a blank spot in my mind, I guess. (pauses) I don't even remember how we got to the train station—we had to go to the train station—I don't remember how we got there.

MQ: Was your family informed where they were supposed to meet? Or did somebody come for you guys?

FT: That's the part that's very unclear. Whether somebody picked us up or the Army or—yeah, I sure don't recall. I can probably find out.

MQ: How far do you remember about that time?

FT: Well, I remember getting on the train. There was a lot of Army security—I mean, guards with weapons. But, as I recall, to me it was just going someplace, a train ride so to speak, not realizing where we're going or anything like that.

MQ: How old were you in that time?

FT: Ten years old, I think.

MQ: I heard that for most kids in that time, during that age, it was something new. It was like a trip.

FT: Yeah, you really don't, I guess. You don't realize the impact. You packed your clothes. Your family is together. You're on the train. And, of course, they had security on both ends of the train, with a guard on each end. I still remember we had some young teenage gals, I guess they were. The guard was typical young, flirting with the girls. So, I thought, to me, was just, Ease the tension.

MQ: Where was the first place your family was sent to?

FT: That was Pinedale Relocation Center, I guess they called it.

MQ: How were the living conditions?

FT: Well, as I recall, it was just like an Army barracks. Except they were divided into five rooms, and each family was assigned a room. They had a community bathroom, mess hall, and I know they had two shifts for the meals because, I guess, they had a lot of people. They had guards, of course, barbwire around the camp, and then they had the tower guards. Oh, there were rumors that the guard would shoot you if you even got close to the fence. We had softball, baseball, and, if the ball rolled-over and if you went to get it, those guards that also walked inside, you had to talk to him, and they'd tell the guard at the tower.

MQ: So, were kids afraid to pass through the guards?

FT: Yes.

MQ: So fear was enforced? By who?

FT: Well, I think it was a general community feeling—

MQ: To be in the inside.

FT: Yeah, you hear that somebody got shot because he went close to the fence. You know, typical—

MQ: Rumors. Did you see anybody get shot?

FT: No.

MQ: No? It was just rumors.

FT: Rumors, possibly.

MQ: How long did you stay there?

FT: I'm not quite sure. It was—

MQ: Was it a few months?

FT: Couple months, probably three months, something like that.

MQ: During the time that you were there, the three months, how was your family? Was it as close as it was before?

FT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, the thing I recall, being a young child, we took the first shift for breakfast, which was six o'clock. I believe [that's when] we went. Of course, as time went on, we slept in so my dad took six o'clock, and I went his spot, which was at 7:30 or something like that.

MQ: So, your family never ate breakfast together?

FT: No, no. Not that I recall. Because we had that two shift.

MQ: During the time that you were in there, did your dad do any jobs around the camp?

FT: No, no. As I recall, he did not.

MQ: Nor your mom?

FT: No. And kids just played, as I recall. What sticks with me there is they had a lot of baseball games, I guess just to pass the time away. I recall seeing a bat slip out of a player's hand and hit another bystander in the stomach. I heard he, of course, died later. That was the thing I remember from that camp.

MQ: Do you remember how they would organize the games? How did you become involved in them?

[00:20:04]

FT: Well, I never got to play because I was a younger—

MQ: Ten years old.

FT: Yeah. It was more the teenagers at that time who played. I don't know how they got the ball, the bat—maybe the camp furnished them—but that was the main pastime.

MQ: So, you went to school during that time?

FT: No, no.

MQ: No school at all?

FT: No school.

MQ: So actually, your routine was in the morning, just get up in the morning, breakfast, and then what did you do for the rest of the day?

FT: What a kid would do, just play, whatever there is.

MQ: Were you outside most of the time?

FT: Oh, yes.

MQ: And where were your family?

FT: I think my mother stayed inside doing sewing or something like that. I don't know what my dad did. Because he's a very restless man, I'm sure he walked around and talked to people.

MQ: What kind of community was it inside? Because I have heard that camps, they were Japanese Americans from all over California—and other states—and a lot of them had different occupations: some of them were fisherman, some of them were businessmen, some of them lived in rural areas, and some in urban areas. Even though they were Japanese Americans, they came from different communities. So, how did you get along with them? Tensions or anything?

FT: No, I don't recall any tensions or anything in that respect, not at Pinedale.

MQ: Did they, in any way, help you cope with—

FT: No, as I recall, I was just a typical kid not realizing what's coming or anything, just played with whatever friends I can find.

