CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with SUE KUNITOMI EMBREY

Interviewed

By

Tim Carpenter

On

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CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: SUE KUNITOMI EMBREY

INTERVIEWER: Tim Carpenter

DATE: November 21, 1995

LOCATION: Los Angeles, California

PROJECT: Japanese American

TC: This is an interview with Sue Embrey by Tim Carpenter for the Cal State Fullerton Oral History Project of the Cal State Fullerton history class. The interview is being conducted here at Sue's home at—what's your address Sue?

SE: Los Angeles.

TC: On November twenty-second, and it currently is 1:57 p.m.

SE: No, November twenty-first.

TC: November twenty-first. (chuckles) And we're ready. Sue, thank you again for taking time to share with us. We wanted to begin today's interview to talk a little bit about you and growing up. And if we can, maybe an open-ended question to start with—if you could share with me a little bit of how your relationships with your family and friends help shape you politically, and your development, when you were a young woman.

SE: Well, I'm not really sure, except, I was born in Los Angeles just outside of what is now Little Tokyo on the east side, and I was the sixth child of a family of eight children. My father came here after having spent several years in Hawaii as a plantation worker. From what I know, he left Japan because he was eligible for the draft, and he didn't want to go fight the _____ (inaudible) Japanese war so it must have been about 1904.

TC: So, there's an anti-war gene sitting in there.

SE: Yeah, somewhere around there. And it was unusual for the oldest son to leave the family, because they used to get the land and whatever property the parents had owned at the time. So, that when I went to visit Japan in '74—I think 1974—my

cousin took me out and pointed to the fields behind his house that would have belonged to me father, but [the fields] went to my cousin's father who was the youngest son—one of the younger sons, I'm not sure which one. But anyway, he said, "This would have all belong to you and your family if your father had stayed in Japan but he didn't. He left there and went to Hawaii and worked there. I guess he was like a contract laborer that they were sending over from Japan.

TC: What was your father's name?

SE: My father's name is Gomshichi, G-o-m-s-h-i-c-h-i, Kumitomi. And he came from an area from southern Japan called Okayama; it's a prefecture. And the area that he was born was a rural area but is now incorporated as part of the city of Yokoyama. Interesting place, it has Folk Art Museum of Japan. It has a Folk Toy Museum and one of the most modern museums of art in Japan, all located in that area.

TC: Is this where he met your mother?

SE: My mother was also in the same area. Not the same village but Yokoyama, also. And she came to the United States as a picture bride to my father. She knew him but she wasn't really that well acquainted, but she knew all the family. I don't think they were cousins or related, but their last names were the same. They're both Kumitomi.

TC: Wow.

SE: My mother's family, I think, originated somewhere in Kobe or Osaka area. Because when my niece asked for the family crest, they sent for it there, and then they sent a copy to her. We are a ninth generation in the United States in the family line.

TC: The family line?

SE: Um-hm.

TC: And when did your father and mother marry?

SE: They got married around 1915, '16. Something like that.

TC: And you say you're the sixth one?

SE: I'm the sixth one, yeah. I have three older brothers.

TC: That are currently still living?

SE: That are currently living, yeah, and then I have a younger sister and myself. So, there are five of us.

TC: So, can we have the name of those five and then the three that passed away?

SE: My oldest brother is Koichi, K-o-i-c-h-i, but we call him Frank Kunitomi. The second son is Jack. Yoshisuke is the name of a samurai from years ago—my father wanted to name him. So, it's Y-o-s-h-i-s-u-k-e, Yoshisuke. But he goes by initial, Y. Jack Kunitomi, because his Japanese name is too hard to pronounce.

TC: _____(inaudible)

SE: (chuckles) Yeah.

TC: Two down. (chuckles)

SE: The third one is Kiamya, K-i-a-m-y-a, and we call him Kimbo, K-i-m-b-o as a nickname. And my two older brothers are married; Kimbo's not, he's a bachelor. And between them there was my oldest sister who died in 1990. And her name was Choko, C-h-o-k-o. And she came in before Jack and Frank. Then after Kimbo, I had a brother name Hideo—H-i-d-e-o, and we all called him Nibei—and was above me, just above me; he was married and had a daughter when he passes away in 19—gosh, when was it? Sixty-three, I think. He died of cancer at age thirty-nine.

TC: Much too young.

SE: Um-hm. Then I came next. Then I have a younger sister, Midori, M-i-d-o-r-i, who is a widow.

TC: Is your sister still living?

SE: My younger sister, yeah. Then the youngest brother I had was named Tetsuo, T-e-t-s-u-o, and we always called him Tets. And he died during the Korean War. He was in the service. He volunteered at eighteen, and he served the three years. And he reenlisted and then was sent to Tokyo, the occupation troops—I guess it was the occupation troops. And he didn't go into battle. He was in Tokyo, and they don't know what happened. He died of a heart attack. So, he was twenty-two at the time.

TC: Wow.

SE: That's the rest of the family.

TC: Now, original question when we started this afternoon was who helped shaped you a little bit as far as your political growth growing up. You mentioned your father being anti-war, maybe a little bit there?

SE: Yeah, I'm not sure, but my father was very authoritarian with us, anyway, with the kids. Always making sure we followed directions. He didn't like to see any marks other than A on our report cards. And made sure we did our homework and everything. But he was also very good to people. He never said anything to indicate that he was a racist of any kind. He would tell us to fix a sandwich if somebody came

to the door begging for food. We didn't have many of those kinds of people in those days. But once in a while, somebody would come by, "Do you have work? Can you give me some money?" And he'd make them a sandwich and give it to him. He was always good with his neighbors; he never had any harsh words for them. But, also, I think he always felt that people needed to be treated equally.

TC: Did your mother also share that same compassion?

SE: Yeah, she did. When we were children, when my mother died, the letters I got all said, "Your mother looked after us. She made sure we didn't get into trouble, but she always had a smile for us." And I think that was the thing about the both of them. Although my father died before my mother did, she took care of us. I think that in spirit she was a much stronger person over the years. (clears throat)

[00:10:10]

TC: I remember when we had our interview a couple years back, you talked a little bit about a school teacher that had an impact on you, can you revisit that a little bit? Do you remember that?

SE: Oh, yeah. He was a Japanese schoolteacher. That's right. I went all the way through to the eleventh grade in Japanese school, which was an hour after public school.

TC: So, you had your regular public school.

SE: So, it was the regular public school every day, Monday through Friday. And then we had an hour of Japanese school afterwards, and then we had an hour on Saturday. And he was one of these bilingual, very intellectual person. (cat meows in the background) You want to go out? (asks the cat)

TC: For the transcriber, that's her cat. This teacher, what was his name?

SE: I don't remember his name.

TC: Okay.

SE: He was the last teacher I had. And he said to me that he thought I was going in a different direction than most of the other students. But he didn't say what it was. He said, "I think you are going to go away from the community." I guess he meant being within that Japanese community; about me moving out.

TC: Free spirit.

SE: Yeah, I guess, I don't know. The other teacher was—from what everyone used to gossip, at least my parent's group—was a Communist.

TC: But you didn't know—

SE: I didn't know that. They used to say he was *aka*, meaning red. But, he never indicated in class any of that kind of—except, he was progressive.

TC: And what year are we in right now? What time frame?

SE: That would be, probably—

TC: Middle thirties?

SE: Yeah, '35 through '38, '39. The last year I kind of stopped going to Japanese school because I was in my senior year in high school. I had a lot of writing to do—a lot of homework and stuff—and I would go to the library. It was about an hour between public school and Japanese school, so I would just keep moving without getting off on the streetcar. We used to have streetcars—go to the library and study or get books or something. So, by the time I got out of there, it was late. I had to sneak in, but it would be like half an hour class for me.

TC: When did you ultimately find out that he was a member of the Communist Party?

SE: I think probably when the war started, because he was picked up by the FBI.

TC: So, by '41?

SE: Forty-one, after December. I think, in fact, they picked up all the schoolteachers, all the Japanese schoolteachers because they were considered suspicious; because they were teaching Japanese.

TC: Were most of the teachers Issei, then?

SE: Yeah, they were Issei. These two were bilingual.

TC: These gentleman also broke away from the Issei tradition as well.

SE: Yeah, that's right because most of them don't speak Japanese and most of them didn't have the connection outside the community.

TC: What percentage of the Japanese teachers were members of the Communist Party? Was he the exception, or were a number of them out there?

SE: Oh, I think he was the only one that I know of. I think he was the only one.

TC: So, you've got your father refusing to stay in the military—

SE: Yeah.

TC: —and then you have this social apathy that your mother and father showed for those less advantaged with you growing-up. So, these were some of the seeds, then, that are going to spread—

SE: I guess. And also, (clears throat) I went to a public school, which was very unusual. At least I thought it was for those days. We had a principle and teachers who were sensitive to the fact that we were not going to be able to do a lot of things in that kind of society. (coughs) They made sure we went on fieldtrips. But, they didn't have money to do that through the school so the teacher would carpool us. We would go to the museum, Natural History. We would go to La Brea Tar Pits. We would go on different excursions, because they felt we weren't getting—I guess it would be like culturally deprived is the word they use now days, and so they wanted to—

TC: Culturally challenged?

SE: Yeah, all these things. And in fact, when we were in the last year—this was an elementary school that went to the eight grade in those days, and we had a four year high school—ah, they asked permission from our parents to teach us social dancing. And it went from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. or 4:30 p.m. And they taught us all the steps that other kids would be in. And they said, "When you get to high school, these kids are going to be dancing social dancing and you got to learn. You got to be part of that group." So, we learned how to do Foxtrot and waltz, and I remember something like the Big Apple and all of the other steps that were popular at the time.

TC: The efforts to stimulate you as part of the Anglo population, did they also respect your Japanese culture as well?

SE: Yeah, they did. In fact, during the daytime, during class time, we had Native Americans who came and talked about their culture, and they would have some of the Native dancers come and dance. We had Cinco de Mayo celebrations. And we had Boys Day, which happen to be the same day, May fifth. And then they always did something with the Japanese school. When the Japanese school had some activity going on, they would—

TC: Cultural effort.

SE: Yeah. The kids were the same kids, so they figured they might as well do it and they did it together. So, I think that they tried, they were really trying to get us acculturated to the high school; to the outside society that most of us were isolated from.

TC: The school was outside Little Tokyo?

SE: No, it was right on the edge. In fact, it was two blocks from where I lived and across the street from the Japanese school.

TC: And what do you remember about the population? You said you remember Native Americans coming in, Hispanic—what was the demographics at that time?

