

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with HENRY YOSHITAKE

Interviewed

By

Kala Patel

On December 19, 1994

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NARRATOR: HENRY YOSHITAKE

INTERVIEWER: Kala Patel

DATE: December 19, 1994

LOCATION: Montebello, California

PROJECT: Japanese American

KP: This is an interview with Mr. Henry Yoshitake for the California State University, Fullerton, Japanese American Oral History Project by Kala Patel. Montebello California. On December 19, 1994 at approximately 1 p.m. Can you first tell us something about your background, Mr. Yoshitake?

HY: I am currently sixty-nine years old. I will be seventy in a couple of months. I was born in Los Angeles. And raised in Los Angeles until we evacuated with the masses during World War II. I attended all the public schools in the area. I was a senior in high school at the Roosevelt High School in East Los Angeles. And evacuated to the Santa Anita Assembly Center which is located here in Arcadia. And after about four months, evacuated to a permanent relocation camp. The Rohwer [War] Relocation camp in the heart of Arkansas.

KP: Okay. Can you tell us something about your parents? When did they move here from—

HY: Okay, my father came to the United States when he was fifteen years old, 1910. He worked on the railroad and then he went back to Japan in 1921 to marry his wife. And came back in 1922 and opened up a business in Los Angeles.

KP: Okay. So you were living in Southern California for your entire life. And how was the community towards you? Did you experience any discrimination before the war, do you remember anything like that?

HY: Before the war I would say very little as an individual. We knew we were basically second-class citizens because we were not permitted by law to own property. We were shunned from going into any restaurants. Major hotels. Even swimming pools. Even beaches along the Pacific Coast. We were prohibited from going to many of the beaches.

The schools I attended were very mixed schools where I had many Caucasian, Mexican friends. Plus, Japanese friends. And many times, my Caucasian friends want to go swimming this weekend so, "Let's go." And I said, "Well where are you guys going to go?" "Well, were going to go Bimini [Baths]. I said, "Well, I'm sorry I can't go there with you guys." "What do you mean you can't go?" "Well that Bimini doesn't let Japanese into the pool." And so, I knew basically that we were discriminated on but I think my father taught me early. Yes, there's discrimination out there but he put it in a way—he never used the word discrimination but he kept telling us when I get out of school and I start looking for a job, unless I'm twice as good as the next fellow, I don't deserve that job. So in sense, he was telling me that this is discrimination but he didn't use that word at all. And so, many times we would want to go to a theater and he'd say, "No you can't see that picture because they won't let Japanese in there." So we understood that we were not accepted by the majority.

But I was very fortunate, I was growing up—I was a part of the boy scouts, you know? Where it was just about, in fact, all Japanese Americans. And I had an advisor. He was a graduate of Cal Tech, and he was working at the Grand Central Market, peddling fruit and vegetables. But he used to continue talking to us about things like this. And I'll never forgot one thing he said is that, "Oh yeah, I have people laughing at me all the time. Here I've got an Electrical Engineering degree from Cal Tech and I'm working at a fruit stand. But that's alright, someday the jobs are going to open up. And when they do, I'm going to be the first guy in line because I already got my education." So that type of thinking had a very profound impact on me. So I had determined to go to college when I graduated and this determination even held when I was in relocation camp. I had graduated in camp. The counselors there and everybody said that, Oh why do you want to go to college for? There's no jobs out there for you or anything. I said, "Well, I still want to go." And that's my determination. So I was one of the first to leave the relocation camp, headed for a college up in Cleveland, Ohio. So like I said, that gentleman had a very profound impact on my life.

Something else that came up, had a very important impact on my life, number one, was after Pearl Harbor day. After Pearl Harbor and before, there was any talk about sending us to camp and things like this. I was invited by a doctor friend of mine to attend a couple meetings that was held in Downtown Los Angeles. And one of the things that was brought up was of course a lot of discussions about what's going to happen to us you know. We're discriminated on. Are we going to be sent back to Japan with our parents? Are we going to be locked up somewhere or what? And so, there was a lot of talk like that. But there's two things that came out of these meetings that I think opened my eyes to many things. I think number one; my parents were declared enemy alien and as such what we did as a second generation would have a great impact on the safety of our parents. Since they were enemy aliens, if we raised hell, we don't know what they can do to our parents. So with that in mind, it was the protection of our parents physically that was on our shoulders. And the second point that they discussed and brought up, was that when the opportunity arises, we have got to show that we're loyal Americans. So these were two points that rested on all of the second generation shoulders. Number one, of

course the protection of our parents. And secondly, was the future of the Japanese American community.

And so, I went to camp with this in the back of my mind. I think many of the discussions, the arguments that we had in camp, evolved and revolved around these issues. You know, of course there were people that said, Hey, we're American citizens and we get thrown into camps like this. And they're coming and asking us to declare our loyalties. And I would be crazy to even be a part of this. So many people refused to take a loyalty questionnaire, which came into these camps.

[00:10:06]

KP: Did you take the loyalty questionnaire?