MQ: I was wondering, when you were transferred there, were any of the community where you live, were they transferred with you? Neighbors? Friends of your family?

FT: Yeah, they were in the area, but they weren't in the same—they call it—block. They were possibly a couple blocks from the road, sort of speak.

MQ: I was wondering if your parents saw their old friends again?

FT: Oh, yes, sure.

MQ: So, they were in constant communication with them?

FT: Oh, yeah. I'm sure there was a lot of [that] because they're all from that community, so to speak. But, like I said, they're not—

MQ: They're not the same block.

FT: Not on the same block or could be, as I recall.

MQ: I have read that a lot of them—some saw their neighbors, and they got together during that time. And they used that friendship as reinforcement to handle the time they were in camp. That's I was wondering if your parents had contact with them. Did you have any friends from the old neighborhood that were in the camps with you?

FT: I'm trying to think. I really don't remember that. Because they most have been—yeah, I'm sure that they were—no, I don't remember them specifically, but—

MQ: Okay. What happened after the three months that you stayed there? Where were you sent then?

FT: Then we were relocated to a camp called Tule Lake, which is in Northern California; close to the Oregon border.

MQ: So, what were your feelings during the travel?

FT: I really don't recall how we got from Fresno, or that area, to Northern California, but I'm sure it was a train, again.

MQ: How were you told?

FT: That I don't recall other than my parents saying, this is where we are going. Because I think that—

MQ: Did everyone depart at the same time?

FT: Yeah, yeah.

MQ: Everyone did?

FT: Um-hm. I think depending on where they went. I think there were some that were sent—

MQ: But, was it at the same time or were people leaving before that?

FT: I think they were scattered.

MQ: Scattered.

FT: Segregated times, as I recall.

MQ: So, your parents just told you it's time we have to leave to—

FT: Um-hm.

MQ: Okay. You think you were travelling by train?

FT: Um-hm.

MQ: What happened when you arrived to Tule Lake?

FT: Other than getting assigned to the barracks again, it was same typical set-up: the room, the community bathroom—of course, the women and the men were separates. They had one mess hall that is only one shift this time. And, as I recall, we were at the most northern part. There was a big irrigation ditch or something that was dry that separated us from the rest of the camp, as I recall.

MQ: Apart from arriving by train, you remembered what happened. What were the barracks like? What were the conditions like inside?

FT: Well, of course, a bare—I think, it had one pot stove in the center and beds, of course, mattress. I think we had to furnish our own bedding, as I recall. Other than that—

MQ: Do you remember what time you arrived?

FT: No, I don't.

MQ: You don't remember your first night there?

FT: No, I don't.

MQ: When you arrived, were people living there already?

FT: No, just everybody is new.

MQ: So, everybody arrived at the same time?

FT: Roughly around the same time.

MQ: So, there must be mass confusion?

FT: Well, I don't recall, when we first got to the camp, how they assigned or how you checked in or assigned the barracks or anything like that, other than I knew we had—our block was called 56. Our room was D, I think it was. Yeah, it was just one room; Of course, the roof was a high point, and there's no ceiling. So, whenever there was an argument in the next room—

MQ: Everybody could hear it.

FT: Yeah.

MQ: What about the next day?

FT: No, I sure don't remember. The only thing I kind of remember about the camp was just there was a school to go to. Other than that, it just like living: we eat, we play, go to school. I guess, it's just like now where you go to school, you come home. Except, you're enclosed in a barbwire fence, sort of speak.

[00:30:07]

MQ: What did your parents do during that time?

FT: As I recall, my mom just did whatever in the house, sewing or like she set-up curtains where our beds were. Not exactly a curtain, like blankets so you'd have a little privacy.

MQ: How many people were in the barrack?

FT: There were just five.

MQ: How old were your brothers and sisters?

FT: Let's see, my brother is four years younger, so he was six, and my younger sister about four, I think, at that time.

MQ: When you were there, there was no schooling at first?

FT: At first, there was no school when I first got there. I think as things settled down, then they—I don't know if it's the state of California or who but they had class, regular grade school. I'm not sure about high school. They must have. But anyway, I was in the fifth grade then.

MQ: Was it a few weeks or months before you started school? Do you remember who started the classes? Were there Anglos that came in?

FT: Yes, yes.

MQ: Anglos came in?

