

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Children's Village at Manzanar Oral History Project

An Oral History with TAKATOW MATSUNO

Interviewed

By

Noemi Romero

On March 13, 1993

OH 2339

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NARRATOR: TAKATOW MATSUNO
 INTERVIEWER: Noemi Romero
 DATE: March 13, 1993
 LOCATION: Monterey Park, California
 PROJECT: Children's Village at Manzanar

NR: This is an interview with Takatow Matsuno by Noemi Romero for the Japanese American Project of the Oral History Program of the California State University of Fullerton. The interview is being held at approximately 1:15 p.m., at the home of Tamotsu Isozaki¹ in Monterey Park, California, on Saturday, March 13, 1993. First of all, can you just tell me about your life now? What it is you do? Are you retired?

TM: Okay. From the beginning, or you wanted to know from the orphanage time?

NR: Right now, the question is what you do now as spare time, your work, with your family? Just your life now, the present.

TM: At the present? Okay, I have four kids. There from thirty-eight to thirty-one years old. Two girls and two boys. My two girls are married. I have one granddaughter, and I have another one coming in April. I've got an auto repair shop. I just sold my auto parts shop. I've been in business for thirty-seven years, I guess, thirty-eight years? Nineteen fifty-seven. So, I've been working, working, and working. (laughs) I'm trying to retire, but I can't retire because of all your medical insurances. [recording paused] Let's see, go back to—

NR: Okay, what do you as your hobbies now?

TM: Well, I've got my computer, and I've been fooling with the computer. I just went out and bought some jet skis. You know what jet skis are?

NR: Um-hm.

TM: I just bought a three-seater, and I'm supposed to get a two seater in a couple weeks. But, that's my new hobby.

¹ Tamotsu Isozaki, O.H. 2332, Center for Oral and Public History.

NR: Your new toy?

TM: Yeah, new toy. Before that I used to run sand rails, and we used to go as a family for—since 1967 to 1985, I guess, '85 or '81. The kids were all growing so quick, and it was like a meeting point. We used to go up to Pismo Beach and have two—well, I *had* two brothers that lived up north. They both passed away, but they would bring their family and it was a halfway point between here and San Francisco. So, we would go there and have fun. And all the cousins know each other as a big family and a unit. I'm from a family of nine. There's five boys and four girls. I'm the youngest son. I have two kid sisters below me, and all the rest are above me. Out of the five boys, three of them passed away, and there's only two of the boys left and the four girls.

NR: Can you tell me about your—or did you want to say something? I'm sorry.

TM: You can ask me questions!

NR: Okay. Before camp, what is your most vivid memory?

TM: We used to live on Terminal Island. This was just before the war. We used to play on the railroad tracks. We walked to school about—I guess, we used to walk about a mile or two now to the school, maybe about a mile now. My father was a fisherman then. He would go out fishing and come back, and let's see what else was there. When the war broke out, as a kid—and I guess I must have been terrified. There were three FBI people that came to the house, and they came searching all through the house. So then, my other brothers were saying, "Don't be afraid! Don't be afraid!" You know? And, when they came in, they searched the house without any kind of warrant or anything. They just came in, and they said that our father was an enemy spy or whatever. And we didn't have any lights. We had to get out of Terminal Island in forty-eight hours, I think it was.

From there we came to the Shonien, which is in Silver Lake, we called that the *Shonien*. We stayed over there. Our oldest brother, he was eighteen or nineteen, so they didn't take him. My oldest sister is the one that kept us together; that's Susie. A few went into the Village so we'll be all together, more or less, so she would be like my mother. My mother was in the hospital. Let's see, when we went into the Children's Village, I remember running around catching quails. I mean, I used to catch quails. And I remember going up to Manzanar and there were three buses. We had a motorcycle escort going out of Los Angeles up to the county line. I think when we hit Kern county line then they stopped, and then we started going. There must've been a flood or something near Red Rock Canyon. You could see the highway was, I can kinda remember, was eaten away.

When we reached camp, all these people came looking at us because these three bus loads were for the village. We had to move from the Shonien over here, and I don't remember if there was some Maryknoll people either. We went to the Children's Village, and there were three big barracks. One was a kitchen/mess hall

and where the director was, Matsumotos² [Harry and Lillian]. I think there was a reading room or something. The next barrack was for the older girls, and a nursery, which I was in there for a little bit. And then, the third one was for the boys. One side was a little boy's side, and the other side was the big boy side with the laundry room. And, let's see, from there, we didn't know where our father was. The FBI had taken them away. He was transported all different places. He was in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and I think Louisiana, North Dakota, or Texas, all different places. When we were in the orphanage, it was pretty well disciplined. We were kind of converted to the Christian way, but they had the Catholics from Maryknoll there, too. I remember we went to Sunday school. (chuckles) Every Sunday we would go. They had a mess hall where that first building was. We would go there and eat, and they would say grace. We used to have a pear orchard right in back of us. They used to have a gazebo out in the garden; there was a garden out there.

I remember going to school. A lot of people I should have remembered, but when you're that young it's hard to remember these people. Even now I kind of remember them from their first name, not their last name. From the orphanage we would go to school, and then we'd come straight back to the orphanage. We didn't have any time to dilly-dally around. Orphanage life was—well, it's like Tamo is just like my brother to me. Through the years we've kept in contact. There was one person that was half-German, half-Japanese, Dennis Bambauer³. He was adopted [by] a doctor in Bishop, and I had kept in contact with him through high school. He got married. I was an usher at his wedding. He had it pretty bad, because when you're half and half it's—for them it was worse, worse than for us, being in an orphanage like that. Because we actually had our parents, but like them, they didn't have parents. He was the one that I more or less remember the most because I kept in contact with him. He got a divorce, so I haven't talked with him in about ten or fifteen years maybe. He lives up in Redding now in Northern California. I've seen him up there, and I've called him. We had a Children's Village reunion last year, and Tamo and I had put that together. In fact, it was my other brother that we were supposed to get it together, but he passed away so I asked Tamo and we got it together. So, we had a reunion last year, and it was like the fiftieth. We went by the picture. If you see that picture over there, that Children's Village picture. Did you see that picture?

[00:12:39]

NR: The 1944 one?

TM: Easter of '44. We were out of the orphanage then because my father, finally they brought him back to camp to us, so we got out of the orphanage. It was just before that because we went back there to take that picture.

NR: How long were you in the orphanage?

² Lillian Matsumoto and Taeko Nagayama, O.H. 2492, Center for Oral and Public History.

³ Dennis Tojo Bambauer, O.H. 2335, Center for Oral and Public History.

- TM: From 1941, after the war broke out, until about '43, right before '44. Right before that picture was taken because my father came back to camp.
- NR: During this time what did you think? Did you know why you were in the camp? Did you know why you were in the Children's Village?
- TM: Well, my parents weren't around so we had to go into the Village. Who was going to take care of us, you know. There wasn't anybody around that could take care of us.
- NR: Going back, did you know what was going on? You were what, about six years old? What did you think? Because you were younger, did you have a full understanding?
- TM: When you're small like that it's kind of frightening when you see all this going on. That part there wasn't too bad. The only part that I can remember that was bad was when the FBI came. That was bad. When we got out of camp, going to school, you know, "Jap, Jap, Jap," (chuckles) it was kind of bad for a young person, but we overcame that.
- NR: Can you give me any specific times where you felt that racism here in America after the camp, in school?
- TM: Gee, I don't know, I just let it pass. I went to junior high school, and it was almost like 70 or 80 percent black. That was in Lafayette Junior High School. Hispanics, there was a few. I've got a junior high class picture at home. You can look at it! But, I don't know, there were a few times when I was a lot younger that all that stuff came up. I guess I used to have to fight a little bit. A lot of the stuff I forget.
- NR: Verbally or a fistfight? You actually remember getting into fistfights?
- TM: I'd get in fistfights. You know, "You Jap this and that," then you fight a little bit. But, that's when you're like in elementary school and stuff. Junior high school it started—well, they still had gangs and things then too, you know. I mostly stayed with my own people, the Japanese people. I've gone out with different other people, too. I've mixed, but when they had socials and all that I would go to the Japanese socials. They would be anywhere from Puente to Long Beach, Gardena. We used to do this in one night, driving around just to see how these dances were. This was like on a Saturday night, you know, but that was high school days. That was '50, around there.
- NR: You were telling me how the *hapa* had it worse off than you guys. You had the half-German, half-Japanese. Why do you say it was worse for them? What treatment did they get that was worse than yours?
- TM: First of all, because they were half, they weren't pure Japanese.
- NR: What specific things were done to them?

TM: They were picked on more because they were different people. I mean, you looked at them, it's obvious. If you're Japanese, you're Japanese. If you're half-German and half-Japanese or half-Mexican and half-Japanese, and they all had Japanese blood in them but they were mixed. So, when they were in the orphanage, or even when they were going to school, it's obvious and they'd get picked on. And that would be worse than for me getting picked on.

NR: By other students or by the staff? By the instructors also?

TM: From everybody, more or less. They used to have problems. They used to urinate in their pants and stuff. This isn't like a regular thing.

NR: You mean, because they were frightened?

TM: Yeah, they were frightened and things like that.

NR: Do you remember any specific event happening, what a *hapa* went through—when somebody was looking down to them or when they went through [hardship]? Something specific, like a story you could tell me?

TM: Not really, because I was too young. There's things that happened, but to me, it was like everything in general. I remember some incidents but there are some things you forget.

NR: Can you tell me about the difference between Shonien and the Children's Village?

TM: There really wasn't too much difference. The Shonien was here in Los Angeles, in the Silver Lake district. It was a home for the Japanese kids. It was different when we went to Children's Village. Children's Village, there was the people from the Salvation Army, which is from San Francisco, and then there was people from Maryknoll, which was Catholic, and then there was us from Shonien. There were actually three different groups of people.

[00:20:27]

NR: Any difference in staff or the way they cared for you? Something dramatic that you can remember?

TM: When you're little like that, you just do what they tell you to do. Some of the older people, like Tamo, he was in the orphanage, and he took care of us. When we did anything bad or did something, they would have a SWAT line, and we'd have to go through the SWAT line. All these kids would be lined up with their legs open like that. When you'd come through that SWAT line you'd get hit. (chuckles)

NR: Who would hit you?

TM: All the kids, all the way up in the thing.

NR: No, I mean who would swat you?

TM: All the kids that's in the orphanage. Like say they have the little side here, and then they have the big side here. Well, the little side, all the guys that are on the little side, well, they'd stand up and you'd get the little ones all the way up to the bigger ones, see. And then, they'd make you go through that swat line, and you'd go back and go through there.