HY: Yes, everyone over the age of sixteen, men and women, whether they were first generation or the second generation had to take these. It was called a "loyalty questionnaire." You may be familiar with those questions. Some people called it very cruel piece of document that was presented to the Japanese American community. Here we are in camp and they ask us, Are we loyal people or what. But I think the vast majority, surely said that, Hey, this is our opportunity to prove that we're loyal. At least, you know, we can put it on paper. And so, it's been proven that a vast majority did write in the affirmative saying that they are loyal and they'll do everything they possibly can to support the United States and the war effort. And so, answering positive to those two questions enabled me to leave the camp and to attend a college of my choosing. So of course, a lot of people said, I was crazy to leave camp. There's discrimination wherever I go. To say that you joined the army. Of course, at that time, Japanese Americans were not permitted to join the army. Many of them were in the service before the war but they had their weapons and everything taken away. And even though they were in the uniform of the United States, of course they didn't have the privileges of anybody else. So from December 7 to the early part of 1943, they were not accepting any Japanese Americans into the military.

KP: How did you feel when your status was changed, I mean did you feel any animosity towards the U.S. government?

HY: I personally did not.

KP: You didn't.

HY: My dad who was from the old country, when he came here he was only fifteen years old. And he stayed, his father was here, but after a couple of years his father went back to Japan. So my dad was born at the YMCA, and going to night school at the same time learning English. So for an immigrant from Japan, he spoke fairly good English because of this. But he was very Americanized, when you consider he was from the old country. I think he studied about the constitution, about things that were necessary to become citizen. He would tell me he was not able to become citizen because there was a law of

Japanese becoming citizens. But he had no anger in him about that. In fact, he was in a business where he did a lot of business with Caucasians. He said, Most of them are fair and they treated him with kindness and friendship just like anybody else. And so, he felt fairly close to being a part of the United States. I remember once when President Roosevelt came into Los Angeles, I remember he would take me down to the station to see President Roosevelt and say, "Hey, that's our President!" You know, and some of things like this. But I remember in camp, when all this talk about the loyalty questionnaire was coming up and he had to take it. A lot of the men about his own age obviously said, You can't vote yes on something like this. And my dad went against all their talk and said, (inaudible)_____, affirmative, that he's going to support the United States in this war effort. And he himself was able to leave the camp to find a job. Whereas, a lot of his friends were not able to leave because they had not answered yes. So my dad, looking back was not that educated but he was a very wise in many of his thinking. So looking back I appreciate a lot of things that he told me.

KP: Do you have any siblings?

HY: Beg your pardon?

KP: Do you have any siblings, any brothers or sisters?

HY: Yeah, I have two brothers and one sister.

KP: Are they all older than you?

HY: They're younger than me. I'm the oldest in the family.

KP: How did they feel to—

HY: Okay. They were all young when we went to camp. I was already seventeen just about going on eighteen. And my second brother, I think he was twelve if I'm not mistaken. Twelve and ten. And then my little sister was only three or four. So camp life, I don't think affected them that much—

KP: Yeah, they had the camp for children.

HY: —in fact, they enjoyed it because you didn't have the family rigid—

KP: That's right.

HY: —control that the families had. Uh—

KP: It's been said that the camp life kind of tore apart families because they went into their own groups.

HY: Okay.

KP: Like the children go off with their groups. And the women would be together.

HY: Okay, before the war our parent's generation had a very tight control on us. Number one, they were being discriminated on so in order to keep peace at home, I guess they had to be very strict with us in our upbringing. And so, our generation was brought up being ruled by our parent's group. Even though they were not citizens, a lot of the activities that we participated in, they had parents in our organizations that really controlled us. And when we went to camp, we saw for the first time that they had lost that control. And we were told by the camp directors when to go eat, or who's to eat what. All of this. So there was no family structure in camp. And yes, I believe that a lot of it was destroyed then. But of course, we were also fairly young then. You know, the second generation group was obviously maybe fifteen, sixteen years old. And they were not ready to take over control of the families. So maybe this structure was good, I don't know. It would have eventually happened where our group would have little by little taken over or left the control of our parents anyway. But it just so happened that in camp, that was what was dissolved more or less.

KP: Okay. When did you enlist in the army?

HY: I was in school when I heard that they had come and asked for volunteers for an all-Japanese American army unit. And in fact, a friend had written me that they came in and he was going to go. And so, I take this letter and I show my dean at school that one of my friends are going into the service. They're volunteering and that's the only way you can get in right now—to be in an all-Japanese American. So he says, "Well I can understand your feeling, but he had a hell of time getting out of camp and he had a hell of time getting to school." And I told him, "I don't have any money. My parents, their funds are all frozen and I don't have any money. They don't have any money. So you're going to have to do two things for me. First, the only way they'll let me out of camp is that I have a job waiting for me. So if you could, make sure I have a job at least to pay for my tuition. I'll find another job to pay for my room and board. Those are my two conditions that otherwise I can't leave camp."