FT: Anglos, there were Anglo teachers. They had Japanese aides—I guess you can call it.

MQ: What was your typical school day?

FT: I know it was a full school day. But, for lunch, whether we were given lunch or went to the mess hall—no, we must have been given lunch at the mess hall for school. But, it was a typical full day school. In fact, the desks were similar to these here.

MQ: What were the conditions at school, as far as you remember?

FT: I thought they were—

MQ: Did you have supplies? Everything was ready—

FT: Supplies, yes.

MQ: I've read that a lot of the schools started with no supplies at all. There were no desks, chairs, no pencils, no—actually, nothing. And the first teachers that taught were Japanese Americans who had graduated from school but were not able to teach.

FT: No, as far as—these were Anglo teachers—well, I had a lady instructor, of course.

MQ: They were all women?

FT: Well, the ones I had were women. It couldn't have been men because I think the men were out fighting the war so it must have been all women. As I recall, this teacher is very sincere. She tried to teach.

MQ: Was there any emphasis in assimilation to the American way?

FT: No, no, no. Just typical—

MQ: History?

FT: History, math—

MQ: General history?

FT: General: math, English.

MQ: Did you participate in any plays?

FT: No, no. No, we did not.

MQ: So, as far as the conditions in school, everything was available; all the supplies were there?

FT: Yes, as far as I recall, yes. I had no difficulties for getting writing material.

MQ: What were your feelings toward the teacher? How long were you there in school?

FT: I believe roughly a year.

MQ: You were just there a year?

FT: Just about a year. Just prior to this I was trying to figure out—it says 1943 is when we went to camp.

MQ: Um-hm.

FT: And they left camp in about '44, as I recall, so it was approximately a school year.

MQ: So, the emphasis was sort of—everything was general?

FT: Um-hm.

MQ: And the teachers were just—how would you say the teachers felt toward the Japanese Americans?

FT: To me, she was—

MQ: She was not different from any other teachers you had before?

FT: No. To me, she was trying to teach you whatever subject matter was.

MQ: Uh-huh.

FT: Well, since she lived in the outside area, of course, as I recall, she told us about the area outside about the rattlesnakes, et cetera. When her friends found a pair of boots laying in the trash, she picked them up, put them on, and I guess a rattlesnake jumped and bit on the boot. The fangs were still stuck in there, so the boot scratched his leg. I guess he had a severe snack bite. (laughs) So, don't do that—I mean—you know, those kinds of things. As far as subject matter, I don't recall too much about what subjects were covered.

MQ: She used to say the Pledge of Allegiance in the class?

FT: Yes, yes. I remember doing that. There was no—

MQ: Was there any talk about the war during that time in class?

FT: No, no.

MQ: None at all?

FT: Not that I recall.

MQ: What was the relationship with the teacher with the students in the class? Do you think she treated them fairly, no anti-feelings? Was it a close relationship with the teacher?

FT: In my opinion, it was because I don't recall any incidents or anything that would prove otherwise. Since we had the aide there, if a student had difficulty with English, she was there to assist.

MQ: So, the kids didn't feel the impact of war during that time? Did you feel any resentment inside the camp?

FT: Well, I did not see it. I know for a fact that there were—well, the—I don't know if it's the Japanese custom or what, but normally, they keep things away from the children. I mean, my parents did. They wouldn't discuss war things or things like that in front of the children. If they did, it must be amongst themselves. But, as I recall, there was nothing that—I know that there was a lot of resentment from other people saying that why did they put us in this relocation center, yet they want us to join the Army and go fight for them, things like that.

MQ: What did your father do during that time? Was he employed inside the camp?

[00:40:00]

FT: You know, I think he was. He was a carpenter, I think. Thinking back now, I think he was a carpenter. But, as time went on, they needed farm laborers working not out on the coast, back in inland area.

MQ: I know a lot of farmers needed workers because of the war, a lot of workers went to factories, and I know that they needed a lot of workers from the camps.

FT: Yeah, so then my dad volunteered.

MQ: He wasn't paid?

FT: When he was a carpenter in the camp?

MQ: Uh-huh.

FT: Yes, I think he was, but I don't recall how much, very minimal, I think. Well, in those days laborers didn't make much! Yes, I'm sure he was paid. But, that kept a lot of the people occupied when they were doing whatever work they were. As far as the other people, I know the older men they got to leave the camp and go to go to the mountains. They'd come back with sagebrush. Of course, that was only dried sage, but they'd take the bark off, and then they'd sand it, polish it. You know, those kinds of things. Some were even brave enough to catch a rattlesnake, put them in a cage. I mean, just to keep occupied, I guess.