SE: It was 99 percent Japanese, and the other 5 percent were Chinese, and a group we call Mexican America at that time. I remember one white boy who was blond, and one girl who was also blond, which turned out to be my best friend. But the young boy was being chauffeured in from somewhere—I don't know where—but his parents felt he needed the experience, so they would bring him to school, drop him off at eight o'clock, and pick him up at three. (chuckles)

TC: This 95 percent you went to school with, how many of that percentage were with you the following hour after school when you did your Japanese—

SE: Most of them, most of them.

TC: So, you stayed together?

SE: Yeah, pretty much.

TC: So, you really didn't have any slings and arrows, any racist slurs your way growing-up?

SE: I don't think so. I think we were pretty well protected from that. If we had spread out more, gone out more to do things where we might have been turned down—some people I know were Boy Scouts, they went swimming and they wouldn't let the kid in because he was Japanese. We had heard of that, but nothing like that in our particular area.

TC: So, nothing that you personally experienced? Word of mouth? You heard it through the grapevine?

SE: Yeah.

TC: I suspect that on December 7, 1941, you might have seen some more overt racism directed your way?

SE: Yeah, yeah, probably. Like going to the movies and people would stare. And one time, I recall one incident walking down outside of Little Tokyo, I think it was, and a woman came by—she was walking toward us, I guess—and she said, "Get off the sidewalk." And she said something about, "Oh, you're Jap," and then she just went on. And that was the only time that I ever had anything like that happen to me, and I was kind of taken aback. I didn't expect it.

[00:20:04]

TC: What do you remember about December seventh? First of all, how old were you? Share your memories of that day.

SE: My mother had purchased a small grocery store.

TC: Your father has passed away.

SE: My father had passed away in '38, before the war. My mother bought a small grocery store, which was owned by a couple who decided to go back to Japan. My mother said she had always wanted to run a business, and this was her chance. So, she bought the grocery store in January of '41, and I was just about to graduate—

TC: From high school?

SE: —from high school, from Lincoln High School when I—

TC: So, you're seventeen, eighteen?

SE: I was eighteen—I had just reached eighteen—and I had an appendectomy. I had an appendix attack just around December, so I was home recuperating. The doctor said I would probably be able to walk in the processional for my graduation, but that I should stay home most of January, which I did. And my mother purchased a grocery store while I was in the recuperation stage. And I had wanted to go on to L.A. Junior—what they had called L.A. Junior College at the time—

TC: Which became a community college.

SE: Yeah, which became a community college. And she said that she would try to arrange it so I could go. But what happened was that when she bought the store, she needed somebody to work in it because she couldn't do it all by herself. So, I—she said, "Let's postpone it, you can go when Dori, my youngest sister, finished. I can really save money by then." That would be a year-and-a-half. So, I said, "Okay." So, I was taking care of the store with her. I was sitting by the doorway listening to the radio, and my mother went next door to make lunch. I heard the radio announcer say, "We interrupt this program to bring you the latest news. Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, has been bombed by Japanese airplanes." I said, "*What?*" And I kept listening, and they kept repeating it over and over—eight o'clock this morning. This was three hours ahead of us, I think.

TC: I believe so.

SE: Yeah, so it was like maybe 11:30 or so—just before my lunch. So, I kept listening and listening, and I finally ran next door and I said, "I just heard on the radio that the Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor. Why?" I said, "Do you know anything about that?" My mother looks at me, "Why should I know anything?" (chuckles) "Oh," she said, "that's just a big joke. I don't think that's true. Japanese wouldn't do that.

Maybe it was the German planes." I said, "No, but they said it had that flag, the flag." "Oh, they probably painted the red flag on there, the Japanese flag. It's probably Germans. Germans were fighting in Europe. They probably wanted to attack the United States." I said, "I don't know." And that's all they kept saying over and over about the attack on Pearl Harbor. I thought, Oh, God, this is going to be terrible. Around afternoon, late afternoon, my brothers started to come home—they had been shooting pool in Little Tokyo. And they all came home and said, You know that they barricaded Little Tokyo streets, and they won't let people in. But, there are so many people coming by just to look.

TC: To gawk.

SE: Yeah, just curiosity.

TC: Now, where was your store in relationship to Little Tokyo?

SE: It would be a long walk, because I think they walked from there. So, we were east of Alameda Street. And Little Tokyo begins at Alameda and goes west to about maybe Main Street. I would say six blocks walk.

TC: Was your residence outside of Little Tokyo as well?

SE: Yeah, it was right next door, and then our house was right next door, so it was outside of Little Tokyo.

TC: So, you were actually moved from the initial—

SE: So, we really didn't see what was going on in Little Tokyo. In fact, I don't think we heard of anybody in our neighborhood being pick-up, because the principle of the Japanese school didn't live in our neighborhood, he lived somewhere else. And so, he would be picked up at home.

TC: So, within hours of the bombing, there was evidence of Japanese Americans that were rounded-up?

SE: Um-hm.

TC: Quote, unquote, agitators?

SE: They, evidently, were having some meetings in Little Tokyo, the chamber of commerce people. There were weddings going-on; all kinds of things. The FBI just came and took the priest, the chamber of commerce president, and the officers, different people that may have been in the shops that were open on Sunday. So, I guess, it was quite a mess from what my brothers were saying. We were just hearing all of this. My mother was hearing this from them, and I was hearing it from them. And they were saying that the streets are blocked now. They can't let people in

because there're too many people gawking around. And they said, It's really true. It really was true that Pearl Harbor was attacked and they were Japanese planes.

So, we were really worried about what was going to happen. But, most of us kept saying, "We are American citizens. They probably can't do anything to us." And my mother was worried that they might pick her up, and I said, "But, what have you done? You haven't been active in anything." She said, "But we give money into the Buddhist temple and Japanese school." But, they didn't pick up the other woman who lived a block away from us who was very active in the women's federation.

TC: Women's federation?

SE: I think of her church there—I'm not sure which one it was.

TC: But a Buddhist church?

SE: Buddhist church, yeah. I'm not sure how they selected the people that they picked up that first night, but evidently, they picked up about two hundred, three hundred of them, and then the weeks that followed because we kept on hearing so and so is picked up, so and so is picked up.

TC: So, now there's a pattern developing?

SE: Yeah, right. But, for us, it was just a shock of hearing about the attack and then wondering what was going to happen. I can't remember whether my mother had money in the bank in our name, my brother's name, or whether it was in her name, so we couldn't take it out. But a lot of bank accounts were frozen—

TC: Assets were frozen.

SE: Yeah, and all the people couldn't take their money out, so they couldn't open their shops. With the head of the household gone, they couldn't do business, many of the stores, so Monday morning, I don't think many places were open.

TC: Do you remember any mass meetings going on at this point in time? Do you remember how your mom was going to get information? How were messages being sent throughout the community at that time? Just word of mouth through the grapevine?

SE: I think it was mostly word of mouth. I think the paper was still publishing, *The Rafu*. At least during that first week.

TC: And that would have been Japanese paper—

SE: Japanese and English, yeah. So, we would get some information from that. But, I don't think there were any mass meetings until, actually, after January. At least not while the evacuation was going on.

TC: So, now we are at the first of the year when talks of evacuation were beginning. What is a young woman of eighteen—

SE: Well—

TC: —for your little filter as what you're picking-up? What do you remember?

SE: I do remember once, my former high school teacher—and I guess my sister was in his class, social studies class—invited us to come to his house for dinner and we went by street car. And I remember being leery about being out in public like that, but nobody bothered us. We all went from Little Tokyo all the way to Highland Park, I think it was, up in the hills. He picked us up at the stop because we had to climb up a hill and go all the way to his house. And he tried to give us assurance that, at least in his point of view, nothing was going to happen, but it was scary because we weren't sure.

And my mother said, "Oh, should I sell the store?" And I said, "Then what will we do for income? We need to keep the store as long as we can." And she said, "We might lose it, you know? And if we have a chance to sell it, we should sell it." And I think what happen was that we finally sold it in March or April because by then the movement had started for people to be moved.

[00:30:10]

TC: February was the order.

SE: February was the order. The first groups that left was around March thirtieth from Bainbridge Island in the state of Washington. They were the first group to be moved.

TC: So, from December seventh through March, you managed to hang on to the—

SE: To the store.

TC: At that point in time.

SE: And then March twenty-first, or just before that, they had what they call the voluntary evacuation where people could pick up and leave if they could find a place to go to. So, people were doing that. But a lot of people were running into resistance from gas stations not selling them gas; hotels not letting them book a room. So the Western Defense Command closed the _____ (inaudible) that no more voluntary movement. And then they issued the first order for Bainbridge Island in Washington State, people to be moved out. They also sent an announcement out for a thousand volunteers to help build Manzanar—

TC: Build your own concentration camp.

SE: Yeah, right. And my brother, my older brother—the one who passed away with cancer—told my mother, "I'm going to volunteer and go, because if we are going to

go, we might has well make things comfortable and I can go ahead and see." So, he quit his job, and he was one of the first to go up there.

TC: Thinking back, what was your advice to your brother? Were you questioning him, why would he want to participate in building our own, or were you at that point in time not forming an opinion one way or another?

SE: I really didn't have any opinion. I just felt like they can't do this. I mean, they can't do this. We are American citizens. And I guess it was mostly not facing the fact that it was already happening.

TC: So, sense of injustice, you were definitely feeling it at this time?

SE: Yeah.

TC: Now your brother's are volunteering. Where is the rest of your family? And are the other members of your family sharing the same type of injustice or are you kind of separating yourself—

SE: No, I think we were all very worried; we weren't sure what was going to happen. But, my other two brothers were home, and they kept their jobs. They didn't quit their jobs. My oldest brother had gotten married and had a six-week-old baby by the time all of this was happening, and he lived in East L.A. So, my mother was worried that they were going to be shipped away first and that we wouldn't see them again. And then, we were the one family outside of Little Tokyo. So, when my brother left, and she said, "Well, we are going to make sure we get to where you are going to be. I don't want to have to let you go and not see you again." And he kept on saying, "Oh, no, no, it's going to be okay. It's going to be all right. We'll be all right." And so, he kept on writing us letters about how horrible it was there, that the wind was blowing, the sand was blowing, there were no windows in the barracks they were sleeping. It was cold at night.

TC: I remember you were saying last time in our interview that there was a labor dispute up there.

SE: Yeah. What happened was that the government asked for volunteers and said that they would give them union scale wages. And all of the unions got angry because you can't do this to non-members. I'm union. And, of course, most of them could not belong to a union because the union wasn't taking Asians. So, they didn't get paid for quite a long time, and I don't even know if he got paid $16 a month or the $12 a month that we would have gotten eventually.

TC: And which brother is the one in Manzanar?

SE: This is the one we called Hideo, the one who died of cancer right after the war.

TC: So, he's in Manzanar, he is writing to you, explaining to you what is going on, and you were trying to hold on to your store.