In fact, I wanted to go to the University of Michigan and I had applied there and they accepted me, but of course I had to tell them these conditions. They were only going to give me twenty-five dollars and a one-way ticket to Ann Arbor. And so, in order for me to get out of camp I had to have a guarantee that I do have a job to support me in my school. So they wrote back saying, Well, okay don't worry about the job, we'll make sure you get one, but just come on. I said, "I can't leave camp without a guarantee. At least tell me that there's a job waiting for me, then I can leave." But they couldn't guarantee me the job so I had to go to another school in Cleveland. An engineering school that would. So I was able to leave camp and then in January of 44', they start to open up the draft. The selective service for the Japanese American, and that's when I was taken in. So I was in freshmen year of college when they called me in. My dean said that, "You'll probably be taken in any way." And it was true. You know, as soon as they opened up the selective service, then they called me and I was taken. So I trained

and I went overseas with the 100th [Infantry] Battalion. I was shipped to go to the placement with the 100th Battalion.

[00:22:27]

KP: You went to Italy first and—?

HY: I was in Italy and then France. And then back to Italy, yes.

KP: Back to Italy, okay.

HY: Um-hm.

KP: The 100th Battalion, came back to the states and then, was it integrated with the 442nd [Infantry Regiment]?

HY: Okay, a lot of people don't understand what the connection [is] with the 100th Battalion. You see before the war, there were boys that were drafted into the service. Both in Hawaii and on the mainland. And there were probably a thousand drafted in Hawaii. A thousand or so drafted on the mainland. In Hawaii, when the war broke out, their job was to guard the islands. Well as soon as replacements came from the mainland, they took their guns away and made them do menial work in the service. So they said, Hey, let us be a part of this war, we want to see some combat too. So they gathered the Japanese American Hawaiians that were there and they put them on a boat and they brought them to the states and they classified them as the 100th Infantry Battalion (Separate). In other words, separate means they are not part of any unit.

KP: Oh, okay.

HY: They're just separate unit, okay? And that's the Hawaiian boys. They were drafted before the war about a thousand boys brought over here to train as combat soldiers. They train as combat soldiers. The main land was scattered all over. All the different camps. And so, if they're on the coast they shoved them all in line. Texas, Missouri, wherever, Arkansas. And they did menial work in these camps. So the 100th Battalion, they trained as combat soldiers. When they first finished their first training nobody wanted them. So they came but they spent in a maneuver, and finished the second leg of their training and still nobody wanted them. By then, the volunteers from the 442 were being organized and so they were training as the 442nd. About twenty-five hundred volunteers from Hawaii and about fifteen-hundred from the camps. They put them together and formed the 442. The 100th were separate, okay. And the 4—had just started training. The 100th had already gone through two trainings. And they found out nobody wanted them. Then around August of 43' (inaudible)_____ said, We are getting ready to invade Italy. We need all the help you can send us. So they sent the 100th overseas to North Africa. When they saw who the 100th were they said, *Oh*. Okay, we need some boys to guard our supply depots. And so, the CO, the officer, said, Hey we didn't come no eight thousand miles to guard no supplies, we came here to fight a war. We want to see

combat. All the men were Japanese Americans. The top officers were Caucasian. Okay? But in the 100th most of the top officers were guys that were living in Hawaii. So they knew the Hawaiian boys, they knew the Japanese Americans. And so they went into battle in Italy from Salerno. And the main and the 442nd would be trained back in Mississippi. Early part of 44' the 100th was a part of the attack group against [Battle of Monte] Cassino. You have probably heard of Cassino, huh?

KP: Um-hm, yes.

HY: Here they took quite a beating and so finally they had to pull back. They just ran out of men. And so, there were no Japanese Americans that they could draw on except the 442nd that were training in [Camp] Shelby. So what they did, they took part of the 442 to the 1st battalion and they started sending them over as replacements for the 100th. And so that went on probably for about three to four months. So that way the 100th kept fighting and then finally when the 442 was ready to go overseas they were minus one battalion. They had already sent so many over men over for replacements. So when the 442 went overseas, the original regiment has a 1st, 2nd and 3rd battalion but they only had the 2nd and 3rd battalion so when they went overseas the 100th joined them as the 1st battalion

KP: Oh, I see.

HY: That's where they get the designation of the 100th 442. The 100th had to gain a name for themselves at Cassino. So the Army said that, You guys deserve it, we're going to let you keep the designation of the 100th Battalion. So the "separate" part came off and they became a part of the 442. Yeah, because the 442 was a bigger unit. So a regiment size and it's a complete offensive combat team used to spearhead any attacks and that's what we were trained to do. So we were not defensive men. We were men that were trained to be on the offensive. So that's where you get the designation the 100th 442 and then the 100th and the 442 fought together in the war, okay.

KP: So when did you come back from Europe?

HY: 1946.

KP: 1946.

HY: Yes.

KP: And where did you go after that, did you go straight to, did you come back to California or—

HY: Yes, my parents were here in California so I came back to California. And I was working for about a few months deciding what to do. And the funny thing is, the school there I was going to from camp was an engineering college in Cleveland, Ohio. And I had not written them all that time and then after two years I came home to Los Angeles. The

second day home I got a telegram from the school, Welcome home. You are no eligible to finish your education on the GI Bill. And to this day, I don't know how they ever kept track of me. But it's just too bad I was not really ready to decide what to do when I came back. It had been two years since I left. So I kind of put it aside and I said, When I decide, I'll consider that. But a lot of my friends went to different schools. And I finally went into an electronics, television school. That kind of goes back a long way too because, why television? You know my dad tried to—

[Recording cuts out]

KP: Okay.