MQ: In the time that you arrived, and in the time that you left camp, was there any changes around the camp? Any improvements?

FT: Uh, improvements? I would say—

MQ: For example, at Manzanar, they constructed dams, they built a beautiful garden, they did a lot of projects inside the camp.

FT: Inside the camp?

MQ: Yeah, to improve the living conditions in there. I was wondering if the same thing happened in Tule Lake.

FT: I sure don't recall anything. No, I don't recall anything. I know they had dances—what was it? Friday nights? Some nights they used to have dances. Then they had movies.

MQ: What kind of movies were they showing?

FT: Abbot and Castillo, as I recall.

MQ: Comedy.

FT: Comedies, yeah, comedies. Yeah, that was—

MQ: Was it a family thing when the movie was shown?

FT: No, it's mostly—the older Issei, unless it's a Japanese movie, they just stayed at home. It would be just the children and the younger—

MQ: So, was your family affected by this?

FT: No, no, I don't think so.

MQ: Comparing your family life before the camps and in the camps, what was the difference?

FT: Oh, in the camp, they had nothing to lose, so to speak. But, before the war, of course, they were busy on the farm, daylight to dusk.

MQ: Okay, before the war, was your mother working with your father in the fields?

FT: Um-hm.

MQ: So, they were pretty busy working?

FT: Yes.

MQ: Okay, who took care of your brothers and sisters and you?

FT: No one.

MQ: You stayed home or were you in the fields with your parents?

FT: Yeah, they'd take us out to the fields and set us aside in an area to play or whatever. Once they picked the crop and they'd take it to the shed and they sort it and put it in boxes, of course, they'd take of there.

MQ: So, you saw a lot of your parents during the time before the war? Was there a difference during the camp?

FT: Well, I'd say, I saw them less because I'd be playing more with—

MQ: Involved in school.

FT: School and things like that. You know, you wouldn't be home all the time with your parents. My parents, of course—my dad, he used to go to the market really early in the morning, I wouldn't normally see him until the afternoon or something like that.

MQ: What was the relationship with your father?

FT: Well, being—

MQ: A lot of kids during that time looked up to their fathers.

FT: During the camp, you mean?

MQ: No, during that age.

FT: Oh, that age?

MQ: Yeah, they look up to their father a lot. The camp helped or maybe changed you a little bit?

FT: Well, looking back, I think being Nisei, I think, he was more concern with making a living, so to speak. So, I hardly saw him. Because, as far as playing, there was no free time, as I recall. I got to go to the market with him a few times, of course. The only time I saw him is when I needed discipline. My mother would tell my dad, and, of course, he would come and whack me or whatever. (laughs) But, I guess that's the typical—as I recall—Japanese way of raising children.

MQ: I wondering, I know during that time, a lot of Issei took their incarceration as it can't be helped. They justified the incarceration because they were Japanese citizens. I was wondering, you being a Nisei, do you feel any—I know that a lot of Nisei people felt that, during the incarceration, that if they could assimilate more into the American way they could cope with it?

FT: Yeah.

MQ: Was there any emphasis in assimilation to the American life during the camps?

FT: Yeah, I think—well, the camp, itself, was not Japanese culturally set-up that way. It was the way we were being raised at that time, going to American school—well, as far as I'm concerned, I was never forced on the Japanese culture, et cetera. Later on in life, of course, they said, Well, why should I go to Japanese school? I'm fine here.

MQ: As far as the community in the camp, did they talk Japanese more than English?

FT: Yes.

MQ: Or was it—

FT: Well, it would be typical—if we were in the outside community, the older Japanese ladies and men would be speaking Japanese; the kids would be speaking English. The child would normally speak Japanese to the parent. When the child would speak to his friend, it would be in English.

[00:50:05]

MQ: I remember now, you were telling me that you saw your parents far less than before; you were always outside.

FT: Um-hm.

MQ: You being seven years old, being in the company of kids who spoke more English than Japanese, do you think it affected your knowledge of Japanese language?

FT: Not that much because my parents would still speak it.

MQ: What about culturally?

FT: Well, culturally, it could have I'm sure.