NR: So, you'd hit each other? Is that how you guys disciplined each other?

TM: Yeah, they used to do that.

NR: What other ways did they discipline you?

TM: I don't remember any of them taking a strap to me or anything like that, a whipping.

NR: You mean, anyone as a staff?

TM: Yeah, as a staff. I don't remember any of that. All I remember is when we did something it was go through the line. You'd get revenge on the one's that swatted you. (laughs)

NR: How about emotionally, did any of the staff ever put you down or hurt you? Anything that you recall?

TM: It's not like you have your mother and father, but then the Oriental custom is not like the younger ones—they're the Issei and we're the Niseis. It's not like I would treat my granddaughter now. I give her a lot of love and attention. You don't have that with the older Japanese people. Even in the orphanage, you don't have any of that. I can remember one thing. When they had Christmas, the older ones would give us gifts. I remember this one, and she didn't want to come to this reunion thing. Her name was Mary Honda. That's one thing I cherish, because she gave me a little Archie funny book. It was something that you'd get from someone older and you get a gift like that, you kind of remember that as a little kid. That's one thing I remember. I never forgot that. It was kindness when someone gives you something, a gift like that. Things will come up, but I can't—

NR: Yeah. Did you have any other specific toys, toys that were just yours, or were the toys that you guys had for everyone to share?

TM: For everyone to share, as I remember. More or less they had toys in the little side. And then we used to play marbles. Naturally, when you play marbles you keep the marbles you win. We used to play in a ring and play marbles. And tops, we used to

play tops. We used to look at the Sears and Roebucks and Montgomery Wards, look at their catalogs, because that's all you'd get to look at when you were in camp.

NR: What specific toys did you have just for yourself, besides your marbles?

TM: There wasn't too many. I mean, they had toys and things. It was when I was on the little side, because I remember the little side. My kid sister was born when the war broke out. She was born in '41. So, it was from babies to five years old, and then from there you'd go to the other side. You're in the older group. It was like six to twelve, and then the other ones were from thirteen to eighteen. The girls' side was kind of the same way. My three sisters were on the girls' side there. Then they got out. My two older sisters and my other brother, I remember they got out. My brother went to Montana, beet topping and everything else.

NR: What other games did you play?

TM: We in the barracks used to play—what's the game when you throw the ball over the roof and you get and when you come around you hit the people to go to the other side. We used to play Capture the Flag. Do you know what "Capture the Flag" is? There's a big open field like this, you had one side here and one side here, and they'd have like a middle point. If you come out and this guy comes out after and you tag him, then you take him in as a prisoner. If you could get over there, they have a little flag. If you get that flag, you run all the way back to this other side and you win the game. Then they have it where when you take a prisoner you go and extend the thing, although you can come out from that thing and hold hands, and when they come over, if you tag the person on the end he came come back. You don't know what Capture the Flag is? See, nowadays they don't have any of these games. I never see them play marbles. I don't see them play tops. I don't see them using yo-yos. All they do now is look at TV and violence and stuff.

NR: You guys had a baseball diamond, basketball court, and volleyball court. Did you ever participate in any of the games played?

TM: I remember the elder ones always playing the games, and we'd go see it. Tamo and then had, I think they called them the Zeros, and it consisted of a lot of the orphanage, the older boys. We used to go watch them. They had a baseball diamond, which was way down near Highway 395. After we got out of the orphanage that's where we went, right near the diamond. They had a baseball diamond, and they played. They had an outdoor movie theatre that you'd go out, and they called them firebreaks. They had firebreaks between all these blocks. You'd go to the movies once a week. I forget what day it was. They had a judo place, and they built the auditorium. That auditorium now is a county maintenance yard. At that time, when I was a little kid, I thought, Boy, that sure is a *big* building! (chuckles) But, you go there now, and it's not that big.

[00:30:00]

NR: Tell me about—they had a building where they practiced judo?

TM: Uh-huh.

NR: Did you ever practice any martial arts or judo?

TM: No, I never went to do judo, not in camp I didn't. My father was a grand champion in sumotori back in 1929 here. His name was Kozan. They used to call him Kozan, and he was a grand sumotori champion, I think two years, 1928 and '29. He never lost a match. He was a strong person. Back then he carried a five hundred pound safe on his back [up] twenty-one flights of stairs, and he won \$1,000. That's my understanding. And to this day, all the older people know about him.

NR: Can you tell me more about your father?

TM: My father was from the old country, and he would never talk to us in English. He would always tell us to speak Japanese. B being at the time the war broke, this is when I should have learned my own Japanese language, and that was between five and ten years old, when you learn your language and know how to speak it and everything else. This is what I lost. I lost that. My brothers and sisters above me could more or less converse and so everything else, but this is one thing I lost. This is what I have against the American people. Because of that, I didn't get my heritage down as the language part.

NR: You said that your dad was from the country, and he really emphasized that you learn the Japanese language. Did this change after he was released, and you met with him?

TM: He was always the same. (chuckles)

NR: Did he still require that you speak Japanese?

TM: He did, but we'd speak English to him. I mean, what can we do? We can't talk to him in Japanese. I couldn't.

NR: So, the time that you were in camp, you forgot your Japanese? Is that what happened?

TM: Yeah, I forgot mine. I really forgot mine. I should have known it. If I would have had a few more years with my mother and father, I probably would have been real good. Like I went to Japan in '88. When you start getting around it, then you start picking it up again and you learn the language.

NR: So, if you listen to it, do you understand it? When your father would talk to you?

TM: I could get the drift, and he'd use sign language. (chuckles) And you'd better know, otherwise you'd get kicked right in the butt. He never hit us with his hands.

NR: He would hit you with what?

TM: His foot. He would kick you in the butt. He would never use his hands, though. Never.

NR: You were kind of young, but did you notice any difference in your father after you guys reunited in camp? His attitude, his behavior towards you?

TM: It's kind of hard because I was young then. It was like a pecking order: if you do something wrong, it goes all the way up the line, more or less.

NR: How about your mother, did you ever see her again?

TM: Oh, yeah. We've seen her. We'd go visit her, but it was a ways. It was out in San Bernardino. She never went into camp, so we hadn't seen her from 1941 until 1945 I guess we got out. I can't remember when, but when we came out of camp, each person was given \$25, and they were on their own more or less. When we came out of camp, we went to Long Beach, Long Beach Trailer Park they called it. We went over there, and then we had to relocate. We relocated back to 1st Street after my father and them, they started an express business, which he was in before. My father was more or less a jack-of-all-trades, (chuckles) master of none, you know. He was a fisherman, he was a carpenter—they had to do everything. They had to do all different kinds of jobs to get by. They couldn't get jobs where the Anglo people would accelerate and then get ahead. There weren't jobs like that because there was a lot of discrimination, and they wouldn't allow any of that. A lot of us overcame that. That's part of history.

NR: You said they gave you \$25 and, "Here, go on, live your life again." Who helped you? Who helped your father come up again?

TM: We all had to chip in and so what we could. It wasn't like welfare. You go back and you try and get things on welfare—I guess it's partly pride, too. We just managed. When you have nothing and you come out and you have nothing and you have to start all over again, you have to keep struggling to get ahead. These things weren't handed to us; we had to go out and make it on our own. Like my father and my brother, they put it all in the pot so we could get by. Just progressively as we got along, then [we] just bettered ourselves.

NR: Back to Manzanar, when you came to Manzanar, what did you bring with you?

TM: Nothing. I was at the Shonien. Whatever we had, that's what we had, the clothes on our back and whatever things we had when we were in the orphanage. When we left Terminal Island?

NR: Yes.

TM: I don't know because I was too young. Things that you had you just had to get rid of. We were worse when we were in Terminal Island because they gave us a forty-eight hour notice. You've got to move everything out, because that was a Navy base camp there. I remember the airport and stuff right there and the beaches. To this day, my brother and I, and he confirmed it too later on, we were on the beach there fooling around as little kids, and we saw a guy with a German shepherd out there, (chuckles) and we were hiding from him, you know? I don't know if it was a two-man sub or what, but I kind of remember that. That was in my mind. I had asked my [brother]. He passed away, but he said, "Yeah, we were out there." They had Brighton Beach and Second Beach. I forget which beach it was at, but it was right there on the island.

[00:40:18]

NR: Any other memories you want to add that you have not told me that you can remember before camp? Any memories you have of your mother or father before camp?

TM: I remember my oldest brother. He was kind of a maverick. He was well-read. He knew everything. He would have a lot! He had a motorcycle when we were there. (chuckles) I remember he got the motorcycle on credit or something, and he blew a rod or something on the engine. So, he got some leather or something and put it together and returned it back to the people. (laughs) He was recruited. At that time, they had all these young guys like him, you know, eighteen, nineteen years old, when they're out of high school and they're bumming around or whatever. They recruited them, saying they were going to offer them a lot of money to go to the camps to build the camps. And this is where the government lied to them. When he went to camp, he said all he had was guns on him when they hit the camp. They had all these younger guys in camp then. (chuckles) You know, my daughter interviewed my oldest brother. She wanted to interview me, but I said the one you want to interview is the older one because they could tell you everything. I could tell you bits and pieces, but it's not like someone that's older that tells you all these things.

NR: It's good if she has the opportunity to interview both of you.

TM: This was twenty years ago when she was in college, and she was writing a project or something.

NR: She should still interview you.

TM: In fact, I wanted to dig it up. I said, "Where's it at?" "It's in your garage someplace with the rest of my junk." (laughs)

NR: You should. You should dig it up.

TM: That would be interesting. If you look at that, maybe you could come up with things. She interviewed him, but it wasn't like he was in the Village or anything. It was his experience.

NR: Outside the Village.

TM: Yeah. You could talk to each one of us, and we're going to tell you different things because we had different experiences.

NR: Can you tell me about your relationship with your brothers and sisters before camp, what you remember?

TM: Well, yeah, there was an incident with my brother. We were down on Terminal Island—this is my brother Shioo. He would be about six years older than I was. Let's see, I was about five years old, and he must have been about twelve. We were on Terminal Island, and being that you're the younger kid you have to go out and do what the older ones tell you. So, we were down where they had the roundhouse on Terminal Island. They took the roundhouse out, and there was a big rock quarry where all the rock was around there. We would have to go down there and set the cans up so they could throw the rocks and knock them down. I went down there, and I've got a scar up here someplace right on my forehead. They hit me with a rock, and I started bleeding and bawling like mad. Shioo got me on his back, and he said, "Oh, I'm a fire engine." (chuckles) He carried me all the way home, and that must have been about a mile away. He just kind of rocked me, and I went home. That's one thing I remember. Our family is pretty close, our whole family. Very close.