[00:31:27]

HY: Okay, when I was in the eighth grade, I was in a boy's league or something that my responsibility was to set up a program for the boys at that school. So I had contacted the General Electric and I said, "Is there anything new you think your company is experimenting with that would be interesting to talk about?" They said, Yes. They didn't call it television then. They called it, something vision. And so, Well can you send someone to make a presentation for say a, 45 minute program? And I said, Sure. So I made all the contacts and I made all the arrangements for this program, and it was on something in the future instead of radio. We knew what radio was. But instead of just voice it would be a picture. You know over the air, you can see something that's happening in the studio, you can see it in your home. And that was the program at the time. And I had forgotten all about it.

And when I came home and decided what to do, a friend of mine wanted me to go with him to UCLA—he enlisted at UCLA. Another one said, He was going to (inaudible)____. I said, Nah, I'm undecided right now. But then I read something about television. Where you can take a program and you can pick it up on a camera through the air and we can have it in people's home. And then it flashed back on me. I learned about, you know, I was twelve or fourteen years old. So I made contact with this school. I said, I'd like to know more about this program you're having. So they showed me they had a studio set up. And there's a cameraman here and they have a little something over here where you can see what's happening. I said, "*Oh, wow!*" That intrigued me so I enrolled and I went to that school. And I was in that business until the early part of this year. Well, I had my own business. But that's because of my experience—

KP: In television.

HY: Yeah. But during the war years, the schools most of them were very supportive. They understood our position. Especially the school that I went to. They tried to help me in any way they can both in counseling and financial areas. Because I had told them, "My parents don't have anything, I don't have anything but I'm willing to work at the school for my tuition and I'll find a job maybe on the weekends to take care of room and board."

That's the only way I can leave camp. So I remember I was one of the first to leave my camp and a lot of guys came up and said, Hey you're crazy to leave—

KP: (laughs)

HY: —you're going to get beat up. And you're going to go to college, what kind of job are you going to get? But anyway, I went.

KP: So how long were you in that camp?

HY: Okay, I was in the Santa Anita Assembly Center. I was there about four months. I lived in the horse stables. And then we were put on a train. We didn't know where we were going, and we could not get off of the train. There were MPs [Military Police] walking up and down the train. And every now, we would come by and say, Okay guys, pull your shades. So we would pull our shades and everything. You know, being seventeen years old you want to know what's out there, right?

KP: Um-hm.

HY: So we would look and we'd be passing through maybe an airport or a train station. Or there'd be a train headed the other way with tanks and guns and things like this. And then we would record (?) our sightings off the main track and usually we did most of our traveling at night. But anyway, then sometimes we would be pulled off the main line and just sit there and then all of a sudden, a train would come by going the other way. And we'd look out and there'd be tanks and guns and things like that going the other way. And then finally after about four days, they said, Okay, you can get out and stretch your legs. So we were at a railroad station. We were kind of far away. But here, there's a lot of people by the railroad station. Because the MP was to get out, and they'd line us up and they'd be there with their rifles. And so, these people from the station would come out and look and they would get closer and closer. And so, I remember I asked them, "Hey, where are we?" (laughs) You know, we had no idea where we were. *Oh*, you guys speak English? (Patel laughs) I said, "Yeah. We're Japanese American being evacuated from the West Coast to parts unknown." But they said, *Oh*, we thought you were Japanese prisoners of war. (Patel laughs) We said, No, we're civilians that were living on the West Coast and we're being evacuated. They said, You guys are in Louisiana. I said, *Wow!* Louisiana. (Patel laughs) But anyway, that was the first time we knew, we were able to get off the train and we knew where we were. And of course, we got back on the train and then in half another day we ended up in a camp called Rohwer.

KP: Rohwer.

HY: Yeah. It's five miles from the Mississippi River. But one thing that was strange, I remember, they were still busy making a lot of the camp areas. And there was a crew there working and I noticed that it looked like the supervisor on that crew was a Black man. And so I remember, I talked to him and I said—then I started to learn that Black

people down here and they were put into supervisor positions and things like this— “I noticed you’re the boss of this crew”. He said, “Well I’ve been with this company over twenty-something years. But that’s true that a lot of my people have the opportunity but this company treats me okay and I work hard for them.” But you know so again, our history books don’t say anything.

KP: Right, right. They don’t.

HY: And there are people that have bent over backwards to help. The Blacks. A lot of people bent over backwards to help us also.

KP: Okay, so after you had left the camp, your parents were still at the camp?

HY: Yes, my parents and family were all in camp.

KP: They were all in camp.

HY: Then probably about six months after I left, my father came out to work. But my mother and my two brothers and sister remained in camp all this time.

[00:40:15]

KP: Okay. While you were in camp do you recall hearing about the riots at other camps like the riot at Manzanar?