MQ: Not the language. You don't think that by being in the company and speaking more English, it affected your Japanese language, but culturally, you think it did?

FT: Yeah, well, I think you don't have the culture in camp as you would outside. Like you'd have the festivals and stuff like that. I don't recall discussing this is a religious holiday or things like that.

MQ: What about, many people see camp as, well, at first they see it as this is life, live with it, and they didn't see anything wrong with it. From the beginning of time, they had school, they had the usual play, and everything. But, were you aware of the wires surrounding you?

FT: Yeah, I was aware. But, I think in Tule Lake, we were able to—within the area of the camp—go out beyond the fence and hunt for Indian relics like the arrowheads and things. And they had an Army riffle range someplace, and we used to go pick up the bullet, come back and polish the copper on there. There's lead in the inside so we used to have a little wire melt the lead and put the wire on and make necklaces and things like that.

MQ: I have read that a lot of kids, teenagers weren't resentful at first, but then, they realized, I can't buy hamburgers. I can't wear certain clothes because they are not available or go to the movies when I want to or go to the drugstore. They resented that they weren't able to do a lot of stuff that they did before. That's when they realized what it meant to be in camp. Was there a point when you—

FT: I think because I was not quite to that age—yeah, I was still back with the little kids, so to speak, you're just happy with what you got. You don't realize what's out there.

MQ: Do you think you had more free time, more freedom during the time you were in camp versus the time before camp?

FT: Freedom?

MQ: Uh-huh. You were telling me that before camp, school and the fields with your parents, and then home.

FT: Yeah, I think that you would have more free time; there's no chores to do. You'd go out, just as long as you make it home in time to eat.

MQ: Do you think the freedom in any way disrupted the family?

FT: No, I don't think so.

MQ: You don't think so?

FT: No.

MQ: What about what you saw in teenagers, if you remember anything?

FT: I really don't recall seeing teenagers, as such. Yeah, I don't—thinking back—gosh, I hardly remember seeing any older teenage children.

MQ: Did you see much of your brothers and sisters?

FT: Oh, yeah, every—

MQ: You did? Because you were telling me, you wake up early, go to the mess hall. Was your entire family with you in the morning during breakfast time?

FT: I think still we ate separate.

MQ: Everybody ate separate.

FT: I'd probably go with a friend, as I recall, or whoever, a young kid. _____ (inaudible).

MQ: Was the relationship with your mom changed in any way?

FT: No, I don't think so.

MQ: Did they have any vocational classes there?

FT: Geez, I sure don't recall.

MQ: Did your parents have any schooling in the camp?

FT: No.

MQ: About the time you were there, you were in the camp for a year.

FT: In Tule Lake, about a year.

MQ: Were there any problems?

FT: No. Toward the end of my stay there, I think the camp was changing. They were bringing in the people that wanted to go back to Japan. And then, prior to that, they had this, for the young men at the end of the war, they would fight for the country, they would not _____ (inaudible) there was a lot of dissension. I've seen results where, this gentleman had a different view and next day I saw him, he was all bandaged up. Being that young, I don't—

MQ: Impact you.

FT: Impact? Well, I was scared of what was going to happen.

MQ: So, you didn't feel any fear coming from the parents?

FT: No, at that time, my dad had already left and was working out in the fields.

MQ: So, was he out in the fields during the week. Did he come back on the weekends?

FT: Oh, no, he was out in the state of Oregon, eastern Oregon. We never saw him, for three, four months, I think.

MQ: Three, four months?

FT: Yeah, something like that.

MQ: So, during the time that your father was out, how was your family life? Your mom, how did she manage?

FT: Well, I'm sure it was difficult for her that he wasn't around to discuss matters or whatever.

MQ: She disciplined you?

FT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, (laughs) yes, probably.

MQ: She became the head of the family during that time.

FT: Yes. I remember before my dad left, he told me he was going to be gone working so—

MQ: When your father told you he was leaving, how did you feel? Did you have any fear that he wasn't coming back?

[01:00:00]

FT: Yeah, you kind of wonder, you know, hope everything is going to be okay and nothing happens.

MQ: Did he tell you where he was going? What he was going to do?

FT: He might have told us where, but we wouldn't relate to what area. He said he was going out to work on farm somewhere.

MQ: Of course, your mother is going to feel anxiety and fear, and, after your father left, she took over. What was your relationship with your mother after that? Did it change? Your father is the main head, and then suddenly, your mom is.