NR: Can you just run by the list, from the oldest to the youngest?

TM: My oldest brother?

NR: Yes, please.

TM: John. He's the oldest, and when you're the oldest you get everything in the Japanese custom. There was land in Japan he was supposed to take care of, and he passed away before he did that. He wanted to sell the land off and make like a house over there so, if any of us want to go there, we'd have someplace to go. He had five kids. They live up in Mill Valley. Very well-read. He's never been a college graduate or anything, but he could talk about any given subject, and he could tell you all about it. This is how well-read he was. He would do different things. At least he did what he wanted to do out of life before he died. If he wanted to do something, he just did it. He wasn't that rich or anything, but he used to take the kids. They had the World's Fair in New York back in 1963, I think it was, and he took the whole family. And to Washington. He built his car or his truck, and he put a canopy on it or whatever and took off.

NR: Is he like your role model?

TM: I don't know, we used to do things together. He would get us together, and we would do different things.

[recording paused]

NR: You were telling me about your brother John. We're going down the list. Who's after John?

TM: My oldest sister, Susie, she's like my mother. She took care of all of us, and she took care of her family. And she's still taking care of us, you know. She watches over us. How old is she now? Seventy years old? We'll see her this afternoon after this is all over. We're having a potluck over at my house. I'm more or less the catalyst between all the brothers and sisters. I'm the leftover, they say. I'm the youngest boy, and I've got it all. (chuckles) Let's see, that's my oldest brother—my oldest sister, Susi, she married a person down in Japanese Town that was part of the Modern Food Market, and Watamura family. She married one of the brothers. They had some mama and papa stores in different places. She's retired. Oh, my oldest brother, he passed away. He passed away of a heart attack.

NR: I'm sorry to hear that.

TM: Then my oldest sister, she lives in Monterey Park about a half mile away from me. She's retired, and she does all different things. Even her when she retired and everything—her husband passed away—with my other kid sister, they've gone all the way back to the East Coast in their van, camping along the way and whatever, just to see the country. She's pretty well adjusted.

[00:50:05]

NR: Who is after Susie?

TM: Then my brother Isa, Isao. He is my second oldest brother. When we were in camp, he was one of the older ones in the Children's Village. We can kind of remember all the vibrations and stuff—Tamo's older brother was named Tak⁴ and Isa, they were kind of—they'd look at each other like, oh, one of these days we're going to have it out, you know? (chuckles) You have different things like that, but they never did anything. It's just they'd give [each other] dirty looks and all that. But, that was when they were in them days. Right now they're best of friends or whatever, just like Tamo.

NR: Who's after that? Sorry.

TM: He left camp. He went to Salt Lake City and Montana and all these different places, doing farming and stuff like that. He used to go over there, send back money for us, because when we were in camp, the one that got paid the most was \$19 a month,

⁴ Takeshi Isozaki, O.H. 2337, Center for Oral and Public History.

doctors, and the other one was \$16 a month. So, if you're a professional you get \$19 a month. Can you imagine? And if you're \$16 a month, you're like a peon. You'd do whatever, you know. Then \$12 a month.

NR: Subsistence work?

TM: Yeah. In fact, my oldest brother went out of camp, too. He went to Chicago and all that. Isa went to Montana, different places. Then we come to my other sister, Mary⁵, which is the other one you're interviewing. She was in the orphanage, and she got out. She graduated high school there. In fact, my oldest sister graduated high school, and she must have been about nineteen or twenty years old when she graduated, because of the war and all the Children's Village stuff and all that, everything got all messed up and she graduated very late.

NR: Did she graduate in Children's Village?

TM: No, she and Isa went into Shonien to go to Manzanar. She graduated in 1943, Isa in 1944, and Mary in 1945.

NR: Oh, that's true, they were all together.

TM: So, it's not the Village. It's not like a regular school.

NR: So, from Mary down—

TM: From Mary foes to my other brother, Shioo.

NR: Shioo?

TM: Shioo. He was more or less like my older brother, actually, and we were pretty close. I used to look up to him because the others were kind of gone already, and, at that time, I'm a little youngster. He used to play football and baseball and we used to go watch him, being that, say, I'm seven or eight years old and here he's about thirteen or fourteen, so you'd look up to him and go to his ball games and stuff like that. He moved up to Sunnyvale, up north near Palo Alto. Between him and my other brother, we used to meet in Pismo Beach, and that was for almost twenty years, with the kids. That's what I got together so we could all get together as a family. We used to have a lot of people there. We used to have over a hundred people. The beauty of it was you camp there, and nobody bothers you. We used to have a regular line to eat, eat potluck and dinner and all that. That was Shioo.

Let's see, my oldest sister, Susie, had one girl and a set of twin boys. Mary doesn't have any kids. Shioo has three kids, one girl and two boys. Then it goes to my brother, Shiro. Him and I were real close. When we were in camp, when we got out of the orphanage, we used to go all over camp. We used to sneak out under the barbed wire. You could see the guards were watching us, but we used to sneak out

⁵ Mary Matsuno Miya, O.H. 2489, Center for Oral and Public History.

and go out and play out in the irrigation ditches. We used to catch trout with our hands. They used to have an irrigation ditch. We used to go swimming. They had three creeks. They had one that went through camp a little bit, which is Bair's Creek. They had Shepherd's Creek, which is north, and that was a pretty big creek. It was where we used to go swimming. And then, George's Creek, which was down towards Independence, which was further. We used to go out, and we used to go up Bair's Creek. We used to dam up the creek a little bit and make our own swimming pool. I must have been eight, and Shiro was two or three years older than I am. We used to have a lot of fun. Him and I, we used to go together and with other kids, we'd have like little gangs and we used to go out. But, more when we used to go swimming at the swimming pool, my two brothers would be there and we would go. The girls would never. Girls were girls. They just stayed in camp. My two sisters were—when you're saying one, two, three years old, they're younger, it's a lot different. It's just like when you go in high school. If a guy is one year ahead of you, one year or two years, you know, there's a lot of difference than when you're out of high school. Even when you're in high school, it's kind of different.

NR: What as your relationship with Mary and your two younger sisters inside of camp? How often did you see them?

TM: When we were in the Village? We'd see each other, but then you're confined to your barracks, because they had the girls' barracks and the boys' barracks. You'd see them at mess hall time, or you'd see them when you're playing around outside. The barracks were three of them in a row, and in-between the barracks was, say, about fifty feet. You'd have a street over here, which was the low side, and then when you were on this side it's the high side in this deal, I'd say about then feet down, from the porch down. It was that much of a kind of a hill. Yeah, maybe about eight or ten feet, as I remember. You could even see it in the picture.

Let's see, where were we at? Shiro? Shiro had three kids. He passed away. He lived in Denver. Then you come to me. I'm the youngest, the fifth boy, and then you go down to my kid sister, Tatsy.

NR: Tatsy?

TM: Yeah, Tatsuye. She's, I guess, four years younger than I am. And then, my other kid sister is another two years younger, so she's about fifty-two years old.

NR: What's her name?

TM: Betsy, Elizabeth.

NR: How many children does Elizabeth have?

TM: She has not been married. Tatsy has two kids, a girl and a boy. I have four kids, two boys and two girls. Shiro had two girls and one boy.

[01:00:00]

NR: Did you play with your sisters? Because you have a lot of memories with your brothers and how close you were to Shiro, but with them—

TM: Not too much with my kid sisters. We used to play canasta back in the canasta craze. That was back in '48 when we were out of camp, when we lived on First Street. We played cards. When we were in camp, we didn't play with the girls; it was all boys, you know. We used to play marbles and things. We played tops. We used to break each other's tops. When it's your turn, the top is down and you get the top and you try and break the guy's top. That was our games, you know, that we played when we were in camp. We played that, and we liked Capture the Flag, like I was telling you. I don't know what you call the game when you throw the ball over the roof and switch sides.

NR: I've never heard about that.

TM: We used to play that. Annie-Annie, over or something. And then you played dodge ball. Do you know what dodge ball is?

NR: I know what dodge ball is.

TM: Yeah, we used to play dodge ball. What else was there? A little basketball.

NR: Did you visit anybody or play with anybody outside of the Village?

TM: Not too much. It was more or less we were kind of confined to the Village—I mean, when we were in the Village, we would go to school and come back. We couldn't kind of linger around and do different things. When we got out of the Village, it was different. Then we used to have little gangs. Where we lived, there was Block 25 and Block 19. In between this block there was another block that they called a firebreak, and this is where the baseball diamond was here. The Catholic church was in Block 25. Highway 395 was right outside. Have you been to Manzanar?

NR: Yes.

TM: You know where that guard shack is?

NR: I've seen it.

TM: Okay, it was up north further. They had thirty-six blocks in the camp.

NR: I've seen the layout.

TM: I used to take my kids back there every year almost. On vacation time we should go to Shepherd's Creek. We'd camp there. If I'm up that way, we used to stop and just

- camp there and take it easy, and maybe go up further north or whatever. Every time when they were kids and I'd show them where the guard towers were. Where the reservoir is now, it's the local skinny-dipping place now. We've gone there swimming. I used to go all around the camp, show them different things.
- NR: The cemetery and everything?
- TM: The cemetery. There is one person that's buried in there that used to be—Ambo-san. I don't know, he was one of my father's friends. I don't know if they moved his [remains] or if they had Unknown or something. I think he's one of the unknown ones. They didn't put him into the compound there. Because we used to go over there, we used to visit it. I used to have a sand buggy and I used to just ride all around there and show the kids different things.
- NR: What was the first year you went back?
- TM: We used to go back all the time, even in high school.
- NR: Oh, really? You used to go back with your father also?
- TM: Oh, no, we used to go back on our own. We used to go out, go to the dances on Saturday night, and then we'd go hunting. We'd take off and we'd drive all the way up there and go fool around hunting and stuff and then we'd come back.
- NR: Just your brothers and friends?
- TM: Friends and my brothers.
- NR: None of the girls?
- TM: No. (chuckles) You can't take a girl overnight, you know, spend all that time. Now times have changed, but in them days—
- NR: I thought you were going to say because it was too rough or something, and they can't go hunting.
- TM: No. Well, you couldn't—
- NR: We could do that.
- TM: Yeah, you could do that now, but not then.
- NR: We can go shooting.
- TM: We used to go shooting. We used to even shoot at each other. We used to have war out there. We used to get .22s and pick sides. You don't shoot at the guy. You just

shoot ahead of them or behind them. (laughs) If my brothers would have known that, boy, they would have really got on us. (laughs) We used to fool around out in Lancaster, too. We'd go shooting. My brother, Shiro, was a good shot, but we used to go out there with .22s and shoot jackrabbits. Bang, bang, bang, just line-of-site shooting. We used to go up there all the time, after camp.