HY: Okay, I didn’t hear anything about Manzanar but we did have a riot in Santa Anita. But that riot was not against the people running the camps. What it was, was they were chasing a Japanese man out of camp. They were chasing him towards the gate and I guess the army let him to protect him. Because he was trying to get information against the people in camp to turn over to the authorities, something like this. So they say, He’s a dog. “Dog” is somebody that goes against their people. So but then of course, there was one time where they tried to burn a mess hall at the Santa Anita. But other than that, no. Only after I came home and started to read about different camps did I know that there were some riots in other camps, things such as this. I knew of people that objected to us going into the service—so the loyalty questionnaires—but I didn’t know about the fight to keep us from being drafted. See the draft was open to us in the early part of 1944. And at that time there’s a big kind of a conflict between different fractions. See in the Japanese American community, our age is very common for a family to maybe have two boys and a daughter or something like that. To send one son back to Japan to study.

KP: *Kibei*.¹

HY: Okay?

¹ *Keibi*: A person born in the United States of Japanese immigrant parents but chiefly educated in Japan.

KP: Yeah.

HY: And that was fairly common. And a lot of these people say they were sent back when they were seven or eight years old and they were there maybe ten years. So they were indoctrinated in the Japanese language, culture, and things such as this. And they were sent to the same camp with us. And so, when this loyalty questionnaire came up even though they were American citizens and they had to answer the question, they were very antagonistic. They throw us in here and they expect us to go fight for them? They must be crazy! We had these arguments back and forth—discussion. So amongst our group there was a very distinct subgroup. I'd say probably 80 percent were American born, never been to Japan. But there was about 20 percent that, like I said, were trained in Japan and came back to the United States just before the war started. So even though they were born American citizens and they looked like us, their thoughts, their thinking were entirely different.

KP: So you came back and then you started working here in Southern California. How did you meet your wife, did you meet her after you came back or—?

HY: Okay, before the war, most of our group attended Japanese language school. Our parents didn't know much English, very little English. And so, we had to communicate with them so we went to these Japanese schools to learn a little Japanese so we could converse with them. And her brother was in my class. Of course, I knew the brother but you know, but she was still a little girl. She was only what twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old then. Then when I came home, then of course the family was living a couple blocks away. So since I know him before the war, I go over and meet him and I see his sister.

KP: (laughs)

HY: Oh, that's what happens, right?

KP: Uh-huh.

HY: Okay, that's how we—I really didn't know her before the war. But through her brother I got to know her. And then we dated a lot and then finally got married and been together since the 1950's, okay?

KP: Um-hm. When you did come back and you got your job here in Southern California was it difficult to reintegrate yourself? I mean, did you detect any animosity from the Caucasians that were here?

HY: I would say no. Uh, a couple of reasons. I had a lot of Caucasian friends to begin with.

KP: And they remained your friends—

HY: I think my English probably was more Caucasinized than a lot of other Japanese Americans because I grew up with them, with boys. And I never considered myself

below them or above them. And so, as far as my fitting in, I thought that I fit in pretty good. I'm good to begin with, I think, and if I have a point that I'd like to bring up, I can bring it up. And so, I had graduated from this television school and at that time it was 1948, I believe. And at that time, this company was selling televisions but they needed a technician. They needed someone to be able to take care of it. So the school recommended me. And so, I was working for this company which is all Caucasians. And they would send me to a lot of these wealthy people's homes. They were the only ones that could afford televisions, 1940 to 49'. I was the top technician and I would go to take care of these wealthy peoples' T.V.s. Plus the bars that had them in their bars. Plus, in the show room, Barker Brothers [Furniture], May [Department Stores] Company, all these big stores, you know. It was my responsibility to make sure that they're running properly, that the people there know how to operate it and things such as that. So in my work I had no problem. I had no problem.

And then, the company got fairly large and I was in charge of all these technicians and a lot of these stores that I would go to said, Why don't you go into business for yourself? Well, I didn't have a business background but my dad was in business, remember? And growing up I used to go there on summer vacations and on the weekends because I'd help him. And he would tell me about how you price things. You know, you have to make a profit to stay in business. It isn't that you're gouging anyone but there's a certain amount of profit you have to make and things such as this. How you employ people, the kind of taxes you have to pay. So I had some general idea of a business. So this company was fairly large and then they were having trouble with taxes or something. So when it got to that point, I talked to a couple of these Japanese boys that were working with me and I said, "I have the contacts would you like to go in business?" And they said well, "What business? What do you do?" I said, "Well, I know a little bit about it but we just need maybe a little car, we can use cars to get around. I have the contacts. You know, we'll get in touch with the CPA, an accountant, that can do our books for us to give us an idea and we'll start." And they said, Okay.

So the three of us started business. And one was in about a year and he went into the service during the Korean War. And when he came back he said he's going to go into a different field so we bought him out. Then my other partner and I stayed together for about another uh, eight years. And then we were located near The Colosseum. And we had quite a bit of customers around there. But I said, "Hey, this whole area's changing. And I have some stores on the east side near where I live that were doing work for right now that wants me to take over. What if we just close down over there and move our whole shop over here?" Well, he didn't want to. I said, "Okay well, I'll buy you out and then I'll move the store." And he said, Nah, he wants to stay in the business. So I said, "Okay, well then you keep it and you buy me out." So that's what he did. He ran the store over there and he bought me out and I opened up on the east side town with my brother. And then we actually had about twelve technicians working for us. It was a fairly large company. It was good. And I just got rid of the business the first part of this year. Forty-something years it's been good to us, yeah.