SE: Yeah, we are trying to hold on to the store. Finally, I guess in April my mother sold it. She sold it to a young couple.

TC: Mexican American?

SE: Mexican American who lived in the neighborhood, who wanted to start a business. They borrowed some money and paid my mother cash for it.

TC: So, you got fair value for it?

SE: Well, we got just the inventory, actually. Nothing in terms of goodwill because nobody would be around, unless new people moved in to the houses we were all vacating and apartments in the neighborhood. So, they took over. I guess we must have been there at least a month before we were given instructions to leave.

TC: So, March we sold; now we are into April, late April?

SE: Yeah. It was all of April, and it was May. We left on May the ninth.

TC: And how did you deal with your home? How did your mom dispersed of your home?

SE: Well, the elementary school was still there, and the principle was still there. But, with the students gone, they would have to close the school up. So, the principle went around to all the neighborhoods and found out exactly what we had to sell and what we could take with us. She called all her friends and other teachers from other schools and said, "Come on down. Let's see if you can help these people by buying their value." So, we were lucky, in a way, we had bought a refrigerator and a stove from the gas company, and we were making payments. It was the first big deal for my mother.

TC: The American Dream.

SE: Yeah, to make payment on the refrigerator and the stove, and we would be able to buy other things later on. We were, I think, almost the last year of our payments, and the principle found a buyer for us. So, we were able to sell the refrigerator, I think, for $75, which was a pretty good deal at the time. The gas stove we sold for like fifty. I don't know if that was enough to cover the payments that my mother paid for them; made the final payments in payments.

TC: Did you own your home or were you renting?

SE: No, we were renting. And most of us were renting at the time. So, we sold all the plants my mother had in pots, and she put them out in the front and people came by

and bought them. We didn't sell any of our furniture because we decided there was a man who was Jewish who had been a friend of ours; he ran a second hand store. We used to call them junk stores, but they were second hand furniture stores.

TC: Sure.

SE: He said, "Look, I'll give you a good price for all this furniture. Why don't you just leave it, and I'll take it and clean out the house for you when you leave." So, my mother thought that was a good idea. So, we had a dining table, chairs, beds, sofas, and whatever, chested drawers, and everything else. We just left whatever we couldn't take. And he piled them up on his truck and took them home with him back to his shop. And then he cleaned the house out so they could rent it to someone else.

TC: And did you ever see that stuff again?

SE: No, never saw him again. I don't know what happened to him, whether he had to move out of that neighborhood or what.

TC: So, you were limited to what you could carry on your back all the way with you to camp?

SE: Right. Although we were lucky, we had neighbors who were Mexican American and they took some of our suitcases. They carried some of our stuff so that we had more than the two—

TC: To Manzanar?

SE: Yeah. Well, they put it on the train for us.

TC: To help you carry?

SE: Um-hm.

TC: Was Santa Anita, then, the relocation center that you went to with your family at that time? Or did you go directly to Manzanar?

SE: We were supposed to go to Santa Anita, all of Little Tokyo was supposed to go to Santa Anita. But, at the last minute—I think it was like Monday or Tuesday before we left, we left on a Saturday—my brother came home and said, "They got to notice that people who have relatives in Manzanar could go to Manzanar."

TC: Your brother is there.

SE: My brother is there. So, my mother said, "That's great." Because when they told us we were going to Santa Anita, my mother said, "No, we can't go there. We have to go to Manzanar." And the government clerks said, "Well, from Santa Anita, you

could probably go to Manzanar, but there's no guarantee where we are going to go." So, my mother said, "Well, let's all sign up to go to Manzanar." So, here we were—

TC: There's seven of you.

SE: Seven of us. My brother, his wife, his baby—and she had some relatives. She had a sister, a brother, she had nephews and nieces. So, we said, "Let's put them all together, and let's all go together." So, my brother signed us all up, and we went that Saturday morning from the old Union Station.

[00:40:08]

TC: In Downtown Los Angeles.

SE: In Downtown. Now, the other people that were leaving for Santa Anita left on a Friday, so we went to see them off. They left from that little street in front of the museum [Japanese American National Museum].

TC: How many people? Hundreds, thousands?

SE: Oh, yeah. It must have been two, three hundred people. We were a whole block, and a whole block had about three hundred people.

TC: For you, at this point in time, was it a sense of adventure? Were you scared? Was it outrage?

SE: Partly we were scared, partly we were excited because they told us we should go out and buy boots, and we should but jeans and overalls. And don't take any fancy clothes because we were going to be out in the desert somewhere. We needed to buy sweaters and jackets and things because it would be cold. And I don't know where my mother got the money to do all this, but she said, "Well, we better buy." And so we did, we had new clothes, in a way. That part was kind of exciting. But, on the other hand, you are saying good-bye to all your friends. Are we ever going to see them again? You know, you just get that awful feeling that maybe this is the last time you are going to see them. That they are going to be somewhere else, and you never get back together in Los Angeles. And my mother cried a lot because all her neighbors were going to Santa Anita, and she was going to be the only one in our block that was going to Manzanar. Although, all the people of Little Tokyo did go to Manzanar; we were all together there.

TC: But, as you were leaving, and you were saying bye to your support network—

SE: Yeah, that's right. And we had some—we had three or four Mexican American neighbors who came to the train depot to see us off. And we had people who were customers for the store who worked around there, who simply didn't understand what was going on. Why was the government doing it? Why didn't they just arrest people

they were suspicious of? I said, "But they did already. We are American citizens and we haven't done anything."

TC: And it just kept coming.

SE: Yeah, and they kept saying they didn't understand. They were wondering why the government was doing it, and I think that was the general feeling for those people who knew us. And there are some, of course, they got fired from their jobs, or they got evicted from their homes from people who were very anti-Japanese and came out after Pearl Harbor. For us it was not that way, I think. At least for our group.

TC: What do you remember about the train ride?

SE: Well, they told us we had to be there at eight in the morning, so all our friends helped us. And we walked. We walked to the train depot because it was fairly close, if I remember. So, we were on Crocker Street, and we had to walk over to Vignes and then cut across to Alameda. Of course, in those days, we always walked, always walked most of the time so it was not such a long walk. But, everyone carried their own luggage, and then our friends carried some duffle bags and things like that we needed, so we were able to take a few extra bag and stuff. And we hung around the train depot, and they had the Jeeps, the soldiers, and military men. I guess they had the military police there checking everybody. They had the Red Cross passing out coffee and things like that. I don't remember if they looked into our suitcase. I don't think they checked our bags. I think they just loaded them all. We each had a family number, so they gave of a tag, and we had a family number that identified our luggage. So, our number was 2614, and then they started from head of household, *a-b-c-d*, all the way for each family. So, I was *d*.

JT: You're six of eight so you're at the top.

SE: Yeah. And because my older brother was married and he had his number, my second brother, Jack and his girlfriend, decided they needed to get married, because her family was living in Hollywood and they were going somewhere else.

JT: So, everyone stay together.

SE: Yeah. So, they went down to the city clerk's office and got married, so she came with us. So, he had a separate number for him, and then the rest of us have 2614. And then I guess they loaded us all on the train and they pulled all the shades down. And if I remember, they were old trains from probably pre-war. Maybe World War I because they had the little gas flame for the lights.

JT: Wow.

SE: Although, we didn't need them in the morning. And so, I remember waving good-bye to all our friends and the young Mexican American, they were young men. Three

or four of them had come and helped us with our luggage hanging on to the chicken wire fence while our train was going by. And then two of the men who worked at the—there was an American Express garage around the corner from us, where all the American Express trucks would go in. I don't think they have that anymore. And two of them had gone out—they were like UPS trucks. They had gone out delivering, and they were coming back. And just as the train was leaving, they pulled up and they honked the horn, kept honking the horn and waving until we couldn't see them anymore. They were the last. And they were the two we had given fishing rods and all the fishing equipment to.

My brother had gone to help Terminal Islanders who were evicted on forty-eight hours' notice in February. So, they had taken all the wholesale market trucks to help them load and get them out of Terminal Island. And they said, "We don't have anything to give you in return for all your help. We don't need anything here. Take all these fishing rods." They gave them all the fishing rods and all the books and everything that had to do with fishing.

JT: _____ (inaudible)

SE: When they brought them home, my mother said, "Well, we're not going to need fishing rods? What can we do?" My brother said, "You never know, they might send us somewhere where we have to catch our own fish for our supper." Oh, my God, how awful. But, at the end, of course, we couldn't take them, so we gave them to these—

[recording paused]

JT: We are continuing our interview with Sue. So, you were on the train. We've said good-bye to your friends. The shades have been pulled down. How long a ride was it?

SE: It took us all day, pretty much. I remember we went through San Fernando Valley and all toward Antelope Valley. Someone got sick on the train, so we stopped for quite a while. And then, an ambulance came and took that person off the train, and after that we started up again. So, I don't know what happened to that person. I don't know whether it was a man or woman or if they had a heart attack, had been ill before and could not take the trip—

JT: So, by the time you got to Manzanar, do you remember if it was light or dark?

SE: It was still light. It must have been since this was May, it was probably a long—sunset was probably later. They told us to get off the train, and then we waited. They said the buses are going to come for us. So, these huge ground type buses came. We got on that, and they took us from the Lone Pine Train Station to Manzanar, which is about nine miles. By the time we got there, it was getting pretty dark, and my brother was waiting for us. Now, we didn't have flashlights or anything. We were kind of

stumbling around in the dark. And they took us to this big room—I guess it was a barrack—and checked us in.

JT: Your first memory of Manzanar when you arrived, were the guard towers up? Was the barbwire up yet?

SE: No, they weren't up.

JT: Okay, so you had your barracks; it sounds like it's pretty barren.

SE: Pretty barren, there's nothing there. Just the barracks and they all looked alike. I can't even remember whether we were toward the entrance of the camp itself, or whether we went in, farther in. But, I think they built the first block of barracks toward the entrance before us. Because after we came through the line—I think they also gave us shots. I think they also gave us tetanus shots. And they had all the rooms all assigned so we knew—we didn't know. My brother knew where we were going.

JT: And your family was assigned as a unit.

SE: As a unit, yeah. So, we had one for my brother, Frank and wife and the baby, another one for my brother Jack and his wife; and then the rest of us were in another room. So, then my sister was also there with her husband—I think they had a separate room. No, they were with us. So, my brother had a flashlight, said, "Okay, let's go find your barrack." And it seemed like we walked and walked and walked on uneven ground of dirt and gravel.

[00:50:19]

TC: I remember that when we were out there.

SE: Yeah. And finally got there. And my brother had stuffed all the mattresses for us, but everybody else in the group that came by train had to stuff their own. They had to go get this long—looked like a pillow case—and go over to the other side of the block and fill it up with hay and then close up the opening and take it back to the barrack. Whereas, my brother had already done it for us, so we were very happy that we didn't have to do that. And so, there were eight cots, and that was it.