NR: What can you tell me about religion? What religion were you?

TM: We were supposed to be Buddhists because my father was a Buddhist, but when we went into the orphanage we were converted to Christians. And then, my sister Mary is Catholic. She was a Catholic, and she wanted us to be Catholic. We just stayed with being a Christian. She was the only Catholic. And then it all reverts back to when you die and everything you go back to your old religion, like a Buddhist or whatever. Like my father or you get these people who pass away, they go back to kind of their old [religion], Buddhist. Like me, I'm a Christian, but after all that, my church is like my kids. When we used to go camping, we used to go camping on weekends. We'd never go to church. So, what's more important, church or with the family? So, we're with the family.

NR: You said Mary is Catholic. When did she become Catholic?

TM: When she was in camp she converted. I don't know if she's a practicing Catholic now or what.

NR: And you say that when you die you go back to your original religion?

TM: A lot of the people do that, I guess. Well, now it's a little different, you know.

NR: Like, with your brothers, were the ceremonies done more like Buddhist or more Christian?

TM: No, were kind of lax. My brothers, both of them, we just had a regular service. It wasn't Buddhist. It was Christian, I guess you'd call it, but it wasn't no big thing. We scattered their ashes out in the ocean. That's what they wanted, so that's where we go once a year, my brothers and sisters usually. I go up to Point Area. We go abalone diving. That's what we used to do. Well, that's what I was doing after Pismo Beach, after the sand buggy and the kids got older. Then my brother Shioo and I would go up north and go diving for abalone. When it's low tide we'd go over there. Tamo has been there. In fact, Tamo went with us when we scattered their ashes, too, because he knows my brothers. He's like our brother anyway.

NR: So, both of them wanted that? Is that what you want also?

TM: I'm thinking about that one. I almost drowned the year after. I was out in the water, and I was tired, and I had a tide take me out. I had my weight belts. (chuckles) In fact, Tamo was there then. (chuckles)

NR: It's funny now! (laughs)

TM: No, it wasn't then. It's like everything goes before you. I was going down and I looked and, "What the hell am I doing here, man? I want to live!" I kept my cool, though. I didn't panic. I got up, but I couldn't drop my weight belt. I had my weight belt on me, so I couldn't drop that weight belt. Finally, I dropped the weight belt and then I just got up on top of the tube. I didn't have my flippers on. I had the flippers in the tube, and I started paddling myself in. (chuckles) My wife was panicking, and everybody was panicking out there. Since I lost my weight belt, I went back into town, rented me a weight belt, and went back out the next day. I didn't want to be afraid of the ocean. When I had my sand buggy and my son flipped that thing over backwards, we were in the sand. So he wouldn't be afraid, I had him climb that hill again. He made the hill finally. (chuckles)

[01:10:51]

NR: That's good.

TM: That was when he was about ten or twelve years old. They all learned how to drive it. When they were about nine or ten years old, they knew how to drive. Like I say, my church was my kids or the family part. Because all these things that go on, if you don't have family, then they go all off. When you're an orphan, see, you think of all that kind of stuff. We weren't actually orphans because we had our parents, but then we were separated.

NR: It makes you appreciate it more. When you were down when you were in the Children's Village, who did you go to for emotional support?

TM: I guess I would go to my sister, probably my older sister or my brother. They were all protective, too, of us younger ones.

NR: John and Susie, you mean?

TM: No, John and Susie weren't in the orphanage.

NR: They weren't there?

TM: Susie was there for a little while, but she went out because she was too old, but she kept us together.

NR: So, you're taking about Mary?

TM: I think more or less my brothers. They were more protective of the younger ones, my brother above me, because Isa was still in there and Shioo was in there. Mary was there, but they got out. Susie was in there just for a little bit, my oldest sister, and then Isa was in there for a little bit and so was Mary. Then it was like Shioo, Shiro,

- me, Tatsy, and Betsy. There were five of us that were more or less left behind, but my brother Shioo kind of looked over us.
- NR: So, when you cried, when you were sad, you went to him for that support?
- TM: No, you kind of more or less keep it to yourself, because you have all these other kids. If you cry—I don't know, you really didn't have a mother and father to go to, to cry or whatever on their shoulder. So, being a young kid, I stop and think about it, it's nice to have a mother and father that you could always go to.
- NR: You were little, and to be taken away—I mean, even as an adult it would hurt to be pulled away from your family, and you cry. What memories would trigger that?
- TM: Well, you have that, and then you get over it. I mean, I don't think you ever get over it, but the situation is you learn how to survive. And, this is the thing: if you don't survive, people are going to step on you. And that's what you have to do. You have to do what you have to do.
- NR: Did you feel that the staff was there for emotional support for you?
- TM: No. (chuckles) The matrons were kind of mean, you know.
- NR: In what way? They would yell at you?
- TM: Well, there were different ways to discipline you. We had to be disciplined. It's not like it's your own [parents]. I mean, they're not my mother or whatever; they're just strict and they tell you to do this and that. I mean, you don't question them, it has to be done. They just tell you, You do that or else. It's not like you're going to get love and attention. Even if you do something good, it wasn't really there. Now you could talk to them and—well, some of them didn't want to come [to the reunion]. I wanted this one to come, but she was really kind of real, real strict, strict person. In fact, her brother worked for me for a while. I wanted her to come because, hey, them days were them days. You know what I mean? You forget all your ill feelings or whatever. We're adults, so that kind of thing doesn't bother me now. I'm not going to keep a grudge. We're adults.
- NR: Why did you really want her to come? Is there a particular reason?
- TM: To get everybody together, because it was kind of my project, and I got most of it together.
- NR: Was there any staff member that you were attached to?
- TM: Tamo. As I remember, when we were in camp he used to always carry a Bible. I mean, you're brought up a Christian when you're in the thing and you look up to your elders. There was him and another person, he was a *hapa*, Kenny. I don't know

where he's at. We are trying to get some of these people together. There's some that called after. But yeah, I looked up to Tamo. He was real good.

John Hohri⁶, he was in Shonien back in '34 and '35. His brother William Hohri, you read about him a lot in the papers and stuff. Well, John Hohri—this is a good part. He used to tell us stories, us little guys. He had the knack to tell you a story and keep you in suspense for the next day, and this was at nighttime. So, he would talk to us about Jean Valjean or Jack London, a lot of these different stories, and he'd have it down in his head already. He would tell us these stories, and the guys from the big side would come over and listen to it, too. (chuckles) That's how good he was. He'd go in a slow way, and then this happens and that happens. We were all attentive, and we'd just listen. He'd tell all these stories. That was real clear in my mind. He used to do that. I think he lived across the street in Block 29. He was in Shonien, so he used to come and help, and he used to tell us these stories and, boy, everybody used to listen. Even, like I say, a lot of the big side would come over and listen to him, he was that good. He's retired now. He lives up in New York.

NR: How about when you became sick? Do you remember having any of your sisters take care of you? Who took care of you?

TM: They had matrons and all that taking care of us. I remember getting sick, and I had to go to the hospital. I don't remember if I had mumps or chicken pox, but they had the hospital so you go to the hospital. Or you were quarantined there, too. I forget what I had. It was a contagious disease, and the snow was out there. The hospital was like maybe a block or two away from the Village. It was up right near where the cemetery was. You've been to the cemetery?

[01:20:22]

NR: Yes.

TM: Well, the hospital was right up there. In fact, my oldest brother was the talk of the camp once. He went out with this friend of his that came to camp in a motorcycle, and I remember that distinctly. There was this guy named Wahoo. He said, "You're going to get caught! You're going to get this and that—" They went to Lone Pine to go to a movie. So, they went out to the movie show and coming back they had to put the lights off to get back into camp. So, they were coming back, and they hit a dip or something. My brother flew off the bike, and he had a big old gouge in his leg. The guy didn't want to move the bike. He said, "Get that motorcycle running." (chuckles) So, he came into camp, and he was in the hospital. It was the talk of the camp. He had his leg all stretched out and a big old gash. He had a big gash on his leg. And the motorcycle, I guess it bent the fork or something. (chuckles) I remember we told this guy, "See, you put the voodoo on him!" (laughs)

NR: What brother was this?

⁶ Sohei "John" Hohri, O.H. 3786, Center for Oral and Public History.

- TM: That was my oldest brother, John. They must have went off to Chicago or something and then they came back to camp. They'd come to visit or whatever.
- NR: Can you tell me about the adjustment, how you adjusted from before into camp?
Actually, you went from your house to Shonien, and then to [Children's Village].
- TM: From Terminal Island to Shonien, and from Shonien we went to camp, and then we went to the Children's Village when we went into camp.
- NR: So, how did you adjust?
- TM: It was the same, because you were like in a room where you have beds and stuff. You had different cots or beds, and there was a whole bunch of you, so you were just confined in the one room. You'd sleep there, you get up, you go eat in the mess hall, you go eat, come back to your room, or you go out and play in the yard, go to school, come back, eat. They had programs. They'd give you allowance. I forget what they'd give you. Fifty cents or something.
- NR: Like \$1.50, depending on your age?
- TM: Yeah, something. It wasn't too much.
- NR: What did you do with that money?
- TM: You could do whatever you wanted to with it. You'd buy candy.
- NR: Is that what you did?
- TM: I really can't remember. I remember they used to have a thing you'd see—when they had their sections, like one end was for the small boys, the other end was for the big boys, right in the middle they had a storage room and the bathrooms and the showers, and I remember going and stealing some candy. (chuckles)
- NR: From the storage room?
- TM: In the storage room, yeah.
- NR: So, your main adjustment was from Terminal Island into Shonien?
- TM: My main adjustment was when we came out of camp.
- NR: More?
- TM: More than in the Village. Actually, if you talk about the camp life for us younger ones, I think we had more fun because we had no responsibility. Everything was like furnished, but we went out for adventure. We would sneak out of camp and go. This was after the Village, but, when we were in Village we were regimented where we

had to do different things, and that was it. I mean, you'd sleep in this one deal, you'd go to the mess hall and you'd come back, and then go to school, come back home. I mean, we didn't dilly-dally anyplace like you would when we got out there. Then it was different. We weren't as restricted as we were as when we were in the Village, so that part there we adjusted real quick. But, when we came out of camp, then we had to move. We were in Long Beach. We were in a trailer court there. There were trailers parked there, so the people went to live in the trailer courts.

NR: The trailers were provided by whom?

TM: The government.

NR: And a lot of Japanese went there?

TM: Yeah, a lot of them. They had that place, and the other place was Truman Boyd Manor. It was another place like apartment units. Then there was another place in San Pedro, because we used to visit friends—my sister and them, we'd get a ride or something. Then from there we moved again. We moved out to Second and San Pedro into America Hotel; and kind of moving and going to the different places, you had to adjust. You know, you make your adjustments. The hardest thing, I think, was when we moved to that trailer court and we had to go to school there in Long Beach.

Then we came back and we moved into Los Angeles, so we were right in the heart of the city. So, a lot of ethnic—I mean, you'd had the Hispanics. You had the blacks. There was a lot of blacks there. They took over that whole section. We lived in Japanese Town, so they were kind of pushed to 5th Street. Do you know where 5th Street in Los Angeles is?

NR: Not really.

TM: That's Skid Row. Skid Row is what that is. That's 5th Street. Pushed them all out, and the Japanese people started coming in again back in there. We stayed on 2nd Street, and then from 2nd Street we moved to 1st Street. Because I was born right in Japanese Town, just about, on Alameda and Jackson, or Alameda and 1st Street, just north of 1st Street. Where the [Los Angeles Department] of Water and Power is right now, that's where I was born. Midwife—I was born in a hotel. That's how I got my name, from Takata Hotel to Takatow. See?

NR: Oh, that's interesting.

TM: I have a middle name: Sammy. I guess my mother like the name Sammy or something. That's not my given name, but I've been using Sammy all my life as my middle name.

NR: How long were you in the trailer in Long Beach?

TM: Eight months to a year, something like that.

NR: How about the hotel?

TM: The hotel? Maybe a couple of years. Then we moved to 1st Street, and that was maybe another two or three years.

NR: Where was that? Was that an apartment house on First Street?

TM: On 1st Street it was a house in back of an alley. It was next to the Linda Lea Theater. They used to have a theater right there, and we used to live in the back. There were three houses, and we lived in the first house.

NR: Then after that you moved where?

TM: Moved to Savannah Street in East Los Angeles, Savannah and 1st Street. We lived there for about one or two years.

NR: Was this a house you were renting?

TM: That was a house that we rented.

NR: And then from there?

TM: My brother and father, they used to go fishing. They used to go to South America. They used to leave like six months at a time, two to six months at a time. One month is a good month. If they came back in a month, they made a good load; then it would go to two, three months. Then from Savannah Street I got married.

[01:30:18]

NR: You were how old when you got married?

TM: I was eighteen or nineteen. I can't remember. (chuckles) I was young. I've got kids almost as old as Tamo's kids. I was one of the younger Niseis, and I had kids that are about as old as the older Niseis. Because a lot of them when they got out of camp, they had kids when they were like in '48 or '46, '47, '48. Shoot, I was out of high school, and I got married.

NR: Where did you move then?

TM: I had worked. I had been doing this mechanic work since I was maybe about twelve years old, '47. I used to just hang out at a gas station. Then I went to this garage, and then they showed me everything I knew. Then I had two kids, and I started my own business.

NR: Here in Monterey Park?

TM: No, in East Los Angeles.

NR: How long have you been here in Monterey Park?

TM: Monterey Park? Since 1960. I bought my home in 1959. I started my business in 1957, so I was pretty young. But, to get ahead you've got to work hard at it.

NR: Then what?

TM: I started on my own. At Whittier and Lorena I had a little gas station. My brother fronted me some money. I think I borrowed five hundred bucks from him, but I paid him back in six months. I didn't use the money, actually, I just needed some backing and started from that. Then I bought my home in Monterey Park in 1959. Even in them days they were very prejudiced. Monterey Park didn't allow any Orientals over here in them days. I mean, not at that time, but I remember back like in 1949, when I used to work in the garage, and we'd go see this guy that owned a gas station. He was an Anglo and when we came over here, he lived in Monterey Park. They didn't like Japanese. They didn't like Orientals. And Montebello—do you know where Montebello is? They used to clean the swimming pool every Thursday, I think it was, and they would let us swim there Wednesdays. We could go to the swimming pool because we were Japanese. (chuckles) You're talking really discriminating against—even against Hispanics they discriminated.

NR: So, who was allowed to go in there Wednesday? Was it just Asians or was it—

TM: All the minority groups.

NR: So, the Caucasians were the only ones that were allowed to go the rest of the time?

TM: During the rest of the time, yeah. Because it was the day before they cleaned the pool, so they would let us swim then. [recording paused] The Orientals, the Japanese knew where their place was. I mean you get discriminated against, you know _____ (inaudible), and you even know before so you don't push anything. Like now, you stand up for your rights. In them days, you don't. A lot of the older Niseis, they would humble themselves or whatever because that's the way they're brought up. Well, to me, I'm a younger one, so I would kind of rebel on a lot of this stuff. It's like anything else. Even the blacks that are born and raised here isn't like the blacks that were down in the South. Because they used to come from down there over here, you know, y'all and this and that, but they were discriminated against. They had freedom here, and they don't care. But, the ones that were born and raised here, they're pretty intelligent. I mean, they knew where their place is too. I mean, when we were growing up—and we grew up in the city—in the city, they're a lot more hip to everything that's around. Whereas the people from the country, they aren't as hip as the people in the city. We were raised in the city, so it's a lot different that people

from the country or people from down South. I can remember in them days where this black guy used to come in and used to get the car worked on and he said—he used to travel down South—you don’t drink in a white man’s drinking fountain, or you don’t go to the bathroom, or you don’t go onto the bus. You stand in the back. They had all different things like that. I mean, that was discrimination, flat-out. Even like all the stuff that was here, they didn’t let older Isseis buy land. They couldn’t get property. They couldn’t even buy any property until probably in the late forties or maybe fifties they could start buying things, but there was a lot of discrimination. You couldn’t buy property around all these white neighborhoods. It was bad. (chuckles) I remember all that.

NR: Do you think this can happen again, the government imprisoning a smaller group?

TM: No. No way. They wanted to put some of these blacks into these different camps or whatever. They can’t go for it. But, there’s a lot of things the government does and you don’t know about it, I’m sure. Sometimes I don’t have no faith in some of the systems right now. They just turn their heads. I’ve had that happen to me a few times.

NR: What do you mean?

TM: I had that happen to me in Monterey Park once, and I was so mad.

NR: What happened?

TM: It’s politics, kind of. A rubbish truck came by and a rock fell off of the thing. I’m coming back from camping, I had my camper. Of course, I’ve got guns inside my camper, and I got *really* ticked off. A cop was coming down the street and I stopped him and I said, “Man, this so and so, he dropped a rock on my truck. Why don’t you go get the guy? (chuckles) If I get a chance, man, I’d probably shoot him.” And, then he started making me a criminal instead of going after the person that did this. Then I’m over there and he’s saying, “What are you this and that? You know, you’ve got a gun.” Then I had to kind of humble myself. Then my next-door neighbor down the street, he went to school with the guy, so he started socializing with him. I said, “Hey, why don’t you go get the guy that dropped the rock off on my truck?” He didn’t do nothing about that. Then I called the rubbish company, and they said, Oh, we don’t have no truck in that area. How are you going to get the license number or something when a big old rock came? It’s a good thing I had my glasses on and my wife had her glasses on, because that rock, when it hit the windshield it splattered it. We were just come back from Utah, you know, just pulling in. That gets me kind of—different kind of incidents, but this just happened about twenty years ago, I would say.

[01:40:25]

NR: So, you felt that he didn’t do anything about it because you were Japanese?

- TM: I don't know what it was then. The law is supposed to help you, but they don't help you. It really gets me more and more. I guess I'm losing my patience more than being more patient.
- NR: Going back to when you were in camp—you told me what you do now. You work in mechanics, and you started when you were twelve. But, what did you do when you were in the Children's Village? Did you have to do any chores or duties?
- TM: We had different chores to do. I forget what that was. You mopped the floors or scrubbed the floors. Each individual had different things that you had to do, and then it would change, you know.
- NR: Rotate?
- TM: It rotates.
- NR: Every day or week?
- TM: Every week I think it was, once a week you would do different things.
- NR: They wouldn't treat you like you were a slave, make do too many things?
- TM: Oh, no.
- NR: Did you have a nickname?
- TM: When I was working as a mechanic they used to call me Peewee. I used to be small. That was when I was in junior high school. Peewee, you know, because I was a peewee. (chuckles)
- NR: During camp you didn't have a nickname?
- TM: No, I didn't have one in camp. There were a lot of other kids that had nicknames. Turtle, he passed away. He was a couple of years younger than me. Franco, he's about my age. These are brothers. There were one, two, three—there were five of them. There were three boys and two girls. Our family was the biggest family that was in the orphanage, then Tamo's family was probably the second one. Like our family is real tight. So is Tamo's family, and we get together once in a while. It's family. But, we consider everybody that was in there like family. My brother, before he passed away, we had a sixtieth birthday party for him, and he made a speech. He said, "You know, when we were in the orphanage we were all family, whatever it was." Wilbur Sato has a couple of—did you see some of those things?
- NR: I got to see.

- TM: Wilbur and Shioo were about the same age. And Gordon Sato is the brother of Wilbur Sato and has a Manzanar Project. He's a scientist. He goes to Africa or back there and he's the one that for famine, he makes from the ocean—he gets these little fishes and all that and with the ocean and feeds on this and they get food for the famine countries. He snuck in a few of them places and tried to get the government and all that to do this. And he calls that the Manzanar Project.
- NR: Now that you mention that, I've heard about it. Talking about Manzanar and what he called it, do you have any idea why the Village was named Children's Village? Do you know any of the history of the name?
- TM: Children's Village, we're the only orphanage that was in all the camps. We were the only one. I guess because we were children, you know. (chuckles)
- NR: What are your memories with Mr. and Mrs. Matsumoto?
- TM: They were a little cold. They weren't like matrons, you know. A lot of the matrons, they weren't very warm. It was more or less us as kids were closer than these matrons and stuff. That was my feeling with authority. Maybe like Tamo, but he was a younger person. He was in charge, but it's not like the ones that were older that were in charge.
- NR: He had lived through that same experience.
- TM: Well, he was in San Francisco in the Salvation Army orphanage.
- NR: That's why. He had lived through it, being without his parents, so he was more understanding and warm towards you guys.
- TM: Yeah, I would say.
- NR: Anybody else who you remember that showed this care or warmth towards you guys?
- TM: You know, you only think of the good times. You don't want to remember the bad times. (chuckles) Or sometimes you remember the bad times, you know?
- NR: But, you have to remember it all sometimes.
- TM: Yeah. Who else was there? I'll have to look at that picture.
- [recording paused]
- NR: The 1944 Easter picture is what we're looking at now.
- TM; Okay, well, I'm the person that put all this together, all the numbers on the people. You've got numbers?

NR: Yes, we do.

TM: That's what I did to research all this. This is Taeko here. She lives next to—this is Lillian Matsumoto. They live real close together. They're the directors right here.

NR: The Matsumotos.

TM: Yeah, and I think she adopted that one, Karyl Matsumoto. She [Taeko] married John Nagayama. He's in here too. He's a reverend. This used to be my brother's crush. This is my brother Isa here. That's my brother. This is my brother. Do you know where I'm at?

NR: Down here in this corner.

TM: (laughs) Did you look already? I'm number 13. See, this guy here is about my same age. This [Tomi] Yamada, I don't know what happened to him. We just got a phone call from this one here—he's a *hapa*—and this one here. They're brothers.

NR: Japanese and what?

TM: I don't know. She's a registered nurse.⁷ I think she's retired now. She's a little bit younger than me. This one here, Annie [Shiraishi] Sakamoto.⁸ These two were adopted, or not adopted or whatever, from the same *hakujin* lady from Pasadena.⁹ In fact, she lives right in the front house of where she lives now.

[01:50:26]

NR: What's her name?

TM: Here name is Annie. These are my kid sisters right here. That's Tatsy and Betsy. And that's my other brother that passed away, Shioo. That's the one I dedicated the thing too. Here's Tamo's brothers. Here's Tak. You know who that is; that's his other brother. This is his sister. And he's got other brothers and sisters. I've got the [picture] too, where all the brothers and sisters are in here. I've got lines connecting all the brothers.

NR: I haven't seen that one.

TM: Did you get that one? I don't think you have it.

NR: No.

TM: That's in the book I have that I put together.

⁷ Celeste Teodor, O.H. 3776, Center for Oral and Public History.

⁸ Annie Sakamoto, O.H. 2486, Center for Oral and Public History.

⁹ Wilma Stuart, O.H. 2488, Center for Oral and Public History.

NR: What book is that?

TM: I've got a Children's Village book that I kind of put all the pictures together and stuff, and it has all the siblings in that picture. It shows all the siblings.

NR: I asked you about the Matsumotos, and you were telling me that they were kind of cold. In what sense? Did they ever talk to you? Did you ever feel you could go up to them?

TM: I was kind of young so it was kind of hard. When you're a kid you get the feelings of different people, and you get the feelings of how people are. This is where you learn through life, psychology or whatever you want to call it. You learn from experience. You get smart, and it's all kind of like mental gymnastics. You learn how people feel. Because I'm the youngest son, I know all my different brothers and sisters, and each one of them are different. Like they say, I get all the best of what they had, or what they have. (chuckles)

NR: What did they portray across that you felt?

TM: You don't have to. It's like my father, a good example. He didn't have to say anything. The expression of his face, and if he does like this, you know which way you have to go or whatever. You're driving down the street, you know exactly what he's thinking or what he wants you to do. When you look at a person that's your elder, all they have to do is look at you funny and you'd better do it or else. And you get a whipping or you get a spanking. It wasn't really that critical. They had more meanness in the Catholic thing than they did with the Children's Village from when they used to talk about these things. Children's Village they had things, but it wasn't like they were going to beat you with a belt or whatever. But, when they were in the Catholic home, they were treated kind of roughly, I think, Maryknoll and even I think maybe the San Francisco one, too.

NR: Do you remember anything at the Shonien?

TM: All I remember is they used to have a lot of shrubs and stuff and we used to run around inside. That's in Silver Lake. In fact, I've been up there a couple of times before, but I haven't been up there recently. I don't know what's there now. My memory of Matsumoto, the old man, he took me down from the hill to get a pair of shoes. We used to run barefooted when we were at Terminal Island. We weren't the richest people. We were poor, and I remember getting some shoes.

NR: Were these shoes firsthand shoes or were they hand-me-downs?

TM: Brand-new shoes. He took me to the store, and I got brand-new pair of shoes. (chuckles) I think they hurt me, too. (laughs)

NR: Were all your clothes and shoes firsthand, or did you have combination of new and handed-downs also?

TM: I can't remember any of that. We had clothes.

NR: Overall, you had enough clothes?

TM: Yeah. Well, over there [Manzanar] it's like four seasons, too. Because you're up in the mountains it gets cold. They had windstorms you couldn't believe. You'd get out there in the old tar-papered barracks we were in and a lot of that stuff is going to come through. My father used to have a victory garden. They had these barracks, and in-between he would grow grapes and stuff. He'd try to make his wine out of the thing. We used to eat the grapes off the top of it. It turns to raisins and we'd eat the raisins. (chuckles) He used to make tobacco leaves and make his cigarettes. He used to go in the firebreaks—he used to love golf, and he used to drive the golf balls. When they'd get a golf ball, a good golf ball is rubber. He used to drive them things, and my brother and I used to go out on the firebreak. We either had to catch them or find them. (chuckles) We're out there and he's driving them things. We're out there catching them or going in the bushes and getting them.

NR: What about the treatment, how others treated—who would bathe you?

TM: When I was on the little side they used to scrub us down. When you're on the other side, if you don't wash yourself, they'd scrub you good. (chuckles) They'd get the brush and scrub you down. (chuckles)

NR: So, it wasn't anything gentle?

TM: No. You go in there and you go in the shower, and if they see you don't wash yourself, then they'd scrub you down.

NR: Did you like taking showers? Because a lot of time kids just don't like taking them.

TM: I liked showers.

NR: Sometimes they don't like them because of the treatment.

TM: I don't remember, they didn't have any baths. If they did, it was like a *nihon furo*. Do you know what that is? It's a big round tub. In the camps they had like big shower stalls, and even in the Village they had shower stalls. They didn't have bathtubs.

NR: I read here in one of our papers and it said that the older children would wash their own laundry, but the younger ones had it done. You never—

TM: No, we didn't do that. The older ones did.

NR: Just the older ones?

TM: Yeah, we were too young to know any better.

NR: How would you describe the conditions of the pillow on your bed? Do you remember it bugging you or were they fine?

[02:00:00]

TM: I remember if you peed in your bed you'd go through the SWAT line, or whatever it was.

NR: Did you ever?

TM: I think I have, yeah.

NR: Because there were some kids that did have a problem with it.

TM: There were some that had problems, yeah. We called them *shikotare*. Do you know what *shikotare* is? You pee in your pants. That's just like saying, "Oh, you're a *shikotare*."

NR: How about the food?

TM: That's another thing: you had to eat your food that was on the plate, eat all your food up. You eat it or you don't leave the table. You eat everything up. They forced you to eat it.

NR: Did you ever have a chance to get seconds, or was it always just that one meal?

TM: I don't remember that part, but I know whatever food they gave you, if you don't like, you eat it. You eat the food. If you're going to throw it up, you hold it until you go out.

NR: Did you ever throw up because of bad food?

TM: I don't remember that either, but I know we had to eat the food that was served in front of us.

NR: Was it tasty? What do you remember?

TM: Mutton. Do you know what mutton is?

NR: No.

TM: Lamb. Old lamb. Stinky lamb! I like lamb, but I don't like mutton. And, if you talk to any of the older people, except for like my sisters and brothers—because I learned how to barbecue lamb. You take it camping. My wife makes it all the time. You marinate it for about three days and put it on the barbecue, and, oh, it's good. But, if you get the older people and you say lamb—my brother-in-law was a butcher in the Army and he was in the camp, right? He used to eat mutton. And when I told him, "Oh, is that good?" "Yeah, it's good." When I told him lamb, he never touched it again. But a lot of the people, because it was mutton and it stunk—they used to have stew, you know, and they'd make it, and it stinks and it tastes bad. (chuckles) It seemed like they gave you leftover stuff that's not fit for people to eat. I remember that.

NR: Did the Children's Village ever have a pet?

TM: There might have been stray dogs around, but we didn't.

NR: Nothing that you guys had?

TM: No, they didn't allow any of that. We had a dog when we got out there. In fact, we had a dog, and my brother, when we came out of camp and we went to the trailer court, my brother brought the dog, Tipper. He had to ride in the furniture truck, because the furniture truck was coming and then the bus was going, right? So, the furniture truck was behind. He didn't get to where we were at until later, much later, because it was a slower truck. And he brought the one dog out of camp with him.

When we were in camp there, when people started evacuating back out, they moved half the camp over to the other side. We used to go to the other side and bust walls and fool around. There was a lot of wild animals over there after that because they had been abandoned and they knew their home on that side. So, they had like thirty-six blocks, and we moved from there back to Block 18, I think it was. That was from here, we went to this side. Children's Village was here, the hospital was right here, and cemetery was there. A lot of the stuff I know the details because we used to go around the camp and we used to go outside the camp. So, as a little kid or a boy we knew all this stuff. A lot of the girls didn't because they had to stay home more or less. Even my older sister, she had to stay home. She had to do the washing. She had to do all that, take care of us. She really didn't have too much time for herself. She had to take care of the kids. But like us little guys, it's kind of like a Boy Scout trip for us. It was fun, but for the older ones, no, I don't think it was very much fun.

NR: When you were there in the Children's Village, did you blame anybody for not having your parents with you? What did you think?

TM: You know, when they're young like that you can remember one thing one minute, but the next day it'll be gone. It's not like the older people. I really felt sorry for the older people. As I'm old now, I really feel sorry for the older people now because then it didn't mean anything to me. As long as I got to eat and play and do what I had to do, it was really nothing, but some of the emotional stuff gets you.

- NR: When your mom was first taken, then your dad was then taken, those feelings—do you remember those feelings you had?
- TM: Yeah, but I remember my mother making me cereal with sugar and stuff like that. She used to make rice. We used to get rice, and then it was stirred up with a little sugar and stuff and it used to taste good. You remember some of them things, but then as time goes you forget. It's just like saying, "I should have learned my Japanese language then." Through that time, if you're not around it and don't speak it, you don't know it.
- NR: Now I'm coming down to where it would be a little more emotional, but the day that you were separated from your mother, and then later from your dad, what do you remember? I mean, that bond was broken. You were detached. Do you remember how you felt? Were you crying?
- TM: I probably cried.
- NR: It's not like something that stands out that you remember?
- TM: You know, I block it out of my memory or whatever.
- NR: Because it's something so significant that you have to remember something about it.
- TM: I really don't. I think I don't even want to remember those things. I just block that all out of my mind. It's just like when I went into camp, guys when I was in Terminal Island were saying hi and everything to me. I didn't even know them. At that time when all this kind of thing happens, you just live one day at a time. You forget all your friends and everything else. In fact, I've got a friend now. He just started coming around maybe about six months ago. He had forced retirement from the air research, aircraft thing. I was in camp with him. I mean, we went to school together at camp. And, when we came out of camp, we went to school together through junior high school. In high school, he went to a different high school. I went to Roosevelt, and he went to Poly, which was downtown. I came over here. I was supposed to go to Jefferson, but that was almost all 90 percent black, so I didn't want to go over there. So, I came over to Roosevelt, which was pretty well mixed. There was a lot of Jewish, Hispanics, Japanese, Armenians, Russians. It was kind of all mixed, and there was maybe five blacks or something like that, not very many. The blacks were more or less contained. When we came out, they were at 1st Street too, I think, Slauson, from Alameda Street to Main Street. They were kind of contained right in there. After a while, they started moving up and out, and then they started coming to the east side. I can remember when I was in high school, Huntington Park—do you know where Huntington Park is? It's just south of Los Angeles. You couldn't be out on the city streets after seven o'clock. They'd catch you and show you the way out. (chuckles)

[02:10:48]

NR: Show you where to go?

TM: That's right, and you'd never go back there; otherwise you'd go to jail or whatever.

NR: I haven't asked you. Do you know your birthday?

TM: May 14, 1935. I was born in Los Angeles, right in downtown, Jackson and Alameda.

NR: How about your parents?

TM: My father came from Hiroshima with his father, my grandfather. He used to run labor camps in Palos Verdes and up in Santa Maria, Nipomo, up all around there. This was back in the early 1900s. My grandfather went back to Japan, and my father never went back. He wanted the whole family to go back to Japan, and my sister said no, my oldest sister, when we were in camp. Tule Lake was the place where they'd go, and then they sent them back to Japan. My sister was real strongly against it. We didn't go.

NR: Are either one of your parents still alive today?

TM: No, my father got killed over near the general hospital. He got broadsided by a train. One of them wig-wag signals. He was going to go see my sister at Japanese hospital, and he got on that railroad track and the train coming into town got him and must have drug that thing for, I don't know, one hundred yards or whatever. And it broadsided him. My mother passed away, let's see, was it after that? She passed away after that. We have a place in Hiroshima where they have a cemetery, and they're back there. Also, both are at Evergreen Cemetery in East L.A.

NR: Both of them?

TM: Yeah.

NR: Back in Japan?

TM: We sent them back in an urn.

NR: Why did you decide on Hiroshima? Is that what they wanted?

TM: That's where they were born and raised.

NR: Yes, but—

TM: Tradition, I guess.

NR: I'm saying because all of you are here and live here and you were born here.

TM: It's a family cemetery thing, and they have, I think my mother's little pebble and my father is on—I don't know! I went back there, and they wanted to change this and that. My nephew is over there now.

NR: Were you ever interviewed by Matsumoto or any of the staff for casework?

TM: I didn't want to get interviewed. I wasn't going to even do this.

NR: Today you mean?

TM: I wasn't going to do it, but Tamo talked me into it. (chuckles) It's history, so what the heck?

NR: But, I mean back when you were—

TM: I know my sister is a very good person [to interview]. Mary, she remembers a lot.

NR: She was a lot older than you.

TM: She remembers a lot. My oldest sister doesn't know as much as she does because she was always taking care of everybody at home.

NR: She was more secluded inside.

TM: I remember in camp they used to have dances, and we used to have the old 78 records. We used to have contests. The brothers and sisters and their friends or whatever would come over. We could put the needle on that record and just play one note and know what it is. We used to listen to Glenn Miller and Kay Starr and Tommy Dorsey and Jimmy Dorsey and all them different things. It was like something to so, so we used to do things like that.

NR: But, when you were in the camp, did you ever have somebody counsel you or talk to you, ask you questions about your family, your parents, your life in general?

TM: No.

NR: Anything? Nothing you remember them questioning you about?

TM: I don't remember any of that. (chuckles)

NR: How about the educational system? Do you remember someone helping you with your homework?

TM: Oh, I had to learn my times tables. My brother, boy, he pounded that into me. Man, I had to stay up. I used to try and avoid him.

NR: Which brother?

TM: Isa. I learned! (chuckles)

NR: So, mainly it was Isa that helped you out with school?

TM: No, each one of my brothers and sisters. I was so dumb at it that I'd better learn or else! (chuckles) And, I learned. I'd get it more from my brothers and sisters than I would anybody else.

NR: How about at school, your teachers?

TM: When I was in high school I made pretty good money being a mechanic. I used to work part-time as a mechanic, and I'd get my six periods in a go to work. At that time I was making about \$50 a week, which was pretty good for a high school kid. All that money went to my sister for the family pot.

NR: How about when you were in camp? Did the teachers put a lot of emphasis teaching you had to read? Do you remember anything like that?

TM: No, I remember we had plays, and I had to learn how to do the minuet. Do you know what the minuet is?

NR: No.

TM: It's like a waltz. This girl, she had a hole in her panty, and everybody was laughing at her. (laughs) See, I remember that. It was like a school play kind of thing. I forget her last name, but I know she lived out in the San Gabriel Valley. There's bits and pieces I can remember if we keep talking. You have to give me a break because it's been over fifty years ago. (chuckles)

[02:20:00]

NR: You can take your time and remember! You say you remember bits and pieces, but what things do you see that trigger your mind and make you think of camp?

TM: I used to go to camp all the time. It was like my second home, going back. It's like a Boy Scout trip to me, because what we used to do, my brother and I, we used to go and just explore all different things, you know, go outside of camp and go to the creek and go over there and go swimming, just looking around, just kicking around. We were little kids having a good time at that time.

NR: Like you said of the lamb, maybe when you eat some kind of food it reminds you of camp, or something that just triggers your mind subconsciously, maybe you don't realize it all the time?

TM: No, I can't. I know mutton, when you say mutton. You know, you eat lamb, and it's mutton, it'll turn all the old people off because that was bad food. Oh, I remember when they had a shooting. I remember everybody was oh, did you hear about this and that. I remember just bits and pieces like that. There was a riot that they had. When I was in the orphanage I saw an airplane crash, a little Piper Cub. It crashed right in camp. I was outside, and I saw the airplane. The wing came off, and that thing started coming down like that. It landed right in camp. We went running to it, and the guy died. He was dead. I remember kind of looking in there when we got there. A whole bunch of dust was still blowing around.

NR: Did you get to see the man?

TM: I saw him from the thing. It wasn't like he was all bloodied, you know. I kind of remember his shoe must have gotten stuck or something and he couldn't jump out or whatever it was. Another thing I remember, when it was V-J Day or something, there were airplanes flying overhead, and it seems like maybe they could have been going around. America just wanted to show their power or whatever, that they had airplanes. It seemed like all day long airplanes were going over, just flying over like that. There was an airport right across the street from the highway there, and there was an airplane that crash landed there, too. I remember seeing that thing. What else was there? Oh, the barbed wire that was around the fence. We used to hold it like and then we'd go through. When they're on the other side you hold it, you put your foot and you hold it up like that, and we used to crawl through.

NR: Were you ever scared or afraid when you did, or it was like nothing to you?

TM: We were little kids, like we were getting away with something, that we were kind of hiding and going. I'm sure the guards saw us, but, you know, we thought we were getting away with a whole bunch. They used to have a pass to go out of camp. Like, if they were going to go to a picnic ground or something like that, they used to have passes. We weren't allowed on the other side of the highway, but this side here was all right.

NR: Were birthdays celebrated there at the camp, for you at the Children's Village?

TM: Yeah, I think it was. I really can't remember that part of it. I remember they used to have like plays at Christmas. They used to exchange gifts. Like I said, that one gal I remember, Mary Honda, had given me a [comic book]. In the Honda family there was five of them, and they didn't even want to hear or think about the reunion. But I kept sending them things, you know, maybe they may change their mind. I couldn't get a hold of Mary Honda. That's the one I was trying to get ahold of. I got a hold of her sister Jane, talked to her. I've talked to Henry, and Henry didn't even want me to send him anything. That's this guy right here. (points to picture)

NR: Did you feel you were in their position at one time also, that you didn't want to hear anything about it or talk about it?

- TM: It didn't bother me. Maybe kind of in a way because they looked down on us. A lot of the camp people looked down on us because we were orphans, but a lot of us weren't orphans. Like I say, the ones that were *hapa* were the ones that were really picked on. I mean, it was obvious they just weren't Japanese. You look at them, and they're half-and-half.
- NR: Were they also looked down [upon] among the children in the Village? All of others that were not *hapa*, did they also look down at those *hapas*?
- TM: Kind of, I would say.
- NR: Even today, if you go to a Manzanar reunion now, everyone, the people outside, would you still feel that they look down upon the people that were in Children's Village?
- TM: No, I don't think so. If they do, it doesn't bother me. I think it would bother the *hapa* kids. Like I was trying to get Dennis [Bambauer] to come. His mother was Japanese, and his father was German. In fact, I talked to somebody. He finally found his mother, and that was maybe last year. I talked to his ex-wife, and I think she was telling me that he found his mother or something.
- NR: How did he find his mother?
- TM: I have no idea. I've tried to communicate with him but he won't—
- NR: Respond?
- TM: Yeah.
- NR: Did it sound like a warm welcome on her behalf?
- TM: On his ex-wife's?
- NR: No, the mother.
- TM: Oh, I don't know. I don't know what happened.
- NR: You don't know anything?
- TM: I don't know anything that happened. I know that someone said that he found his mother, and that's the extent. When my nephew graduated from Chico State, I went up there, and I tried to get ahold of him. I've got phone numbers and everything. I think I told him about the reunion, the Manzanar reunion, tried to get him. His ex-wife was kind of interested because the kids are maybe about your age. How old are you now?

NR: Twenty-three.

TM: Twenty-three? Well, the kids may be a little older. Yeah, probably a little older. Let's see, my youngest daughter is thirty-one, so their kids must be maybe in their late twenties. One lives here in Azusa. I should go look them up or whatever. She still lives up in Bishop. She's a teacher. Her daughter wanted to come. I've sent stuff to them, and they never responded. It's real touchy, so that could be a touchy subject with a lot of people in that picture.

NR: We're aware of that.

TM: That's why we won't give the list out. I won't give the list out. _____ (inaudible) I think in our family we're a lot more outgoing and not as conservative as a lot of people.

[02:30:00]

NR: Do you find maybe that because you knew your history, you knew your mother, you knew your father, it didn't affect you maybe as much as some other ones, the ones that didn't know who their father and mother were?

TM: Actually, when you say that, I don't think I really—I didn't know my father and mother, per se, like you know your father and mother. I know my sister. She's like my mother, but we're still brothers and sisters. God bless her soul, she watches over us, in her way. Each family is different and has different issues. I mean, you've got different histories. (chuckles) It's hard.

[recording paused]

NR: —the most significant events in your life the last few years, and you were telling me about Shioo.

TM: Yeah, Shioo died of cancer. That was kind of tragic, when you get cancer. It happened so fast. Well, it didn't happen fast. He came down with that New Year's—he was coughing a little bit. He thought it was just the flu. Then he went in March I guess, or I don't know when it was—he was going to be sixty years old, so what we did, we upped the time for his sixtieth birthday, which Orientals celebrate sixtieth birthdays. We had a sixtieth birthday party for him. Tamo was there, his brother Aki was there, and this John Hohri was there from New York. We have that on video or something. I think Wilbur Sato got this thing for the Children's Village, and if you read on it, he says, "It's like Shioo says, 'We're all brothers and sisters.'" When we were in the orphanage, he kind of said that because Tamo and Aki were there. That was very touching. We knew he was dying too, so we stepped that thing up. My sister Susie was there and stayed with him till he died in fact. He didn't want to stay in the hospital. He stayed at home. My nephew was there; the one that's in Japan. He helped too, because it was to the point where he couldn't even hardly walk. I was

- up there every weekend, and I would stay a week or two or whatever. When I went back up, he'd died just before. His body was still warm. I saw him that morning, I guess. He must have died early that morning, and I just go up thereabouts two or three hours later. When you see something like that on someone that you love like that, it's hard, I'll tell you. That was a tragic thing. He had his sixtieth birthday though. We had a lot of fun.
- NR: He was still young.
- TM: Yeah. He was going to be sixty. [He died November 15, 1989.] It's real, real sad. He was my brother. He was my friend.
- NR: How long was he sick?
- TM: It started New Year's. It's ironic. Those two brothers died about the same month. I think it was November. They died in that month.
- NR: Different years?
- TM: Yeah, different years.
- NR: John died what year?
- TM: Eighty-five I think. He died of a heart attack the day after Election Day, November 5, 1986. He lived in Mill Valley, and someone put a big sign up on top of the hill, a political kind of thing. He said, "What the heck was that crap doing up there?" (laughs) He went up there, and he pulled that sign down. As he was walking back, he must have had the heart attack. He was right in front of his house, and one of the kids' girlfriends saw him out there. He lived right next to the freeway, so when he was coming down she saw him. Came all the way around and called the ambulance, and it was too late. He'd passed away.
- NR: So, you were not expecting it at all?
- TM: He was like a Navajo Indian. He said, "I'm Navajo Indian. I cure myself." He didn't like doctors. He should have went to a doctor. In fact, I should have insisted he went, because, when we went abalone diving just before then—and he's the type of person that keeps up with everything—he was tired. It must have been his heart then. I don't know. But, you're not going to tell him to do whatever. He's going to do whatever he wants to do. That's what happens when you get old. You get hardheaded.
- NR: Stubborn. Even when you're not old. (laughs)
- TM: That's life, too, you know. Like I say, I'm kind of the youngest. Just like you, you're the youngest, so you know how your brothers are sisters are, right? More or less.

NR: Yes.

TM: You know their moods and attitudes and everything else, so it's like you and I are about the same. You know the temperaments and all that.

NR: Tell me about the reunion. How was it? Emotional?

TM: My sister, Mary, made a speech, and that was emotional. She was crying through it. That was then and this is now. Like she said, a lot of that from the matrons was good for us because they were strict, and they were disciplining all the kids. But, when you're at that time, you think they're witches, you know? So, she explained that also. They were there. And it's too bad this one didn't come. Her name was Deguchi, and we used to call her Deguchi, coochie, coochie. And she was mean. Alice Kaneko was her name. (points to picture) Her name is Le now.

[02:40:14]

NR: Who was she?

TM: The one in New York. Remember this one I was showing you?

NR: And why do you say she was mean?

TM: Oh, not her. This other one, Deguchi. In fact, I saw her at the Pilgrimage. When we were trying to get this together, I went to the Pilgrimage. First time I went. We had the reunion last year so we planned this thing the year before. I went myself on the bus, and I went up there looking for names and addresses and phone numbers. Out of all that, I just got—there's someone in the valley, and she made a speech at the reunion. And I'm glad she spoke. At the Manzanar reunion, Shioo was alive. I don't know if this should go on that thing.

[recording paused]

NR: Give me the names of your children and their names now and your wife's name.

TM: My wife's name is June Okada.

NR: Okada? And your children, in the order that they were born?

TM: Karen Aiko, she's number one. She's thirty-eight, thirty-nine, I don't know. Tony, he's thirty-seven, Randy, he's thirty-four or five, and Laurie is thirty-one. Let's see. Karen has an AA. She was not that far from a BA, but she quit and went to manage—she had her baby, my granddaughter. She's going to be two years old in May. She had her kids late. She's pregnant now, so she's going to have another one in April or May. Tony got a BA. He took art at the College of Notre Dame up north. Now he has his own business. He rebuilds engines. He found out he has to be part of

- the establishment instead of being an artist. (laughs) Randy is a UPS driver and has an AA degree so he's doing well. Laurie works for Toyota with the Lexus division. She was in the world money market, and the bank closed. Then she went to Toyota, and she's doing very well. She's married to a fireman/paramedic. Karen is married to a Petersen, and Laurie is married to a Tayanaka. So, I have a *hapa* grandkid.
- NR: I think mixed babies, whatever race, I think they're the cutest things.
- TM: Oh, she's smart, very smart.
- NR: What's the babies name?
- TM: Kelsey Emiko Petersen. Every morning I walk her. I take her for a walk around the block before I go to work. Saturdays and Sundays—like this morning they said, Are you going to be back in about an hour? I said, "Yeah, maybe two or three hours." I've been carrying her, but they said, You'd better not. She's getting spoiled.
- NR: That's okay.
- TM: (laughs) I walk her to my sister's place. Her place is all uphill, and that's a half a mile away. I carry her for a mile, walking round-trip a few times. I've been taking her to the park. I want her to be not with the older people. I want her to be with young kids her age.
- NR: She needs that.
- TM: Karen takes her to those school things they have.
- NR: Preschool?
- TM: Preschool things. She's attached to her. Grandma is the one that really takes care of her. If you're sitting here, the dad's here, I'm sitting here, Karen's sitting there—if she comes in the room, she'll go to grandma. But she knows Karen. She spends all day with her all the time. When I take her to the park—like this morning, there was another little Chinese girl. She must have been about maybe three years old, and I would play with her in the sand. There's like a big screen thing, and I said, "Okay, we've got a little raccoon." So, I get it, and I said, "Okay, we're going to bury it." So, we dig a hole, and I'm trying to get this other kid's attention. I'm trying to get her to share, see, so she'll get used to these little kids. And finally, I get the little kid to come. I said, "Okay, Kelsey, you get this stick. You go give it to her. You share." So, the little kid, she's way out there. She wants to come. You know she wants to come. Just patiently [waiting]. "Okay, take it." She goes over there and she just kind of drops it off. So, I get the stick, and said, "Here." So, she gets the stick, and she plays by herself over here. Kelsey is over here. Then finally she goes in like that, and I said, "Come on over here. See, cover the raccoon." So, we started covering. I guess the mother or grandmother was kind of protective—well, I don't blame her—

- because the sand started flying. In Chinese I think she told her, “Okay, you’d better back off.” (laughs)
- NR: You’re always saying how family-oriented you are. Do you feel you were the same way toward your kids?
- TM: No, I don’t think so.
- NR: Not as much?
- TM: Not as much.
- NR: You didn’t have that much time for them?
- TM: I’m working, so I don’t have the time. But, I made time. Through the years, I took more time off with my kids, closing my shop and taking up camping, than I do now. I used to take off all major holidays. We used to meet my brothers up north for Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and then, all the President’s Days. I closed my shop.
- NR: Do you think you did this because you didn’t have this with your parents when you were growing up?
- TM: More or less. I think it was more because we’re pretty close together. Brothers and sisters are closer than parents and kids, because the kids, they’re on their own more or less. Just like my brother’s kids, I’ve had every one of my nephews, except one, come to my shop. I used to be their babysitter for every summer vacation, and I would teach them work habits. Every one of them is good. They knew what work habits are. I’ve done that for I don’t know how many of them. I had one come from Denver. They would give me them, too, because, if they’re bad kind of kids, I used to discipline them a little bit.
- NR: Train them.
- [02:50:00]
- TM: Train them. They learn. What else was there? Yeah, I used to take off all these school holidays. I would want to pull them out of school sometimes, too, but my wife wouldn’t go for it. Like, Easter vacation I used to take off, Christmas vacation we used to take off. We were gone. I would say my church was my family and kids, taking them. I mean, church is all right. When I see church and I see people in churches, I see a lot of hypocrites, and I can’t go for that kind of stuff. Are you Catholic?
- NR: Yes.

TM: There's all different religions. I was raised a Christian. When the kids were real little I think we took them to church, but then we stopped going because they were getting older and went camping. To me, I thought that was more important, for us to be like a family, than it was for church.

NR: Why was that your feeling?

TM: I guess maybe because we were left as orphans.

NR: Did you ever have that feeling that Christianity really wasn't your religion?

TM: No. you know it's like they say, you don't talk religion and politics. Them things don't mix. I mean, you could argue all night long. Everybody has their own feelings so you don't bring those things up. That's the way I feel about it. Everybody has their own opinion. I don't think you want to hear that. You want to hear that? He was throwing snowballs and stuff. He was beating the hell out of four of them. And one went back to the car and got a gun and shot him.

NR: How old was he?

TM: At that time, I think he was about thirty-two or three. Japanese custom, thirty-three is a bad year. He had three kids. The other one was just an infant. These guys had records too, I guess. But, that's life. That was another year that was real—

NR: What year was this one?

TM: Same day as JFK, 1963. When we were kids he told me, I'm going to be a famous person when I die, or he had that premonition. And when JFK died, I came out of the hospital and found out he was shot. I had to tell his nephews and nieces about their dad. Shiro was his name.

NR: And John is the one who had the—

TM: Heart attack.

NR: And Shioo had—

TM: The cancer.

NR: Okay, I thought there was two that died. That's why I was confused.

TM: Three. So, out of five boys, there's two of us left, me and my other brother.

END OF INTERVIEW