[00:51:55]

KP: That's great.

HY: So that's just my personal life.

KP: Uh-huh, yeah. And did you create any organizations? Did you get together with other men that had been in the service with you after the war?

HY: Oh yeah. In fact, that's what I'm involved with right now. But there's always been an organization here in Los Angeles of former veterans of the 100th Battalion and 442nd. And I've always been a member of that but I've been busy in something else so I was just a dues paying member. And of course, I had my business I was involved in but I was busy with something else so I couldn't do too much. But when they knew I was going to finally semi retire and this other thing I was working on was almost over they said, Hey you gotta take over. So I took over the association with approximately six hundred and fifty members throughout the mainland here. And we also have a lot of our buddies from Hawaii. And we meet with them almost on a yearly basis. So we are a very close knit as far as getting together with old veterans. We're all old men. (both laugh) In fact we just got back on October 31st from a 3 week tour of all of our battlegrounds.

KP: Oh, wow.

HY: And that was a very emotional thing. There was a little town in France called, Bruyeres. B-R-U-Y-E-R-E-S. That we liberated fifty years ago. And so that town was having their fiftieth, kind of, liberation celebration. And they said, Hey we got to invite the 100 [and] 442 vets. So they invited us and so we made different groups up. I think about six or seven hundred of us veterans went back in October. And of course, our wives went with us. So we had close to a thousand or twelve hundred at this little town that probably only town that had four hundred people living there. But uh—

KP: You got a good reception there?

HY: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. They've been in contact with our group ever since we left in 1944. And we go back and we walk the streets and these old ladies they come up and say, I remember you guys, I was only eight years old. (both laugh) You know, things like this. It was a very emotional thing. We were not much older. We were only what? 19, 20, 21, 22 years old then. And here it is fifty years later. So, the towns have all changed. The people have changed. Of course everything has grown, cars, you know, things like these. They've got nice store fronts. Especially at that time everything was all bombed out and things like this. And the people that were there were in their cellars and things like this. They had no food to eat. So things like that had all changed.

But the places where we fought have not changed. We were mostly mountain fighters. We would fight in the mountains and every now and then there's a little town we'd liberate and continue on and things like this. And so, we'd always talk about all the mountains that we fought in. And the forest and *oh*, the snow. And the cold. And rain. And our wives would listen and, Yeah, yeah. We've heard that twenty times, (Patel

laughs) you know. But when we finally went back, and they finally for the first time saw what we were talking about, mountains and the forest. And when we said mountains we're talking about the Western end of the Swiss Alps. We're not talking about mountains that are five, six hundred feet high. You're talking about ten, fifteen thousand—they're huge. And then for the first time I think the wives realized that it was no picnic. And so, it was also an eye opener I think for us. We were looking at when we—they say, That's where we gotta go. And we say, Alright we go. Well you know and we look and say, We went up there? (both laugh) *Wow*, how did we get up there? Well, I remember, many of the times we would hold on to the mule's tail and they would pull us up. So we knew it was tough but we never knew it was that tough. And so, it was an eye opener for I think everybody. And to realize that when you're twenty, twenty years old you can do just about anything.

KP: Anything, right.

HY: And here we're fifty years old and we're looking, is that the place? It's hard to imagine. Because I remember one place, this bend in this road because that's where our tank was. And we had to get out it out of there. And I remember we were right by that area. There was a tank and we had to run across this opening. And we look at the opening, we ran across half a mile. And it's not flat, you go and it's like this and this. You know, here we walk and we get tired. Hey, not only can you run, you gotta hold 50-60 pounds on your back too. So that like I said, is part of an eye opener for everyone that was there. I think now when the wives hear our stories, their imagination of it would be a lot different.

KP: Very different, I'm sure.

HY: Well why don't you have some, you want some?

KP: Um, no thank you. [whispers]

[Recording paused]

KP: You very much, are you—did you have anything to do with the Japanese American museum that there is here?

HY: Well they are preparing to go into their World War II period. And of course, one of the displays they will have will be on the camps themselves. But they also realized that a big part of World War II is the veteran's story. And so, I'm working with the museum and trying to construct an exhibit that will not only tell individual stories but will tell the main—what are we trying to tell, the next generation or the generation after. Do we tell a war story? We want to tell a story of maybe, well let me say it this way. When I talk to young Japanese American groups, I talk to quite a number of them. Boy scouts, high school kids, the Japanese American clubs, things like this. I tell them that when we were sitting in that history class and they talk about our forefathers did this and did this, we just sat back and folded our arms. We had no contribution at all. But I taught these

young guys, you guys had forefathers. You guys had forefathers, in spite of things that happened to them, they did something for the United States and don't ever forget that because this is your roots. Your roots are what happened during World War II. Yes, we knew our place in society. Well we wanted to change that and hopefully we did change that to a point where kids today have opportunity. You are not second-class citizens.

[01:02:14]

KP: Right.