JT: That was home, yeah.

SE: That was home, yeah, and a Coleman oil burner in the corner and a bulb of light in the center of the room and that was it. But, there was no closet, no chest of drawers, noting. Nothing on the floor, it was bare wood. Nothing on the wall, except you could see these 2x4s every fourteen or sixteen inches and that was it. It was a cold night. I don't even remember—I think we had blankets.

JT: Probably a blanket at that.

SE: Yeah, probably army blankets, because we didn't take any of our luggage off the train. They said, You're going to have them tomorrow. "Tomorrow? We got to have pajamas for tonight." We didn't have anything, nothing. Toothbrush, nothing.

JT: So, you woke-up that following morning.

SE: Yeah, so we woke-up that following morning. It was nice and bright and cold, and we went to breakfast at eight o'clock in morning.

JT: And what was breakfast? Do you remember?

SE: I can't remember. No, I can't. It's probably coffee and toast. I found out the eggs were powdered eggs.

JT: I'm sure. What is the general atmosphere at Manzanar? Are people in shock, disbelief, anger? How would you describe—

SE: I think we kind of looked around, Where in the world are we? We didn't know where we were. We've never been out of Los Angeles County, most of us.

JT: Just in Little Tokyo.

SE: Yeah. We had not been out into the mountains. I mean, we're not the kind that are going out on recreation trips, so we didn't know where we were, but we saw these huge mountains on one side and the other one on the other side. And I said, "Oh boy, they got us really covered on both sides of the highway." I wondered how long we are going to have to stay there. Somebody said something about, "Well, at the end of the war in six months after that." I said, "But how long is the war going to last?" We didn't know.

JT: So, it was more confusion at this point?

SE: Yeah, I think so, and trying to figure out where we were and what was going to happen to us. And they told us, Well, you are going to have breakfast at a certain time. The bell will ring, go to the mess hall.

JT: Were there efforts at this early juncture at camp, to try to re-establish life as you knew it back in Little Tokyo? Or did you know now that things were not going to be the same as the social traditional prior to the camp were not going to survive? Or did you feel that the community as you knew it was going to survive?

SE: Well, it's funny that—I think people adjust because girls, once they got their luggage, they would dress-up for Sunday, go to church. And we would say, "There goes the Easter parade," because we didn't go to church. But, you'd see all these people using

all of their stuff and flirting with the boys. And everyone wore these sandals. I guess they're called buster brown sandals, brown and white. They are sort of like the Nikes that people wear today but a little bit nicer; brown leather. And they would put their hair up and fancy _____ (inaudible) And I think, especially the young people, dressed and tried to act like things were normal and not changed. They had their own friends, and some of them, of course, the friends were gone but then they still had a few friends.

JT: This was especially the Nisei.

SE: Yeah, especially the Nisei.

JT: Were the Issei more withdrawn, depressed? It sounds like there's a separation beginning within the camps.

SE: Oh, yeah, there was. I think the older people tended—at least the first few months—they were very withdrawn and very worried about what was going to happen. And even though they were there in Manzanar, who knew what was going to happen next, where they were going to be sent and all that. Some people, because they had worked so hard all their lives—twelve hours a day, seven days a week had no vacation—after they got adjusted after maybe, I would say, three or four months, they really got more relaxed and able to do things that they had not done before, just participated in recreational activities. Years later, my mother told me that the first two weeks of camp, she said, "Once all of you went out looking for jobs and doing other things after breakfast." She would walk from Block 20 up to the apple trees, which was I would say was maybe half a mile away. And she said, "I cried every day for two weeks."

JT: Just mourning.

SE: Just crying because she had lost her store, she had lost her future, a way of making any kind of money.

JT: She kept this from you.

SE: She didn't tell us. Yeah, she didn't tell us until years later we were sitting around talking, I think, about one of the pilgrimages that we had gone to. Talking about it and she said that's what she did. She said, "After two weeks, you know, it gets to become kind of stupid." (chuckles)

JT: She wanted to get on with life.

SE: She said, "I decided I better do other things." So, she took care of her first grandson. He was there, so she took care of him. And she took part in the a cappella singing group.

JT: It's amazing, isn't it?

SE: You know, she had not been able to do all of that because she'd been working all her life. So, in a way, it was kind of nice for her, she was relaxing. And got together with all of the other women in the block, and they'd just sit and gossip a lot of time. Something they hadn't done many of them, or didn't have time to do because they are all working.

JT: A lot of time in their hands now.

SE: Yeah, it was a lot of time in their hands. And she, later, when they organized the Red Cross class, she went to that, and she also rolled bandages. They brought bandages, and she spent time rolling bandages for the service.

JT: Did she do any of the nets or any of the camouflage?

SE: No, she didn't do any of that. No, but she wasn't a citizen so she couldn't do that, but she did participate in a lot of things. I think she kind of enjoyed having that time to herself.

JT: Now, your mom is in all of this. What are you doing with your time? The newspaper is going to be—

SE: That's later. But at first, the first week or so, I think we kind of wandered around trying to figure out what was going on. And there was a lot of gossip about all the early arrivals taking all the best jobs; there weren't too many good jobs. But then, there were two Maryknoll sisters who came to Manzanar, and they wanted to start a school right away, because this was a minimum of a semester so a lot of the kids were just kind of running around. So, they managed to get a barrack from the administration, and they put out in a call for volunteers. My sister-in-law wanted to be a teacher, so she dragged me in. She said, "Let's go and volunteer." And so, I went and they had this room full of kids, all ages, from kindergarten up. And the sisters divided them all up, and you know, we taught them some songs. I taught the little ones.

JT: And you only went because you were being dragged along at that point in time?

SE: Yeah, right. And there was nothing there, no chalkboard, no chairs, no tables, no paper, nothing for the kids to work with, so what were we going to do? So, we did that I guess for a couple of weeks. I don't remember whether they were able to get paper and crayons or everything.

JT: The Maryknolls, they were a halfway?

SE: Yeah, they were Catholic. There's a Catholic Maryknoll school here in Los Angeles that a lot of Japanese kids went to so that was part of the program.

JT: So, they were trying to reconnect with a lot of people that they had known?

SE: Right, yeah.

JT: What other spiritual religious represented at the camp at this time? Were the Maryknoll [sisters] the only example or were there Buddhist temples?

SE: There's no Buddhist Temples or anything in the existence because most of the priests had been taken away. The administration had said that they could have all religion except Shinto because Shinto the Japanese state relgion.

[01:00:07]

JT: Japanese state.

SE: Yeah, so the Quakers were there; they came in. They had Lutheran, I think, and Methodist, but I'm not sure if they were all separate. There was a Christian church in Manzanar.

JT: Do you think looking back now that some of these participants who were arriving early at the camp, and your experience with the Maryknolls were laying more of this progressive foundation that you'll later tap into?

SE: Yeah, I think so because a lot of people think the Catholics are very formal and don't welcome other people. With this group and with Maryknoll, and with two of the men priest that were there, I always felt that I was welcomed at any of their activities. When I went to Chicago, there was Brother Theophane [Walsh] and he was part of the Maryknoll, and they had shipped him to Chicago to help resettle people. And you know, always telling me to come join them for this and that activity, because you knew we were lonely and we were off somewhere away from our family.

JT: This is Chicago following the camps?

SE: Following the camps, yeah. So, I think—I guess my relationship with them is—this man who is a Jewish, a second hand furniture dealer, all these Mexican American friends we had, I think that sort of helped.

JT: But, you were certainly the exception at this point in time. Japanese American community as a whole was isolated. Would that be fair to say within Little Tokyo?

SE: I think so.

JT: Because the experience with the Mexican American, Jewish culture, you were definitely outside the social medium of the community?

SE: I think so because later on it was going to bring a lot of trouble to people, because they had no non-Japanese for reference when it came to filling out the questionnaire to get out of camp. You know, the loyalty—

JT: When the loyalty stuff started.

SE: Because they asked for non-Japanese references, and most people didn't have them.

JT: The community as a whole was isolated.

SE: Yeah, as a community. I had some teachers, and I had a couple of people in the neighborhood that vouched for us, so it was okay. But, one of my classmates said that he wrote to one of our teachers ,and she refused. I think it was because they were worried. The government put these people away for some reason, why should we vouch for them? Although the elementary school principle, she did it for everybody. She vouched for every one of her students.

JT: And this is in the public school?

SE: Yeah, yeah. And I had one person who vouched for me; it was a Spanish American War veteran who lived in our neighborhood. He was left behind. He was very lonesome he said, because he was left behind. All of us were gone.

JT: How did he get left behind?

SE: Because he wasn't Japanese.

JT: Oh, okay.

SE: Yeah. And he was fifteen when he went to fight with Teddy Roosevelt in Cuba. He was a veteran living on veteran's pension, so he had to live in a neighborhood he could afford to live. He just had a room.

JT: So, he lost all his friends.

SE: So, he said that the FBI came to see him, actually, because we had put his name down as reference.

JT: Do you remember then growing up, him telling you stories of him charging-up San Juan Hill and telling you all about that?

SE: Telling us all about it. And every year they have the march on Veterans Day—at least they used to have a parade—he would always be there marching with his riffle. We would clap for him, and we would walk back with him, and he would tell us all about his experiences.

JT: And what was his name, do you remember?

SE: Sam—we used to call him Old Sam. He said he was Dutch—Vandervuch or something like that. He not only vouched for us, he kept all of our high school annuals and shipped them to us later, after we got to Manzanar. But, he told the FBI guys to get out of his place. He said, "I don't want you around here. My friends didn't do anything to the government, and you put them all away. I don't want to talk to you."

JT: So again, these are more seeds—

SE: So that, yeah. There was that. We had tried to find out where he had gone to after. They said he was ill, and that he was in some veteran's hospital. We didn't know where. My brother tracked him down, but they said, "Well, he's so old and senile, he probably won't remember anybody." But—

JT: Good ole' Sam.

SE: He was a dear old man, and he would sit and talk to us. He couldn't cook in his room, so he would go out for his beans every morning around ten o'clock. And then, he would go home and fool around with his little radio. He had a little shortwave radio, and he would talk to people. Then he would come out again around four o'clock or so and have his beans. Go home and stand around and talk with us. So, he was a neighborly fellow.

JT: Back to the camp. It's been two weeks—two, three weeks, you been with the Maryknolls and working with the Quakers and so forth.

SE: And then, a call came out that a camouflage net factory was being built in Manzanar, and that Americans citizens that wanted to help the war effort could come and work there.

JT: Which percentage of the population is American citizen?

SE: I would say the general population was the same in all the camps, around two-thirds of American citizens. Because everybody wasn't going to go work for them, they had other jobs, too. My sister and I decided we would go.

JT: Are we still in the summer now or are we getting into the beginning of September, October?

SE: No, this is still maybe a month after we got there. I would say—

JT: June, July?

SE: Yeah, June, yeah. And I can't remember how long I worked there, but around—I'm not sure when harvest time is—the farmers are having trouble finding help to harvest the sugar beet crop and so they came in. It must have been around July, July or August. They recruited young men and women, too. We wanted to go out and work in the farms in Idaho, in Utah, in Montana. So, all of a sudden, there was a shortage of help in camp, in Manzanar. So, someone said to me, "The *Manzanar Free Press* has openings for reporters. Don't you like to write?" I said, "Yes, I do." Why don't you go and apply for a job?" So, I thought, Well, I don't mind working the camouflage net but that might be interesting. So, I went and applied for a job as a reporter, and I got it. So, there I was, it must have been the summer of '42, and the first thing that I was assigned to was to go and check out a fish pond that had been built by some people in Block 6—between Block 6 and another one being built in Block 12. So, I trudge all the way up there.

JT: Your first story.

SE: My first story about the first fishpond. And after that I was doing other news stories and feature stories. And then, one of the women who had what she called a "Canteen Cowboy" column every week left Manzanar, so they told me to take it over. And what that was—sort of an ad for the canteen, what they had on sale this week and what specials were; what you could buy there. Kleenex and cigarettes and candy, whatever. Whatever that was not rationed and if you had the money to buy it. So, that was a column that I did.

JT: How many people were on the paper now?

SE: At that time, we didn't have too many. Let's see, I was a reporter, we had an editor, we had a sports editor, we had a business a manager and his secretary, and we had young girls who did our typing for us. They had to do the final copy on newsprint, and they type it all on manual typewriters. So, we had, I think, three girls who did that.

JT: So, in describing it, this sport, this canteen article, it sounds that it's front paper and that it's information around the camp itself—

SE: Mostly information, yeah, of camp life: who was born, who died, who left camp.

JT: Will the paper take a political stance at some point?

SE: Well, in the beginning it did. Before the end of '42, there were one, two, three—at least four people on the original *Manzanar Free Press* staff who were very progressive.

[01:10:05]

JT: And when you say progressive, how would you define that?

SE: I would say they were about the center.

JT: About the center?

SE: Yeah. They were all active in the Democratic Party in California and had a lot of politics.

JT: And these are all Nisei—

SE: And they are older Nisei, they were like in their—I would say they were beyond college. Many of them, a number of them.

JT: An Issei cannot vote; Nisei can vote?

SE: Um-hm, Issei could not vote.

JT: When was Nisei population given the right to vote?

SE: The Issei, I think '55 when the McCarren-Walter Act was repealed.

JT: Is when the Issei—

SE: Yeah.

JT: And Nisei by birth—

SE: Nisei by birth. Yeah, by right of birth we were citizens.

JT: So, waited until '55 till their parents—

SE: Could vote.

JT: —could vote, so now you have children voting before their parents.

SE: Right, yeah.

JT: And these four, five in the newspaper that you described about the center Democratic Party, were the exception?

SE: I think they were older, the average age, I think, of those of us that went to camp was seventeen. But, these people were at least twenty-two, twenty-three. And they had part, I think, many of them had a lot of relationship with the mainstream; they were not isolated in Little Tokyo. That went to college. And this is the first time I saw a woman smoking, a Nisei woman, and she was talking about drinking, which is something I didn't know about. (chuckles) At least not in our—I knew Issei women who smoked but they smoked in the house. They never smoked—

JT: Publicly.

SE: Yeah, publicly. I knew one woman who used to smoke the long pipe. She went through this whole elaborate ceremony, and I would watch her. She would take a few puffs and that was it. But, she always smoked inside the house, she never smoked publicly. Now this was the first woman—

JT: Now, these progressive Nisei—these four or five within the newspaper we're still talking about a very minority population within the Nisei as a whole. The Nisei as a whole would be more conservative.

SE: Very conservative, yeah. And very quiet, not outspoken. In fact, they would have long discussions about opening a second front in Europe, which I didn't know anything about. They were talking about sending letters to the president and criticizing him for something that he had done. Now, it was a very different world.

JT: Now, the Nisei, wasn't there a split, too, within—I mean, the Nisei that would be Democrats would be very minority, in that I would think a lot of the Nisei were blaming Roosevelt for the camps themselves so they were probably Republican. Is that fair?

SE: Yeah, yeah. And so, this was my first experience with older Nisei who were not saying like my brothers. My brothers were all sports-minded, and they were very conservative within their own circle. But, these people were reading all kids' stuff and—that were published in magazines and things. And I just sat and watched them, and I think probably by osmosis, got all of the ideas.

JT: You were soaking it all up.

SE: Right.

JY: So, now we can say by what month in the camp? We're still in the summer?

SE: Yeah, summer. They were there only till the riot, which is December of '42.

JY: Of '42.

SE: Yeah, which _____ (inaudible).

JY: Did they go to Heart Mountain?

SE: They went to Death Valley to the CCC Camp. Death Valley and then they were released from there in February of '43; they just left. The government let them. Some of them went to Washington to work for the Office of War Information in the broadcast.

JY: They were taken out of Manzanar December because they were accused of—

SE: Being too pro-administration, yeah, too pro-administration. I guess pro-administration might be spying for the government, things like that, for the FBI. So, there were people on what they called a death list of the other extreme group. I guess they were—they called them pro-Japan but they were extreme right-wing people.

JY: Describe the riot.

SE: Well, on a Sunday—I guess they had been having several meetings over the period.

JY: They being?

SE: A group of people that wanted to form what they call a Manzanar Work Corps, and I'm not exactly sure what that meant. And then, there was another group that was forming the Mess Hall Workers Union and that was Harry Ueno.[1] And he was going around after work, checking on all the mess halls to find out why the supply of sugar was so low, and he was beginning to suspect that somebody was taking it, stealing it, and selling it on the black market. So, he worked in—I don't remember what kitchen he worked in. Lot 22 I think. Decided to check it out and went to all the mess halls, checked-up how much sugar they were all getting, how much they had gotten before, and what the balance was. When he found that there was quite a discrepancy from the sugar that went to the warehouse and came to the kitchen.

TC: It was getting lost.

SE: Because he knew who worked in the warehouse; he was also keeping a record. I think he went to the warehouse manager, and he said, "Oh, no, there is no such thing." And he said, "Well, if you don't do an investigation, I'll send it out to the FBI." That's when Harry got into trouble. Because they were having meetings to organize the mess hall workers union, and he was getting petitions signed by all these people who wanted to form a union. I'm not sure what their actual mission was, but they wanted a better condition.

JT: They wanted to improve the life of the camp?

SE: Yeah.

JT: And your newspaper friends were also working in corporation with him? Is it an alliance now with your newspaper friends? Are they working with him as well?

SE: No, I don't think so. That was a separate group.

JT: Okay. So, there is a little bit of progressive activity going on.

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[1] Harry Ueno, O.H. 1518.1, 1518.2 & 1518.3, Center for Oral and Public History.

SE: Yeah, yeah.

JT: What's going on with the newspaper? Now you have this agitating going on, the pro administration is being held accountable that he is taking part in.

SE: Um-hm. Then we had another group that most people did not like, but they kind of distrusted and that was the Japanese American Citizens League [JACL] group who was all pro-American. You know, let's help the administration.

JT: They were bending over backwards to cooperate.

SE: Yeah. So, there was also that group. And there were a few other individuals who were doing other things. You know? I'm not sure which one was part of this research at UC Berkley, somebody was in that group. And then there were a couple of other JACL people—not really part of JACL, but they were kind of working.

JT: Now, the Berkley group was an effort to monitor what was going on at the camp and to document the administration at the camp.

SE: Yeah.

JT: So, this would be a progressive effort when you're talking about the Berkley group versus the Japanese American League, which is a more pro-administration.

SE: Right. There are all these different players. And then, the first thing I heard, or that most of us heard, was that they had a meeting, a community-wide meeting on the weekend. I guess it started Wednesday or Friday of the first week in December. I guess they were trying to figure out if this Manzanar Work Corp was going to work or the Mess Hall Workers Union or how to intergrade them or what. I'm not sure exactly. And then I think Saturday night when the JACL had gotten beaten-up, after this meeting—and that's not the only reason. He had also gone out—the government had given them permission to go out to JACL conference, annual conference in Salt Lake City. So, all the JACL people from all the camps got to go to the meetings, the rest of us couldn't leave to do anything. And so, when they came back, a group of people went to this one guy's house and beat him up.

JT: Retribution.

SE: Yeah.

JT: When you say house, you mean somewhere in the camp, one of the—

SE: One of the JACL people, yeah. And he claimed that Harry Ueno was the one—leader of the group. Harry Ueno claims he was at the movies, and that he had gone home and gone to bed and that he was not anywhere near with this other group. And so, Fred Tayama ends up in the hospital with all this beating.

[01:20:04]

JT: This is our Japanese American Community League—

SE: JACL, um-hm. And then, they come around, and they arrest Harry Ueno, supposedly, for beating-up Fred Tayama. So, they sent him to Independence, to the jail in Independence. And so the guys—all of the other people that were in the Mess Hall Workers Union group had a meeting, and they met on Sunday afternoon and demanded that Harry be brought back. And that the government looked for other people who had beaten up Fred Tayama, and evidently the leader of this group that met, also went to talk to Mr. [Ralph P.] Merritt who was the project director at the time. And he agreed not to have any more meetings and to send everybody home, and they would look at some other arrangement to bring Harry back, which they did, because he was in the police department jail right in Manzanar when the riot happened. And rather than keep his word, the leader of the group told the committee to come back at night, Sunday night. So, they all came back, and they all headed toward the project director's office.

JY: To have a discussion. (laughs)

SE: One of the things they say is that this fellow who was the leading organizer spoke pidgin Hawaiian, and it was hard to understand what he was saying. And the project director assumed he understood when he gave instructions to him not to have another meeting and to let everybody disperse and go home. Evidently, it's not the way this guy heard it. He explained to everybody—and maybe he did explain that they should all go home. Maybe he didn't; we don't know. Anyway, they all met at dark. First, they divided themselves. One group into the hospital looking for Fred Tayama to beat him up some more, and couldn't find him because the nurses had hidden him somewhere. Another group—I know they came passed our block looking for somebody else that they were going to beat up. And then, they were all going to meet in front of the police department, which they did. And the story is disputed by several people, but I'm not sure. Somebody said that they brought a truck, and the driver jumped out of the truck and let it just go down the road to hit the MPs who were all lined-up in front of the entrance. Somebody else said, "We were throwing rocks at them. Throwing rocks at the MPs, telling them to get away. Leave us alone, we are having a meeting." Then they said that the assistant project director was standing behind the military police because he was afraid he was going to get beaten-up. And Harry says he remembers the MPs saying they were going to throw teargas, and he yelled at the guy, everybody to move, to get away.

JT: To disperse.

SE: And he said, "I don't think they heard because the crowd was singing and throwing rocks and stuff." And he said that when they threw the teargas, some people got pushed away, away from the MPs but the others got pushed forward. And that's when the MPs shot, because they thought they were being attacked.

JT: And people were just being dispersed from the gas.

SE: Yeah, so two young men died in the spot; it was seven or eight that were wounded. Of course, there was pandemonium all over; nobody knew what to do. Harry said somebody yelled—the captain yelled, "Who gave the order to shoot?" And someone said, "Nobody," so they just kind of panicked. Whoever the young man was that shot. And so, that night they started ringing the kitchen bells; they rang all night. People didn't know what was going on. This involved maybe two hundred people. The rest of the people in camp had no idea what was going on because they weren't part of it.

JT: And Manzanar was what, ten thousand?

SE: Ten thousand people. And we knew because we saw these people going past our barrack looking—you know? They were just walking. We figured they were just looking for somebody. We had already heard about the beating, and we had no idea who Harry Ueno was because nobody had heard of him. But then, my brother who was a policeman and was working that night, ran out of there, threw his cap and badge away somewhere in the trash.

JT: His days were over.

SE: Yeah. Came running up and said, "The soldiers are shooting down there." And my mother said, "Shooting at who?" "Shooting at the crowd." "Oh, my God, they are going to come after all of us. Now they are going to shoot us all." And a few minutes later, my younger sister's boyfriend came running in. He was shaking, he said, "They shot some people over? Everybody is having a panic. They're just running around." My mother said the same thing, "Now they'll come after us, and they'll shoot us all." So, after that, it was just mostly just the bells ringing. Everything was pretty quiet. I don't think most people knew what was going on. We just heard the shots, and that was it.

TC: Right.

SE: We didn't know; it never happened before. So, that morning, I guess we all knew that the two young boys had been killed. I'm not sure what block. Then my brother came back and said, "We know the young man that was killed and shot in the back." He was the one that laid the linoleum on the floor, and my mother remembered getting him something to drink and saying, "You know, we know the older brother. He's in the service." And so, they sent for him for the funeral, I think. But, we didn't know if he knew the other young boy. So, the camp was pretty quiet from then until the end of December. Everyone, of course, did their work. My friend told me a couple years ago that she knew nothing about the riot, and she got up Monday morning and went to work. She said everyone accused her of being a spy. "Why are you going to work?"

JT: And she honestly didn't know?

SE: She said, "I didn't know anything had happen. I had not heard a thing. I didn't know, and how can you blame me for that?" "You shouldn't have gone to work."

JT: I think it is safe to say this is one of the most profound impacts then maybe on you within the camp, shifting your progressive foundation—

SE: I guess.

JT: I mean, camp life could never be the same after this incident.

SE: That's right and it was—and years later, I heard from a man who was a teacher at Manzanar, and he played his own role in the film, *Farewell to Manzanar*. He was a music teacher. And he told me he was walking his friend's dog around the camp by this crowd of people, and I heard the gunshots. And he said, "And you know? There would have been more people killed if that man's gun hadn't jammed." His machine gun jammed. And I looked at him, and I said, "What did you say?" He said, "The machine gun jammed."

JT: He would have kept firing.

SE: He was going to keep firing. I said, "Oh, my gosh." Well, he said, "They were lucky only nine people were injured, and two were killed."

JT: And this is the time now in the newspaper, friends are going to be living the camp as were going to be leaving the camp as well?

SE: Yeah, they left that night. They were picked up. Around sixty-three of them were picked up by the camp police.

JT: And they were pretty much rounded up because they were the agitators?

SE: Considered to be, yeah.

JT: Inside agitators, they can't be outside agitators.

SE: Pro-administration, too liberal.

JT: Pro-administration, as far as pro-Japanese? When you say administration? When you say they were pro-administration, the newspaper people?

SE: Yeah, for the American administration, and then we had the pro Japanese group on the other side. The pro-administration people were the ones that said they were 200 percent American, and they were going to do everything—

[01:30:07]

JT: These are JACL—

SE: Yeah, JACL and the Democratic Club people.

JT: Okay, I just want to make sure I'm clear now. The newspaper people from the paper, the radicals, are gathered up with the JACL as well? So, they were taking the pro and the agitators and removing them from the camp?

SE: Right.

JT: And were they progressive forces—let's say the newspaper people—where they are going to end up in Death Valley.

SE: They are going to end up at Death Valley at the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] Camp that had been built earlier before the war had been abandoned. When they first picked them up, they didn't know what to do with them. They didn't know where to take them.

JT: Was this part of Dillon—Mayor Myer when he was setting up his jails? This people were being isolated from the camps themselves.

SE: I'm not sure. I'm not sure if they really had a plan. I think they just did it—

JT: They just got them out.

SE: Yeah, they just got them out of there because they didn't know where—they didn't know what type of trouble would happen afterwards, after the riots.

JT: And where would the JACL people go?

SE: They were also sent up there.

JT: Together?

SE: Yeah, they were still put together, but there was a lot of tension among them.

JT: I can imagine. Things were exacerbated a little bit.

SE: Oh, yeah. I understand the first night they spent in the administration offices sleeping on blankets and stuff on the floor because they didn't know what to do with them. And them Mr. Merritt and the assisting project director [Robert] Brown—

JT: And Merritt is running Manzanar—

SE: —thought why don't I ask Death Valley if they have space there, because they remembered that they had built a CCC Camp up there. So, they called the Death Valley superintendent, and he said they had space. So, they put them on these military trucks—

JT: Together?

SE: All of them were sent up there.

JY: What was the break-up of the sixty-three? Was it thirty-thirty or was it more JACL?

SE: No, I think there was probably more—well, actually, there were three or four groups because there was also Karl [Gozo] Yoneda[2] and his—he and his wife [Elaine Black Yoneda][3] were there. She's a communist. She was a communist with the _____ (inaudible) couple of other people who were not part of either group, but individuals who were considered by the people they were maybe spying on the Japanese. So, they were pulled out, too, although they were member of JACL, some of them.

JT: Very eclectic gathering.

SE: Yeah. It was quite a mix-up of people.

JT: Now, let's return back to Manzanar, these folks now are off to Death Valley. I remember—I believe—was this the Christmas when you talked about the caroling within the camp.

SE: Yeah, right, Christmas Eve. I don't know whether we stayed home from work a week or all month. I think we may have gone back to work after a week or so after the riot. Because I remember we put out a paper, a Christmas issue—not a fancy one, just news.

JT: You needed to talk of peace by then.

SE: Yeah, and I can't remember who asked me because I was not going to church or anything. But, somebody said they were going to go caroling on Christmas Eve. So, I thought, "Oh, why not?" I was tired of just sitting at home not doing anything. I mean, my gosh, it was cold. And we need some kind of—something to keep us uplift. So, I went—there weren't too many of us, ten or fifteen people. We just kind of walked around and sang different places in the block. We found ourselves right there in front of the administration, the offices. And behind them—I think they were duplex in each one of the buildings so that the families could move. Because none of them had huge families—maybe just a couple of kids—and they had their own kitchen and bathroom, like an apartment. And so we sang, and we got to the—

[2] Karl Gozo Yoneda, O.H. 1376a & 1376b, Center for Oral and Public History.

[3] Elaine Black Yoneda, O.H. 1377a & 1377b, Center for Oral and Public History.

[recording paused]

JT: We are continuing our interview with Sue Embrey on November twenty-first here at her home. We were just talking about Christmas caroling. We talked about your friends you gathered up, and you've now made your way toward the administration building and you were describing the administration units to us.

SE: I think I said we saw the MP.

JT: Yes.

SE: And he said, "Who goes there? Halt!" Or whatever they say to stop us, and we kind of just stood there. After a few seconds, the leader—I think he was a minister—took a couple of steps and said we want to go caroling across the road there. The MP said, "Okay," and we walked over and found Mr. Merritt's house and sang a couple songs there. He opened the door and greeted us; said a few words and came on back across the—I think it's the main road there. And as we were all coming back, I think we said Merry Christmas to a soldier. I think he was a little surprised. And he said, "Oh, Merry Christmas." He was just walking back and forth. And I don't know whether this is part of the MP contingent that was sent down from Reno after the riot, but there was a unit that was sent back, sent from Reno to help the ones that were already there.

JT: The guard towers were already up.

SE: The guard towers were up already. There were Jeeps that were patrolling up and down the streets.

JT: Was the fence barbwire up prior to this?

SE: The fence was up, yeah, the fence was up.

JT: So, it was just more increase in military presence within the camp as a result of the riot.

SE: Yes, as a result of the riot. And then, about the same time, I remember we put on a newspaper because I was asked to—the whole thing was tied, the headlines were made, and we indicated which type to use for each of the stories, and it was folded up. And I was asked to take it to Mr. Brown, to his office, and he was going to drive up to Independence to the print shop where the newspaper was printed by the shelf on press. So, I came out of the barrack office, and I stopped because there was a Jeep parked right in front of the administration building, there were two soldiers in there. And I thought, Oh, I don't know if I should cross in front of them or go around. I hesitated before I crossed, and we started to cross a little behind the Jeep. And that took me closer to the walkway going into the administration office, the main office.

JT: And you separated from the group.

SE: Yeah.

JT: You were by yourself.

SE: Um-hm. And this was—I can't remember if this was after Christmas or before, when we put out the paper. So, it's probably a few days or somewhere around the holidays. And as I walked up to the door to reach for the handle, it just swung open. And there was a military policeman—he almost ran into me—and when I looked up, it turned-out to be my social studies teacher from high school. And he was Captain Green. And I looked at him, and I said, "What are you doing here?" And he said to me, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "This is where we were sent." He said, "I'm in charge of the MP unit that came from Reno." "How long are you going to be here?" "We are leaving today. We are not going to stay anymore. There is no reason for us to stay here." So then, he said, "Are you making any plans to get out of here?" And I said, "After what happened?" The papers are all full of stories about anniversary rioting. They are not going to let us out." "Oh, no," he said, "I've been talking to Mr. Merritt, I've been talking to Washington, and I've been telling them that they got to get you out of here. You cannot stay here. First of all, you are American citizens. Secondly, this is no place for you."

JT: What was not common knowledge at that time was that the FBI and Department of Navy had said that you were not a security risk.

SE: No, they had not publicized that. It was many years later that they did that. They kept that a secret.

JT: So, as late as '43, early '44, he was already telling you that they wanted—

[01:40:03]

SE: Yeah, he was saying—and I think it was partly based on having so many of us in classes at school. We were not the major population, but we were a large population of the high school that we went to. And I think because of his relationship with us; his contact with us. And I think in a way, he was a liberal, too. Even though he was in the service, he was in the reserves. They called him back. And so I said to him, "Well, I'm not sure that my mother wants to go out. I don't know where we would go." And he knew my brothers; they had all been in his class. He asked about all the students he had in his classes. And he said, "I hope you start making plans and just get out of here."

JT: And how long will it be now from there until your actual—

SE: From the time that happen, it was in December '42 until I left in October of '43. So, it took me about nine months.

JT: Another nine months.

SE: Yeah.

JT: Before we leave the camp, the experiences at camp that we talked about this afternoon as far as shaping your progressive—your movement toward the Progressive Movement. I'm hearing significant ones this afternoon. I want to see if we can recap those. Beginning first with just the Maryknolls' arrival.

SE: Um-hm.

JT: For whatever reason the foundation that your parents have left with you of being of service; examples that your school teachers had given you; you feel into these group with the Maryknolls. That was just a two, three week time just being with trying to create community at the camp itself. The next would be the newspaper. You're becoming a woman now.

SE: Um-hm.

JT: A young woman with role models for the first time. Role models that are really different from your historic Nisei and Issei community within Little Tokyo that you grew up with—

SE: Yeah, because I think I was very conservative in those things. Because my father didn't want me to wear lipstick when I was eighteen. Even before my sister used to sneak out, she would put make-up until after she left the house and things like that. So, we were being pretty much the norm conservative group.

JT: So, these are the role models for you within the newspaper. The newspaper itself gave you writing and articulating, and the writing would then be the culminating—I would think—experience that things aren't what they appear.

SE: Um-hm.

JT So, those would be the three then. Would that be fair then?

SE: Yeah, I think so. And then, the whole thing—someone asked me what the whole effect the evacuation and internment had on me. I said, "Well, in one sense, I became very anti-war. I didn't want war." It was such a waste of money, of energy, of people lives, and I just could not tolerate that.

JT: Do you think that was later, or did that come more in the camp when you realized you were becoming anti-war? Or was that in later years?

SE: I think that was later, because I really didn't take any action on it until the Vietnam War.

JT: The anti-war?

SE: The Korean War came and went, but I really didn't do anything about it then, even though my brother fought and was in there. But, it was not until the Vietnam War that I realized—now my mother send three sons to the service during World War II—my two sons would be old enough to go, because the war had already gone on for two years. I was not about to send my two kids to war that I didn't like.

JT: So, your progressive legacy will find you in the seventies, late sixties in the anti-war movement?

SE: Yeah, right.

JT: Okay, so now if we can just leap a little bit—and we'll probably re-visit some of this in another visit—but in'44, you left the camp for Chicago, correct?

SE: Um-hm.

JT: Can you explain now the period from '45 to '48, how this progressive begins with this progress vent within you took shape? We know '48 is going to cultivate with the Harry Wallace Campaign, but can you spend a little time talking about '45 to '48 with all the Japanese Americans now coming back into the community to spread-out across the country, sling and arrows you faced, and the adversary you face with the progressive leanings that manifest themselves? And what you did with yourself at that time?

SE: Okay, in '43—actually, I went directly to Madison, Wisconsin. I was sponsored by the YWCA, and I didn't have to have a sponsor. Well, by that time, people were leaving to go to work, to Chicago or wherever. You didn't have to have a job, as long as they had a place where they could stay. So, I had some friends that had gone to Madison first, and they were writing letters to me saying it was so nice and to come out. So, I decided when I applied for leave at the relocation office, I indicated I wanted to go to Madison. Then they called me back maybe a month or two later and said there was a YWCA in Madison, Wisconsin, that had a dormitory for girls, and they were willing to sponsor me for a month and pay my room and board for one month, if I wanted to go there and I could find a job. So, that's what I did. And I got to Madison, and stayed in—I think I had a roommate who came from Topaz, Utah, whom I had not known, but they also sponsored her. But, she had a job. She was secretary for the Christian Federation there in Madison.

And so, I went to the relocation office, and they found me a job as a clerk at the mail order cheese factory. So, here I was counting cheese dimes and nickels as well as dollars bills, and also counting the points for—what do you call that? Ration, for rationing. Cheese was rationed, coffee was rationed, and meat was rationed. All those kinds of things were rationed—sugar. You had to have so many points for a pound of cheese in order to buy it, so we would be counting the ration points and the ration stamps. We would ship them and mailed them out to the people. So, I worked

there for a while, and it was really fun because I was the only minority person in that all-white (phone rings) place.

JT: Community.

SE: Yeah, workers.

JT: So Madison, you're making cheese. You're the only Japanese American in this community of—

SE: And these people are so nice. It was like a family we had. One, two, three, four of the women, beside myself, and the owner was a man, and he had started up this place he called Dairyland Cheese Company. Natural cheese, nothing like Craft with that canvas taste, it's natural cheese. And he had a place that made them, so that he would order them directly. And so, we would all sit around and eat lunch together; we were there all day together.

JT: I bet you ate a lot of cheese.

SE: We ate a lot of cheese. (chuckles) And on some weekends, we'd go to lunch or something, the woman anyway. So, it was like I was not part of a minority group. It was like I was part of the whole family thing. And then, at the YWCA, in the dorm, it was the same thing. It was nothing about, "Oh, I wish you came from Iowa or up north somewhere." It was just like they just accepted us as people.

JT: We are all in this together.

SE: Yeah, we were all fighting war with no problem. Even on the streets, I think some people thought we were Chinese for one thing. China was on our side. At one point, I met a man who was at the airfield training station near Madison, and he said he was—"Do you happen to be from Long Beach?" We said, "No." "Because I had a classmate and I don't know where has gone to, and I'm trying to find him." He gave us his name; did we know where we might be able to find him. I said, "No, people were sent everywhere, so we had no idea." And another time, we were eating at a restaurant, and a Marine—I think he was a Marine. He was kind of belligerent. He had a couple of drinks.

JT: They tend to do that.

SE: "Are you guys Japs?" "Yeah." I was with my roommate and her brother, and we were—"Oh, I don't like that." But, by the time he got through, he was talking and laughing with us, and he wanted for us to go to the U.S.O. and dance with him. (chuckles) It was funny. "Well, you guys speak English?" It's really funny. You know, there were incidents like that, but nothing that really said this is a racist town. Partly because it's college town, Madison, Wisconsin, at the University of Wisconsin—and we'd go to the Red Skeller and buy a drink or buy coffee and dessert

and things like that. And nobody paid any attention to us. I mean, we weren't any different than they were. It seemed like all of this was a good experience. Then, when I moved to Chicago a year later—

[01:50:46]

JT: Now, we're in '45.

SE: It was in early '45—no, it was '44. Because I went to Madison in October of '43, and the following summer of '44 I moved to Chicago because I couldn't really find a good paying job. Madison was not that place. And I was trying to get into the university, and they wouldn't take me.

JT: And Chicago was one of the landing spots for a lot of the folks.

SE: Yeah, and my brother was there. He said, "Come to Chicago. You could probably find a better paying job there." So, I got there, and the first thing a friend of mine did was say, "Let's go to the American Friend Service Committee office and see if they have any jobs there. I go there, and there's an opening for telephone operator and secretary and the Newberry Library. And I said, "Oh, a library. I'd like to work at a library." So, they gave me the information, and I went over there the following day. Talked to the business manager, and he said, "You want the job? You can have it." "Sure, why not? I'll take it." So, the first week I was in Chicago, I got the job. I was there until '48, which was when I left Chicago to come back to L.A. But, their the business manager was there. He was a financial agent who—I guess sort of a CEO nowadays—what they call them. And there was one gal, who was the only black woman working there, and she had graduated from college in Texas to come to live in Chicago. And she, six-foot, four, blond gal from Iowa, were buddies. It was really strange.

JT: What a team. (chuckles)

SE: Yeah, and then they got me there, so the three of us we would go to lunch together. We would walk all over Michigan Avenue.

JT: What a threesome.

SE: And here I was the shortest; Dottie is the tallest. In fact, I just saw her in August. I had not seen her, I guess, for about four years. I had to go up there, and I called her up and I said, "Dottie, this is Sue." And she said, "Oh, you finally called me back." Once a year she called me. "Are you still alive?" Because I'm such a poor responder. I called her, and went over to see her. My grandkids just took to her, and she gave them each a stuffed animal to take home. But, there were the three of us. Dottie, even today, still says Negro. You know, she doesn't say black. She's very conservative republican. And yet, she took us in.

JT: Became buddies.

SE: Yeah, Nini and I. And we went around together all the time we worked there at the library until I left, and Nini left later. And she said, "Do you ever know what happen to Nini?" And I said, "No, I never heard from here." She said, "I don't know what happened neither." I often wonder if she went back to Texas because she hated the town because it was so racist. And I said, "Geez, I often think about her, but I don't know." But, this is another, I think, trend of becoming open-minded and maybe more progressive. People treated me fine, so I don't see no reason to treat them otherwise.

JT: So, there was no racial barrier there?

SE: Yeah, there was nothing.

JT: Now, you were in Chicago at the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the ending of the war?

SE: Oh, yeah. In fact, I was in an apartment by myself when I heard the news. I was living with my brother and all of the extended family in Chicago. We really didn't have room. I was sleeping on the coach in the living room. So, when my girlfriend said, "Why don't we rent an apartment—" She was living with her sister and her husband, so we rented an apartment not too far from where everybody lives so we were pretty close. But, when they opened up the West Coast, she and her sister immediately came back to L.A., so I was left by myself. That was September—or August of '45. I was in my room, and I had my radio on. And they said Hiroshima had been bombed. I think the first thing I thought about was the people that sold the store to my mother, they were in Hiroshima. They had gone back to Hiroshima. They had gone back in early '41, and they had built a house. [They] sent us a picture of them sitting in front of this beautiful house they built.

JT: I thought it was a Mexican family who had bought your—

SE: No, the one we bought the store from.

JT: The original.

SE: The original.

JT: Not the one you had sold to. Who you had bought it from?

SE: Bought it from. And I thought about them, but I don't know what happened. I don't know if they were right in town, or they were outside, where they built their house.

JT: And Nagasaki, where were you when you heard the news of Nagasaki?

SE: I don't remember. I guess it was a few days later, wasn't it?

JT: Six to nine.

SE: I think I was probably in the same place, same apartment.

JT: Do you ever sit there by yourself thinking about family and reflecting on that? Again, being the seed of anti-war for you during the later years?

SE: I think so. I think so. Because afterwards, I met somebody who was not a Hiroshima maiden, but was a friend of theirs who had come to the United States with them. I met her, talked to her. And when I visited Japan, I went to Hiroshima, and I looked her up and she took us to the Peace Park.

JT: What year was this?

SE: This was '74. I think that also did something visiting Hiroshima.

JT: I can imagine.

SE: Yeah, because that was long after Issei Progressives.

JT: So, in '48, you went back to Los Angeles?

SE: Yeah.

JT: And how did that come about?

SE: My younger sister was in L.A. with my mother. She had stayed with my mother until the end, and they had all come back to L.A., my sister and my younger brother. And she had met this young man in Manzanar, and—but he hadn't gone to Chicago. So, she wrote to me and said that she wanted to get married, and that my mother was kind of upset because my oldest sister was in a TB sanatorium. With Manzanar, the weather was not good for her. She had had TB, and it had been that she was pretty much over. Then she decided to come to Manzanar with us, and that was the worst thing for her, the wind and the poor food. My mother was very discouraged and didn't think my sister was going to get any better, and that she really needed somebody to be back here. My brothers were here but—

JT: So, you came back—

SE: So, I came back in '48. After the wedding, I came back.

JT: Up until this point, '45 to '48, we talked about more personal examples of your progressive foundation, not really overt political things at this time. But, in '48, returning to Los Angeles was one of the more overt political steps for you would be getting involved in the Harry Wallace Campaign, who was very much perceived as a

progressive, breaking with the Democratic Party, running as a Progressive and so forth. How did that come about?

SE: There was a little notice in the paper, the *Rafu Shimpo*, which is a bilingual Japanese English paper, about a meeting that was being called for people who are interested in supporting Harry Wallace's bid for presidency. That came out of Sak's[4] house, and I guess he must have put it in. A friend of mine, who since has passed on, was a writer, and she wrote poetry. I had known her in Manzanar, she worked on the paper with me.

JT: Like an old buddy then from Manzanar?

[01:59:52]

SE: Yeah. So, she calls me up, and she said, "How would you like to go to this meeting that they are going to have supporting Henry Wallace for the presidency?" And I said, "Well, I saw that. It sounded interesting, but I wasn't about to go by myself." So, she said, "Well, I'll go with you." And so, we went, and I had told that I admired Henry Wallace because of his work on the agriculture field, and I had read a bit about his hybrid corn and all of that. And then he was vice president with Roosevelt, and that I thought he was getting a bad deal. So, we went to this meeting, and they talked about forming the Nisei Progressives—I don't think it was called the Nisei Progressives—just forming a committee.

JT: So, from what I remember, it was not until '52 that actually took on the name?

SE: Yeah, so it was just—

JT: How many people were there at that meeting? Do you remember, Sue?

SE: You know, there were quite a number. I can't remember exactly, but to me the room looked full. It was a living room, Sak's house. It was not big, it was an apartment. But, I would say maybe twenty, twenty-five people were there.

JT: And you didn't know that Sak?

SE: That was the first time I met Sak, and his wife Fumi Okanishi Ishihara at the time. First time I had met some of the other people.

JT: Was Art[5] there at that meeting as well?

SE: No, I can't remember. I can't remember whether Art was there or Wilbur[6] was there. I know some other—couple of people I knew were there. And there were a couple of

[4] Sakae Ishihara, O.H. 2425, Center for Oral and Public History.

[5] Arthur Takei, O.H. 2423, Center for Oral and Public History.

other people that were kind of on the fringes that later dropped out, but they were there.

JT: Do you remember how Sak introduced himself? Was he part of the Communist Party at that time, or was he just there as just a member of the Progressive Party?

SE: He might have said something about the audition job, because he was trying to get signatures. He had done that to put the party on the ballot in California. I don't know whether he introduced himself as the chair.

JT: And then, you would become quite active in the campaign.

SE: Not for a while. It took me a little bit of time before I did, but they said they were going to have a newspaper or newsletter of some kind, so I said I'm interested.

JT: It was your calling.

SE: Yeah, I'm interested in that. And this fellow name Tom Komuro—gee, I wish he had written about himself. He became the editor of the paper.

JT: And the name of the paper?

SE: What did we call it?

JT: It's not the *Bandwagon*?

SE: No, the *Bandwagon* was a New York paper. I think we called it the *Independent*. *Independent*?

JT: *Independent*, okay.

SE: I think so.

JT: Where did *Crossroads* come from?

SE: *Crosswords* came in—Art would know about that because he came and worked on the *Crosswords*.

JT: So, the *Independent* is the one you're working on—

SE: *Crosswords*, I think, came in a little before.

JT: And the *Bandwagon* would be from New York.

SE: Yeah.

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[6] Wilbur Sato, O.H. 2424, Center for Oral and Public History.

JT: Okay, tell me, in 1948, what it meant to be a progressive from your definition.

SE: Being called a Communist, I think mostly, if I remember. (chuckles)

JT: From the outside being called a Communist. From the inside, from Sue Embrey, what did it mean to be a progressive for you?

SE: I think we were calling for civil rights for all people. We were calling for fair housing. Legislation was a big issue in Los Angeles, the fair housing. I guess equal rights, equal opportunity for minorities and women and on a national platform that would provide unemployment benefits—although people were getting them, not everybody was getting them. And good healthcare for everyone, like a national healthcare. I guess a lot of it was ahead of the time.

JT: Still is.

SE: Yeah, we are still talking about healthcare.

JT: If we were to call you progressive, what did the foreign policy in 1948 look like, if you were to call yourself a progressive?

SE: I can't remember. I think mostly trying to be on better terms than the Soviet Union. I think that was the main issue with a lot of the people.

JT: Do you remember as early as '48, was much discussion on banning the bomb or did that come later in the fifties because people began to understand a little bit more once the Soviets got the bomb? Or do you remember in 1948 ban the bomb?

SE: Yeah, there was a little bit of it but not much. I think it happened more in the fifties. Yeah, because I remember one issue we had _____ (inaudible).

JT: What does in mean in 1995 to call yourself a progressive? Do you still call yourself a progressive?

SE: Yeah, I guess I do. I would say anti-Proposition 187 and all this immigration bashing kind of thing that is going on. Right now I think the big issue is the glass ceiling, the fact that—

JT: The economic barriers.

SE: The barriers of promotion for minorities and women. And see because in this process, I've also been on the women's commission for the city of Los Angeles, and I was on there for ten years. We were fighting for equal pay, for equal work, and—

JT: Instead of sixty-two cents on the dollar?

SE: Yeah, right. And all this social security benefits for widows and things like that. And for now, I think mostly all of these economic things, the barriers, trying to remove those.

JT: In your forty plus years as a progressive, are you hopeful in 1995, or are you pessimistic about where we find ourselves?

SE: I think in a way, I'm both. At the beginning of the year, I was really pessimistic because of the Republican take-over. And now, I'm beginning to see that a lot of people—Newt Gingrich's popularity has dropped to 45 percent.

JT: It's a glass ceiling in reverse. He's going down.

SE: Yeah, he's going down. And at first I didn't think it was possible, that we couldn't stop all this destruction that is going on. And the environment, it's just unbelievable.

[recording paused]

JT: So, you were talking about progressive in '95 and the struggles.

SE: In a way, I'm optimistic because I get calls from the California Democrat Party to give them some money, the Democratic National Committee to give them some money, so I give them $20, $25—

JT: They won't stop calling!

SE: Yeah, they won't stop calling. If I don't do it right away, they keep sending me the pledge forms. You're wasting your money. I shouldn't even pledge anything because it cost you three times more to send me the envelope. But then I got a call from Georgia, the Georgia Democratic Party. I said, "How do you people get my name?" "Well, you're a lifetime member of the DNC, and we would like you to give us some money because we think we can beat Newt Gingrich." I said, "Oh, no, you can't beat him. You're not going to be able to beat him." "Oh, yes, we have a chance this coming election. We have a chance." So, I sent them twenty bucks.

JT: So, you're hopeful.

SE: So, I am hopeful that at least more Democratic things will happen, but I don't know what's going to happen now. I think that half of the American people are not really sure, you know. They talk about balancing the budget in seven years, but they never talk about the ten-year plan. Regardless of whether a Republican or a Democrat wins, there is no national plan. What are we going to be doing as a nation?

JT: Besides cutting back.

SE: It's just like cut, cut, cut.

JT: Your sons, do they share your political ideology? Are they progressives today or did they go the other way?

SE: No, they're pretty progressive. My younger son, Bruce, worked on Washington's campaign for mayor.

JT: Carl Washington in Chicago?

SE: Yeah, and he was just devastated when he died of a heart attack.

JT: Sure.

SE: In fact, he was here on Thanksgiving, and he got a phone call. And he just felt terrible about it because he had just worked on his campaign. Then he worked on a campaign after that against Daley. Now he got two kids and he is working. It's hard for him to do things. But, they have some friends from Central America, and they help them.

JT: Which son is this?

SE: Bruce is my younger son.

JT: Bruce. And then your other son—

SE: And then my other son, Gary is here in L.A., and he hasn't done much lately. He's been working on his master's degree for history.

JT: It takes time.

SE: Yeah, that and Latin American history. Although, he did a paper on public housing in L.A., and it got smashed by the Red Scare. And he read it at a history convention down in San Diego, and a couple of professors came up and they were in real estate history and had never heard of this kind of thing. He tried to get it published in a history magazine. And then he wrote another one about a revolution that went on in El Salvador in the thirties. He said no English journal, that he knows of, has covered it. So, he reads Spanish. He went down and read the whole thing, as much as he could in Spanish. And he wrote an article and it got published in a student history magazine at Cal State L.A.

[02:10:24]

JT: That's great.

SE: So, he was very happy with that.

JT: It sounds like your sons are falling in the tradition; it's sounds like the progressive genes from your mom and dad pass through.

SE: No, they are not active right now, but they've passed this on to their kids. At least Bruce is to his kids so that's nice. Barbara, his wife, took the kids on a driving tour of New York and stopped in Washington D.C., and they stopped at Harper's Ferry. So that was their last Thanksgiving, talking about slavery, what it means to be a slave. And who was Harriet Tubman, so I think that's a good start—

JT: So, it continues.

SE: —For them, yeah.

JT: Well, it's hard to believe we have already done three hours—

SE: Three hours.

JT: Sue, thank you. Is there anything that you wanted to talk about that we didn't cover today?

SE: No, I don't think so. I think we covered a lot.

JT: I really appreciate it. Thank you so much. We will be back, needless to say, so I guess we will wrap it up for November twenty-first. It's now 3:14, and Sue, thanks so much for your hospitality, opening-up your home.

SE: Oh, you're welcome. Sorry I didn't give you lunch.

JT: Thanks, Sue.

END OF INTERVIEW