FT: No, it still—I think that I changed that I would mind her.

MQ: Did you see your mother the same way?

FT: Yeah, yeah.

MQ: Did your father and your mother have equal responsibilities?

FT: No, I think my dad—

MQ: Usually it's the father—

FT: Father.

MQ: What happened after he came back?

FT: Oh, he never came back. He stayed out; they started farming.

MQ: So, he was where?

FT: Eastern Oregon.

MQ: Eastern Oregon. Your family joined him later on?

FT: Yes.

MQ: When exactly were you told you were leaving the camps? Or how were you told?

FT: Well, he made me a car, a wooden car with wooden wheels. As I recall, he was putting the wheels on when he told me that he was going out to work out in the fields. Said that's something that he's got to do. "You're the oldest so just take care of things."

MQ: Okay. After your father left, how long did you stay at the camp?

FT: Just guessing I'd say, (pauses) oh, maybe six months or something like that.

MQ: Six months?

FT: Approximately.

MQ: Did the community change during that time?

FT: At the camp, yes.

MQ: How?

FT: It's getting violent.

MQ: More violent?

FT: Yeah, all of a sudden, changes about whether they should go to war—I mean, the young people.

[recording paused]

MQ: Okay, so it was getting more violent? What year was that?

FT: I think it was '44.

MQ: Yeah, that's the year.

FT: Yeah—well, like I mentioned that's when the people that wanted to go back to Japan, they were bringing [them] from all the other camps into Tule Lake. They had this voting thing—that was earlier, of course, at the year. There was a lot of dissension. I think during that time, my dad was calling us to come out.

MQ: Oh, he called you?

FT: Later, or whatever it was, that he was going to bring us out to the farm or the country.

MQ: Were you informed by your mother that you were leaving?

FT: Yes.

MQ: What did she tell you?

FT: "We're going to see Papa." (laughs)

MQ: How was your trip? Did your mom decide we're leaving this day, we're taking the train, or did your mom require help from someone to raise the trip?

FT: It must have been some help because we had to get bus tickets and pack the little clothes we had. I don't recall that part, other than getting on a bus. It was a long trip. Come to think of it, it's only—it must have been Klamath Falls, Oregon, where we caught the bus—or it could have been. Yeah, it must have been Klamath Falls. Anyway, we had to catch a Greyhound bus, as I recall.

MQ: During the camp, did you have any contact with the Anglo community?

FT: No.

MQ: Apart from your teachers?

FT: No, that was it.

MQ: And that was just a professional teacher/student relationship.

FT: Um-hm.

MQ: So, what about the trip?

FT: We had to sit in the back of the bus.

MQ: You had to?

FT: Um-hm.

MQ: Was your mother told?

FT: Yeah, I think the bus driver told us where we would be sitting.

MQ: Where you be sitting, that's what he told you?

FT: Yes.

MQ: Were you the only Japanese on the bus?

FT: Well, there was another man. He sat next to us.

MQ: Did you feel any tension during the trip?

FT: Oh, yes.

MQ: A lot of tension?

FT: A lot of people staring type of thing. At some bus stop, my mom got off to get a drink for my brother and sister. Typical, she didn't get waited on till right before the bus was going to leave, she got her drink.

MQ: How many stops did you make on the trip?

FT: I don't recall. I remember I was at one rest stop, I guess you can call it in those days.

MQ: So, there was a lot of anti-feelings?

FT: Yes.

MQ: That was the year 1944. How were you received when you arrived? Of course, your father was at the station?

FT: Was he there? I don't recall now. I know that part of the war, we had these two young men working with us; they were also out in the farm. They may have come pick us up. No, my dad was there. No, he was there.

MQ: He was there?

FT: Yeah, yeah. The three of them came and picked us up.

MQ: They were the ones that worked with your father before the war?

FT: Um-hm.

MQ: Were they at the camp at the same time?

FT: In a different area.

MQ: So, they probably had contact with your father.

FT: Oh, yeah. Oh, differently.

MQ: Do you think your father had any resentment, any bitterness during the time he was in camp?

FT: Oh, I'm sure he did. Like I said, they never expressed their feelings toward us. Especially not knowing where they are going to go.

MQ: Was your father working in his farm? Or was he working as an employee somewhere?

FT: At first he was an employee.

MQ: When he asked your family to go meet him, he had his farm at that time?

FT: Yeah, they were—oh, my goodness, they must have been about five or six people got together. They pooled whatever money they had, rented a farm, got the equipment, and—

MQ: Uh-huh. So, by the time you went there, was there another family?

[01:10:00]

FT: No—well, there was families but no one that we knew. Basically, it was just the people that was living with us prior to the war.

MQ: The bachelor men?

FT: Bachelors, yes. They were still making their own food and all that. We had a home—see, when we first got there, we had a home and just our family was living there. And the other farmers were all living near the farm.

MQ: Was it a remote area?

FT: Yeah.

MQ: When did you start school after that?

FT: Shortly after that.

MQ: Did you see any difference?

FT: Oh, definitely. It was all Anglos. There was a lot of resentment, prejudice. In fact, the whole town—you'd go into town, you'd see signs, No Japs Wanted or Not Allowed. Things like that. It was typical, we had some students that were very friendly and the others were all—

MQ: What about your school curriculum? Was it different from the camp?

FT: Well, it was sixth grade so, of course, they had different subjects. As far as teachers, I thought they were very—

MQ: You had a typical student / teaching relationship.

FT: You had no resentment, no prejudice, or anything like that.

MQ: Did you feel that you had to assimilate more?

FT: Yeah, I would think so.

MQ: In what ways?

FT: Well, you're more—you look around, you see hardly any Asians.

MQ: Did you have many friends?

FT: Well, I had many—as time went on, first it was very hard were there was a few that came and talked to you. As time went on, of course, you got to know other people. There was still a very select that were prejudice.

MQ: I was wondering if you had to assimilate more. What I meant was in the dressing form; the way you may have acted.

FT: I think you're more reserved. You're not as bold, I guess you can say, as before.

MQ: A lot of the Japanese American—Nisei—feel that they had to assimilate more. They stopped speaking Japanese and talked more English, and they felt resentment toward their culture.

FT: I didn't feel resentment toward my culture.

MQ: You think your _____ (inaudible) principles stayed the same as before?

FT: I think so.

MQ: It's just more quiet.

FT: Well, yeah, I'm normally on the quiet side, anyways, as far as dress, being typical Issei family, nothing fancy like the kids nowadays.

MQ: I know that a lot of Japanese Americans felt that they had to Americanize 100 percent, at the expense of their Japanese heritage. How many Japanese Americans that you went to school with?

FT: Oh, there were—

MQ: In your class?

FT: In my class? There was none. I think there was about two or three scattered around.

MQ: Were you in contact with them in school?

FT: No.

MQ: None at all?

FT: I just walked with the class. Maybe it is one of those things that you would like to go speak to them but yet you may cause a little resentment by, you know.

MQ: So, you feel that you were mistreated?

FT: Yeah, I think so. You'd have the fear of causing problems or getting in trouble.

MQ: What was your attitude during school? Do you think you studied more than before?

FT: No.

MQ: Equally?

FT: Equally, yeah, being what I am. _____ (inaudible) to excel. But then, we left that area, and we moved seventeen miles away. Then I attended a real country grade school, two classrooms with four grades in each type of thing. People were a little different there, for some reason.

MQ: Were they move open there?

FT: Open.

MQ: Friendly.

FT: Friendlier. I don't know if it is just because of the small community or what. I think it was from seventh through eighth grade there. We went back to high school back to the original town when I first came out. The thing is time changed it quite a bit. Except the Japanese people; there were more coming.

MQ: Do you think the camps affected you in any way? In your thinking?

FT: Well, not in my thinking. I think I was too young to understand all that.

MQ: How about in later years? Have you ever thought about it?

FT: Yeah, I thought, Well, if it wasn't for the war, what would I be doing? If there was no war, maybe we'd still be back at the same ole area near Seattle and whatever we were doing? I thought maybe the war helped a lot of us Nisei to get away from the normal farming type of life.

MQ: It probably opened you up more.

FT: Yeah.

MQ: So, you think it had a positive effect?

FT: Yeah, I think so. As I look back, I think getting into the military really opened up your vision of the world because you got to travel.

MQ: You were in the military?

FT: Yeah. In other words, if you stayed on the farm in the local community, I think that's all you'd see.

MQ: It opened you to different opportunities.

FT: Sure.

MQ: So, it actually did help you.

[01:20:00]

FT: Yeah, I think so.

MQ: As time went by, did your parents talk about it about their experience? Have they ever talked to you about it?

FT: No.

MQ: Never, at all?

FT: Nothing about camp.

MQ: So, it was camp. After that, nothing else?

FT: That was it. Yeah, there was nothing, as I recall, discussed or anything. Just typical farming after the war; doing farming, purchasing land, of course, and so forth.

MQ: Did you ever feel that your experience in camp—you went to a university or college later on?

FT: Yes, I went North University here El Segundo, L.A., anyway.

MQ: You think that your experience helped you get more education, understand it better or—

FT: Well, yeah, I think it did. Well, being from the old country, that's all your parents talk about is school. No matter what, you go to school. I think it broadens your vision of what's out there. If you didn't, you'd probably only have a vision of farming.

MQ: So, by the end of camp, being aware of what is happening—even though you were still a kid, the little tensions there were, but being aware of the other Japanese American community, you were more aware of what life had to offer?

FT: Um-hm.

MQ: Is that what you mean? So, it actually opened your eyes.

FT: It opened a lot of people's.

MQ: It did not affect you culturally?

FT: No, no, I still support whatever festivals that the church would have or anything like that.

MQ: A lot of people have reversed—before that, they didn't practice their culture that much. After the camp, the reversed it—they said they practiced their culture more than before and are aware of it more than before.

FT: Well, I became more aware of the culture, yes. As you get older, of course, you get exposed.

MQ: A lot of people kind of feel that the camp was trying take away the culture, and they had a lot of resentment from that time. So after, they changed their way. Some of them moved to Japan and some of them went into communities, and they practiced their Japanese culture even more than before. I was wondering if you felt any—

FT: No, no.

MQ: Everything went more like before.

FT: Yeah.

MQ: You're just more open to life, to the community available?

FT: Sure.

MQ: Positive effect.

FT: Yeah, I think so.

MQ: How about your dad, did he emphasize—apart from education, they always emphasize education? Did he emphasize opportunities outside?

FT: I don't think he knew of all the opportunities they were, but any schooling he would back 100 percent.

MQ: He never felt that you had to follow his steps?

FT: No.

MQ: No? Because a lot of Japanese follow their parents steps.

FT: Well, I'm sure he wanted somebody to stay and farm. But, of course, once you go to school, you have a different outlook. You don't want to go back and farm.

MQ: After the war and after college, have you ever thought about it? Not at all?

FT: No. It's gone. I don't dwell on it or anything. Well, of course, when you read the newspaper—when we went to Manzanar, there's a creek or whatever, yeah, I like to

see what it used to look like. If there's any buildings left and things like that. It's just curiosity. I wonder if it looks the same as Tule Lake, that sort of thing.

MQ: Do you think that what happened to Japanese Americans during the war can happen again to anyone?

FT: No, I don't think so.

MQ: Why?

FT: I think the government is more aware of the situation rather than in self panicking because of a race of people.

MQ: So, you just think what happened is because of panic of war? You don't think it was resentment against—

FT: Yeah, there was resentment. From what I've heard, the Japanese from that part of the world was just about taking over the coast as far as businesses, farms.

MQ: So, they resent it, and they used it as a scapegoat?

FT: As part of the scapegoat.

MQ: So, you don't think it could happen again?

FT: No, I don't think so. In my opinion.

MQ: Do you think other Japanese American should be aware of it?

FT: I think so. It's history they should be aware of it.

MQ: Why?

FT: My part of the generation has gone through it.

MQ: Do you think they would appreciate it more?

FT: Sure, I think so. As time goes on, the generation changes.

MQ: Do you think this generation has Americanized more?

FT: Sure. The culture is slowly getting lost, I think.

MQ: So, you think they are not that culturally aware?

FT: That's right.

MQ: When do you think that started happening?

FT: I think you get more Americanized. Well, I'm a Nisei—like the Sansei, fourth generation—

MQ: Culturally, it just continues.

FT: You probably have a little bit but not a total cultural thing.

MQ: Do you have any kids?

FT: Yeah, I have one.

MQ: Is he aware of what happened?

FT: Geez, I really—no. Oh, yeah, he's aware. Being what he is, next generation, *so what* type of thing. (laughs)

MQ: Well, Mr. Tomiyoshi, thanks a lot for the interview. The Japanese American Oral Project at California State University, Fullerton appreciates your time and cooperation. Thank a lot.

FT: No problem.

END OF INTERVIEW