HY: We knew we were second class citizens but you guys are first class citizens. If there's something you want, go after it. Don't let anybody say you can't do it. Go after it. It's a bumpy road. Yes, nothing's going to be laid out for you, nothing's going to be perfect. But it's a tough road. Yeah, but the doors are open. The only people that can close these doors are you, yourself. If you put half the effort in and you say, I can't do it, it's going to be closed. Okay? You have forefathers that did something for the United States, Americans. And I want you guys to leave here and if you want to go to college, if you want to be an engineer, go into politics, whatever you want to do, Hey its wide open, go right in. You want to be an engineer, you can (inaudible)_____. You want to be going to aeronautics, maybe you can even be an airplane mechanic. Because everything is close to us, no? First by the government itself, secondly by individuals. But what really hurt us was the government itself was against us but now things have all changed. And to say that you can't do it or to say that I'm being discriminated on, is—all my buddies who didn't come back with us just died for nothing.

So that's basically the talk that I like to leave with young people, is that there's a thought of being first class citizens. You're always going to have discrimination. People are going to look at you, Oh yeah, my grandpa told me about you Japs. You're always going to have individual discrimination that you'll never stop. If it's not because of your race, it's because you're the tall guy that looked down on the small guy or the small guy that looked up at the tall guy. There's always some type of discrimination but don't let it stop you because the government has opened all the doors for you. And I tell most of my veterans, I say, See our parents suffered a lot. Like, all first-generation immigrants do. But we have nothing of these stories. We have things that they brought over, we have their pictures, things like this but we don't have the words or the feelings. How did they feel coming here not knowing the language? Being discriminated—told you can't even own your own home. You can't own your own business. And then you fight to get out of this [Great] Depression and then you finally get thrown into camps, you lose everything. How do you feel, to have none of that? Because every succeeding generation lives on the gains that the previous generation made for them. And I tell the young kids, you may be the brightest in class and you might get all kinds of opportunities but don't ever think that just because of you, that you did. You made it, because of somebody before you, okay? I'm not trying to glorify what we done but I think if they know where they came from, it makes them a stronger people. And that applies to you, the same thing. You may have it fairly easy but your parents had a hell of time. Don't ever forget that. You owe an awful lot to your parents and your kids are going to owe an

awful lot to you too. Because you're always trying to make it better for the next generation. So it's a provocative thinking that it's something that I tell guys, you may not be very articulate in your talking but a few words or thoughts that you can leave your kids, that's going to stay with them the rest of their lives. So don't be afraid to put words down either on a piece of paper or through tape or video. Help the museum out. They're trying to set up a library like this for the voices of the veterans are left behind and that's basically the project that I'm working on—

KP: That you're working on—

HY: —at the present time, yes. That's one of the projects. There's a few others. (laughs)

KP: And you're also going around to high schools and speaking to high school students?

HY: Yeah, I've done that quite a bit over the last—how I got started on that is funny. My daughter was going to a private high school. Caucasian basically, 99 percent were Caucasians. And it was a Christian high school. And one day, her senior history teacher said, "Was your parents in camp?" And my daughter said, "No, *what camp?*" "Oh, during World War II a lot of the Japanese Americans were in camp." So she came home from school and said, Dad, tell me were you in camp? And I say, Well where did you hear that from. She's already 17 years old and asking that question. Oh, my history teacher asked if I was in camp. And I said, Yes, both myself and your mother were in camp. And *Oh, I didn't know that. What kind of camp was this?* It's where the Japanese Americans were not trusted to be loyal and actually they were all rounded up and put in these so-called relocation camps. And your mother was a young girl and she was there for the whole three years. They said, three years. And so, she went back and told the teacher, "Yeah, he was in camp, both my mother and father." And they said, "Can you ask your father if they'd like to come to the class and talk on this subject." So she came home and said, Would you be willing to speak? And I said, Well okay.

Only thing I knew about it, I was only in camp for maybe 6-7 months. And so, I had to, I had a few friends who had written books on the Japanese American culture and things like this. And I said, I made a commitment to speak before a high school class and I know other than my own experience, I don't know nothing about the background. So can you show me some books where I can read about it. So they showed me a few books and I studied that and my presentation was basically on—that's why I said—trying to get the class to look at it because I was their age. So when I'm speaking, you can put yourself in my shoes too. Because I was a senior in high school when this all happened. So I tried to give the whole background on the Japanese American community. How it was made up, what kinds of schools we went, things that we did on an individual and a group basis. And then the first start of World War II. And then the evacuation and sales that we all had to go through. You know, our parents were in the prime of their lives. They were all probably between 40-50 years old. And they had gone through everything and then all of a sudden to be—it had to be taken away from all this. I think even today we really don't know the impact that it had on our parents because like I said, we don't have it on tape. But I was, probably a little older than the average so I knew what the

older generation was like before the war. I knew how it was in camp and maybe after camp. So looking at it this way, simply put, the first generation were called *Issei*, okay?

[01:13:26]

KP: Uh-huh.

HY: They could live with the discrimination. They could live with the Depression. But I think that the evacuation tore them up. Because the discrimination was a lot of individual places. The Depression, everyone was going through that. But the evacuation, everything that they had lived, financially, but mostly their dreams went down the tube. Everything they had built up for. I was involved where a lot of my father's generation were in parent's committees and they'd say, Now you can do this, this, this is how it's going to be done. And we just did it. And when we got to camp, they were as mellow as can be. And they lost all of their ability to lead. They were no longer voices that spoke for the Japanese American community.

And so, this is where I say that everyone talks about the relocation camps and how harsh it was and things like that. But the harshest part was the evacuation. Where they had to leave behind everything. You know, most of them had been here 20-30 years. It wasn't they just came over. And that's what tore up the first, the *Issei* generation. And we have nothing of that on tape. And the museum I talked to, and they agree. There's still a lot of *Issei* living but they're in their nineties, ninety-five. They're in their senior citizen homes. They're senile. They can barely talk. They can barely eat. And this is why it's so important, that at least we try to leave something behind. It's too bad that our parents—because to me, I don't know if I could have gone through what they went through. Because they went through a tremendous amount, okay?

KP: Just to make one point certain, what years that you were President of the 100th 442nd—

HY: 1991 and 1992.

KP: Okay.

HY: I guess, I didn't do a very good job in 1991. So they made me do it in 1992.

KP: They wanted you back. (both laugh)

HY: Eh?

KP: You were good so they wanted you back.

HY: (laughs)

KP: Okay, that's all I have. Thank you very much for your time and thank you so much.

HY: I know what it is to write and to try to put everything together. I hope you are able to put all of that together, it's going to be a lot of work.

KP: No, it will be a pleasure most of the time. This is all very interesting.

HY: Are you planning to be a writer or journalism?

KP: I'm getting my bachelors in history. So, I'm going to be a historian.

HY: I'm kind of a history buff myself. I love museums. And it doesn't have to be a big city museum. It can be a small little town. They all have museums.

KP: Yeah, they do.

HY: They all have museums and I look forward to visiting some of them and every time I get a chance I do go visit a museum.

KP: You should come to Cal State Fullerton Oral History Department. We have a very wide collection and they're on tape and they're also on hard copy—either written interviews with other Japanese Americans. So I think that'd be great if you can come visit us there.

HY: Most of the people I talk to that are Japanese American talk about the experiences of camp. And it's on a personal level. So I try to get away from my own personal, the effect and the purpose of what our generation was trying to do. I have talked to a lot of people and that's good because like I said, 90 percent of what he says, 90 percent of what I said, 90 percent of what he says—if it's personal it's all the same. But the 10 percent is what you try to draw out. So I try to stay away from that and get in the focus of what we're trying to take. I was very fortunate, I think, growing up I had people that were looking to the future a lot. Like I said, this man who was a graduate of Cal Tech working at a food stand—99 percent of the guys would be madder than hell. He said on the graduation day, "Everyone had three to four offers for jobs. I didn't have anything, I had none." Okay? But it doesn't phase him.

KP: He went on.

HY: And when I was in the service, we'd have a battle and we'd come back and try to relax. And we had officers and they'd come talk about how it is back home and when we get back we're going to have to change this and this and this. We're not going to take this crap anymore. You know, we're not going to go back to the plantation and live like our parents and work to the bone for nothing. When we go back home, we have to become lawyers. We have to become involved in politics. We've got to change things around. And I said, *Wow*, here we may not live tomorrow and yet the guys are talking about ten years from today.

[01:20:27]

KP: Yeah.

HY: And so maybe I was fortunate to sit in on a lot of these things. And the future was probably more important than what happens tomorrow. Because they may get shot up tomorrow, that's true. But that's the chance everybody is taking. In fact, I was talking about that this morning. I'm in a memorial foundation with the 442 and we were in a discussion about this, this morning. Here we are right in the middle of battle and we got a ten minute—here we fought this morning and this afternoon kind of quieted down. And so we get back and we talk about this morning battle and how many people we lost and things like this and who got shot up and stuff. And what we gotta do tomorrow. And then talk about, you know, I gotta go back to school. I wanted to be a doctor but I think it's more important now that I went into politics or something like this. And they say, why? Well, number one, we can't go back and do the same things our parents are doing. You know, we gotta change these things. Even back then they're talking about Hawaii and the future of Hawaii. Things like this. And maybe 90 percent of the people are non-Caucasian but the Caucasians run everything. Well same thing back here. So you know, I guess, like I said, even to this day, I just think back and say, *Wow*. For guys to think like that in a middle of a battle zone, (both laugh) you pop your head out of the fox hole and you may get shot. But you're in the fox hole and we're talking like this. They said, You're still young, what are you planning to do? Well, I still have my education I've got to continue. I left college and I may just go back there but I'm not sure what I'm going to do because I don't know the situation back home. But they'd talk about [how] there were graduates of the University of Hawaii but the only jobs open to them were teaching, you know, things like this. My parents they worked themselves to the bone in a pineapple factory or out in the fields. And instead of somebody working to elevate him to supervisor, they'd hire someone from the mainland, something like that. And we said, well we can't take that kind of crap, we're not going to go back to that. So this is the way they used to talk. So the future is what you make up. The future is wide open, yeah.

KP: Okay, well thank you very much again. Thanks.

HY: Beg your pardon.

KP: Thank you again for taking your time with me.

HY: No problem.

KP: Okay.

HY: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW