

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Children's Village at Manzanar Oral History Project

An Oral History with ANNIE SAKAMOTO

Interviewed

By

Noemi Romero and Celia Cardenas

On July 11, 1993

OH 2486

This is an edited transcription of an interview conducted for the Center for Oral and Public History, sponsored by California State University, Fullerton. The reader should be aware that an oral history document portrays information as recalled by the interviewee. Because of the spontaneous nature of this kind of document, it may contain statements and impressions that are not factual. The Center for Oral and Public History encourages all researchers to listen to the recording while reading the oral history transcription, as some expressions, verbiage, and intent may be lost in the interpretation from audio to written source.

Researchers are welcome to utilize short excerpts from this transcription without obtaining permission as long as proper credit is given to the interviewee, the interviewer, and the Center for Oral and Public History. Permission for extensive use of the transcription and related materials, duplication, and/or reproduction can be obtained by contacting the Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, PO Box 6846, Fullerton CA 92834-6846. Email: coph@fullerton.edu.



Doug and Annie Sakamoto



Doug and Annie Sakamoto

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: ANNIE SAKAMOTO
INTERVIEWER: Noemi Romero and Celia Cardenas
DATE: July 11, 1993
LOCATION: Los Angeles, California
PROJECT: Children's Village at Manzanar

NR: This is an interview with Annie Sakamoto by Noemi Romero for the Japanese American Project of the Oral History Program at California State University Fullerton. The interview is being held at approximately 4:45 p.m. at the home of Annie in Los Angeles, California. Today is Sunday, July 11th, 1993. We're going to start out by asking—well, first of all, I want to tell you that Celia Cardenas is here listening to our interview, and if for some reason you hear a different voice, it's her. I'm going to ask you about your life now, what you do.

AS: I'm a registered nurse, work in a doctor's office, family practice. I have been there for over twenty years.

NR: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your family now?

AS: My husband is a supervisor in a vending machine company in Los Angeles. Our son is twenty-four, and he lives in Fullerton. He will be getting married in November. Our daughter is twenty-three. She lives in San Diego, and she graduated from Point Loma Nazarene College last year with a degree in biology. She's working part-time/full-time at a medical biology lab as a quality control technician, and soon they will be hiring her full-time. She is getting married in a couple years. Of course, both children live away from home.

NR: Can you tell me what your son is doing in Fullerton?

AS: He's working in the Bank of America Center in the Home Equity Loan Department. Also it's the Collection Department, and he's working there full-time.

NR: Can you tell me a little bit about your husband?

AS: My husband was born in Molokai, Hawaii. When he got out of the service in the 1950s, he came to the United States to live, or the Mainland to live. He has been here ever since. His mother lives in Hawaii with his middle sister. He has an older sister also in Hawaii and a younger sister and a brother, both are living there. We have a few relatives here locally. He has been working at this vending machine company for about sixteen years.

NR: You could also tell me a little bit about Wilma.¹ You can introduce Wilma.

AS: Wilma C. Stuart is a Caucasian lady who was teaching school. She asked the government to release the last two children from the camp in Manzanar, and she wanted to take care of them. She had been acquainted with quite a few Japanese people, had visited them in the hospital, wrote to them. When they left for camp, some of them stored their furniture in her garage. She kept correspondence with some of them in the camp. When they came out of camp, of course, they came to see her. Through the years a lot of them have either passed away or moved away, but she does still keep in contact with several of them who live in the San Gabriel area. Miss Stuart taught school for many years and retired in 1955. She took care of a number of foster children, among whom were Celeste² and myself.

NR: How old were you when she started to take care of you?

AS: I was six years old when she first took care of us.

NR: So, you were tiny when you first went into camp.

AS: I was only maybe about three years old.

NR: How are your memories? Do you remember anything significant when you first got there that really strikes your mind?

AS: My memories of Manzanar are of the high barbed wires, the tall searchlights, which would sweep the lights over our camp at night. The sweep lights would come in through the windows, and I would hide underneath the covers being afraid. There was a social worker—her name is Eva Robbins—who took a special interest in myself, and I used to like to go to her house, sit on her lap, play the piano or the typewriter. I must have been quite insecure in school because I remember one time that I must have done something especially naughty, which I don't remember, but I was locked up in a dark closet, was crying my head off, then spied some ink—it was in a bottle on top of some books—and spilled the ink over the books. What happened afterwards, I have no idea. It's blotted from my memory, so I must have received a good spanking. I remember the bitter cold, the snow of the winters, and the humidity of the summers. The camp was right at the base of tall mountains on which could be seen the snow most of the time. I liked the babies and used to climb up on the stools

¹ Wilma Stuart, O.H. 2488, Center for Oral and Public History

² Celeste Teodor, O.H. 3776, Center for Oral and Public History

- and peered into their cribs and played like I was taking care of them. The older people I don't really remember, although one of them was Kaziko, which I still keep in contact occasionally.
- NR: Is there anything that really struck your mind when you first got there that you can think of? It's hard because you were so little.
- AS: Being only three years old, I just don't recall.
- NR: Okay. You said you had the social worker, Eva Robbins. Can you tell me more about her?
- AS: We kept in contact after camp. She came out from Indiana and visited us and took Celeste and myself in a car, and we went to some park or maybe to the zoo. I kept in touch with her, writing her every year around Christmas, until she was in a nursing home. Probably she was in her nineties. Eventually, she passed away, and, of course, after that there was a lost contact.
- NR: Was the special interest with you and Celeste, or was it mainly overall she was a nice lady with all the kids?
- AS: I think she was a nice lady to all the children, but I remember being in her house quite a bit and playing with her piano and typewriter and sitting on her lap, so evidently she must have taken a special interest in myself.
- NR: Can you tell me some more about your school while you were there at Manzanar?
- AS: I recall having a Caucasian teacher, and my report card, I got an F in behavior. Being locked up in the closet probably was proof of that. I think I was very insecure at that time, kind of maybe a displaced feeling. No parents to have a role model, not being a family unit.
- NR: Do you know what happened to your parents?
- AS: I was born to a twenty-four-year-old farm laborer mother, and my father was a lot older. He was probably about fifty-six. He had a family of his own, and my mother was unmarried, so she didn't want to take care of me from then on, but I understand that she had me by cesarean. I weighed only two pounds, so I was in the incubator for several months. The social workers tried to contact my mother and see if she wanted to take care of me after camp—I think it was just before camp, but she said no. By that time she was in camp, she had married. I understand I have half-brothers and sisters, but I've had absolutely no contact with them. I met my father only once at age eleven, and it was at a downtown L.A. street. I understand that he passed away when he was probably in his sixties. (begins to cry) He had diabetes and was insulin dependent. He tried to support me through the years, but he had his own family, who knew nothing about my existence. He tried to send some support money to Miss

Stuart, and eventually he had to say he couldn't support me anymore, so Miss Stuart took care of me without charge. The government tried to help her because we were on welfare at the time. That's all I know about my family. A lot of times I wish that I could find my mother. She moved to Chicago after the war, but she's probably—maybe she passed away because she'd be in her seventies by now. She's probably about seventy-nine.

[00:11:56]

NR: You never knew her name?

AS: Her name was Jane. Of course, it was Shiraishi. That was my maiden name. When she married, her name was changed to Mrs. Yata, Y-a-t-a.

NR: And what was her maiden name?

AS: Shiraishi, S-h-i-r-a-i-s-h-i, which I understand means white stone.

NR: Do you ever plan on looking for her?

AS: I have thought at times of going through the records in Chicago, maybe finding her name, but I just haven't been able to travel to Chicago. I often wonder what she looks like, if she's still living. There have been some people that have the last name Shiraishi, and I've kind of wondered if they were family related, but I haven't been able to contact them.

NR: You told me that you met your dad in L.A. How did that happen?

AS: I think Miss Stuart had something to do with it. She asked my father if he would like to meet me, and we did meet in a street downtown L.A. He was short, skinny, kind of dark skin, and maybe we looked alike, but he was very quiet. I don't recall exactly what we talked about. It was just for a short while. I don't even remember if we went out to lunch or whatever. I think he died shortly [after]. That was when he told Miss Stuart that he could no longer support me. He was just sending a little bit of money each month.

NR: Your birth, where were you born?

AS: I was born in a small Japanese hospital, which I understand is no longer in existence. As I stated, I was born prematurely, but you wouldn't know it if you were to look at me today. (laughs)

NR: (laughs) You look very healthy. What generation Japanese would you be?

AS: Nisei.

NR: So, you don't have any brothers and sisters. You were the only child that they conceived? Well, you told me you had steps, but from—

AS: No, I was the only child from my father and mother, yes.

NR: Tell me about whatever you know about your half-brothers and sisters.

AS: That I don't know. I understand that one half-brother was mentally retarded, but, of course, not having contact with them at all—and I don't think they even know of my existence. I've sometimes thought of wishing to get in touch with them or trying to locate the city hall or state or federal, but that's a very involved process. I just don't have the time to do that.

NR: You say you don't have the time because it's painful?

AS: Well, actually, because I work full-time and with the care of my foster mother, Miss Stuart, it's just too time consuming because I would have to go looking at the courts or whatever. I guess they have a birth registry at the court and just trying to write to Chicago and find out if there is such a person as Yata, I don't know how many years that would take.

NR: What are your feelings towards your father and towards your mother?

AS: It was kind of resentment for a long time because—but I understood their situation because their own families didn't know my existence. For quite a few years, I did have a lot of resentment because what they did wasn't really right in having me the way they did, but that's past. Meeting my father one time, that has helped. At least I knew what he looked like. My mother I'll never know.

NR: Did you ever think, I guess, that one of them—well, maybe your mom would come back looking for you?

AS: From what I understand from the social worker, when they came to her home—I think this is after the war in Chicago—they asked her if she would like to have me back, and she told them absolutely no. To her it must have been a very traumatic experience having me, and she wanted to forget that completely.

NR: How do you feel that affected your life?

AS: Not coming from a stable family unit and never having a father figure, I think that has affected having a male person to model after. It's only been in recent years that I have really appreciated the intact family that has the stability and the values to it. I think when I had the children—that's been over twenty years—that I realized how important the family is, with a father and mother and the kids at home. Of course, no family is perfect, but at least a family that's together is becoming extremely rare these days.

NR: You said you resented your parents for many years. How many years or to when?

AS: Oh, it was probably mainly in high school. During adolescent years, it's very unstable. Adolescents, especially when they're in the transitional period between say like, for example, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, that's when they need family stability, and when they don't have it, a lot of times they resent that fragmented family.

NR: Going back to your social worker, Eva Robbins, you were telling me that you liked going to her house and being with her, and you would play there. For emotional support, is that who you went to during camp?

[00:20:14]

AS: I believe so. I don't really recall that much about her talking to me, but I'm sure she thought a lot of Celeste and myself because she took the time to come out from Indiana to visit us and take us someplace. I'm sure we had a lot to talk over. Of course, that was so many years ago. I think it was maybe in 1948, somewhere around there. So, I know she must have thought a lot of us and remembered us very much in camp.

NR: Any other social workers you remember?

AS: No, I do not remember any of the others.

NR: How about the Matsumotos, the directors?

AS: I don't remember them at all.

NR: Can you tell me a little bit about the toys that you had in camp?

AS: I don't remember having any toys in camp, no teddy bear or ball. Maybe that's the reason I didn't like to play with dolls. Really, I don't remember playing that much with other children. I just liked to look at the babies in their cribs.

NR: How about Celeste? Were you guys close in camp? Were you always together?

AS: Apparently, we were close in camp, especially toward the end, but I don't remember my playing with her too much.

NR: What do you remember of her after camp when you went to live with Wilma?

AS: She was a smooth talker. If Miss Stuart wanted to scold her or spank her, she somehow managed to talk her way out of it. She had a way of making people laugh, even the sour ones. She did have an impish grin. I remember her being very skinny and kind of laughing. It was not a throaty laugh, but it was Celeste's laugh.

NR: How did you feel when she was taken away, when you were separated from her?

AS: I don't really recall that incident. I was pretty upset when she left because then there was only myself, but I don't remember what I did at that time. Incidentally, maybe I'm getting myself ahead, but when we just came out of camp, apparently, we must have had some kind of Catholic training because we had rosaries. I recall sitting on the couch in Miss Stuart's house, and we were crying because we wanted to go back to the Catholic orphanage. We felt that we wouldn't be able to continue our Catholic beliefs, but I understand shortly after that Celeste burned her rosary in the fire (chuckles) because Miss Stuart was very much a Protestant.

NR: So, you're a Protestant now?

AS: Yes. Miss Stuart was a Free Methodist, and I was a Free Methodist for many years until I married my husband. We're now Church of the Nazarene, which is Protestant, similar to the Free Methodist Church.

NR: What was your biggest adjustment when you came out of camp and coming into society? Did you notice anything different? Was it hard or easy on you?

AS: The biggest adjustment was coming from a camp full of Japanese to an entirely white world and having to associate with white children because I had never really associated with them before and some of the reaction of the white children toward myself.

NR: Can you give me any specific examples?

AS: In the primary grades at the Bushnell Way School, which Miss Stuart mentioned she also went to as a child, some of the children would taunt me and call me Jap. One time when I was in junior high school, in the classroom, I had come up behind a white boy. I was just looking at his paper, just to be sociable, and he turned around and said, "What do you want, you Jap?" I remember that was like a slap in the face. That was when I fully realized that being Japanese was not such a good idea. For many years I resented being Japanese and wished that I had never been born to parents. But that was during also the adolescent years when a person's emotions and perspective of the world are so changeable and unsteady.

NR: How about the discipline that Miss Stuart gave you?

AS: She was very strict because she had to be. She had her elderly mother to take care of, plus she had about maybe five to seven foster girls—all girls—so she would have each one of us do a chore. We could not really associate with other children in the neighborhood, and they did not come to our house. She, of course, had to keep tabs of us at all times. She didn't allow me to go to other kids' houses or very seldom could they come to our house to play. This was especially true during junior high school and high school. Some of the teachers in the high school thought she was too

strict because she did not want me to—this was actually college—she did not want me to go on choir tour. They had to talk to her a lot, and eventually I was allowed to go on choir tour, which meant going out of state or going up north. So, they thought, in that respect, she was being too restrictive.

NR: Was she mean?

AS: No, she was never mean. I just remember her swatting us a couple times. That was because we were really naughty.

NR: How about in camp? What was your discipline there? Did you ever get swatted?

AS: I think I must have gotten swatted after I poured that ink over the books, because that memory, what happened afterwards, is completely wiped out of my mind.

NR: You said you were put in a dark closet?

AS: I must have been naughty. I don't recall what I did. Maybe I hit one of the other kids or talked back to the teacher.

NR: But, you don't remember anybody being excessively hard on you in camp or disciplining, being real strict?

AS: No. In fact, they were all nice to me, as far as I can remember. I don't remember anybody spanking me or saying cross words to me.

NR: Where were you before camp?

AS: I was in an orphanage because, being born prematurely, I was in the hospital for several months and then must have been put in a children's home or orphanage.

NR: Do you know which one?

AS: I think it was the Japanese American Children's Home.

NR: Shonien?

AS: No, I don't think I was in that one. There's a Maryknoll, and then there's a Japanese American Children's Home, and then there was Shonien. I must have come from the Japanese American Home. That specifically is unknown.

[00:30:12; recording paused]

NR: Can you tell me a little bit about your feelings when you left Manzanar?

AS: I was a little bit apprehensive because on the bus coming from Manzanar I could see the other cars, or the other buses, winding down the road. It was a steep mountain road, and I had my face pressed against the window and was wondering, Where are they taking us, and what's going to happen to us? I still remember the scene of that and seeing those buses or cars going down the winding road. But, as far as other reactions, I just don't remember.

NR: And can you tell me your first encounter with Miss Stuart?

AS: We were put into this front room, and we sat on the couch. She had some other children with her and her elderly mother, and I think her sister Mary was there. Celeste and I sat together, and we were frightened. That's when we were fingering our rosaries and crying. Celeste, she was kind of the ringleader, she said, "We don't belong here. We're Catholics." And we were crying. That's the first encounter that I remember.

NR: What did you think when you saw her?

AS: We saw this—well, she wasn't really fat, but I think she was in her middle age. She seemed like a nice lady, but we didn't really know what was going on, just that we were sent there for her to take care of us.

NR: What did she tell you?

AS: That I don't remember. Whatever conversation we had, that's a total blank.

NR: I mean throughout the years.

AS: 2She told me about the first encounter, about Celeste saying that we didn't want to stay there because we were Catholics, and then she said shortly after Celeste threw her rosary into the fireplace and that's when she broke her ties with the Catholic Church. She said that Celeste left after a few years and I was the only one left and she decided to keep me.

NR: Was it a Protestant church where you were taken that you met Miss Stuart?

AS: Well, she was a Protestant for many years because her father was a minister. She went to the little church down the street. It's only about maybe three blocks from her house. She taught Sunday school and was the superintendent of the beginners class, which is the little kids before they enter kindergarten, for many years. So, I attended that church for many years.

NR: Going back, you told me that each girl had a duty and something to do. What did you do?

AS: I stood on a stool and did the dishes.

NR: You were tiny.

AS: Yes.

NR: Did you have privacy?

AS: No. We had to be like in bunk beds because there five or seven of us. I don't really remember how many. So, we had to have bunk beds. I think there was maybe three bedrooms. Her mother had one bedroom to herself, and Miss Stuart had one bedroom. Then we had a porch that some of us were in, and then we had another bedroom where the rest of us were in.

NR: When you were growing up and got interested in boys, how was her reaction to that?

AS: She didn't like boys. She had never married, never been on a date. Her mother, towards the end, was very restrictive. Miss Stuart never missed boys. I mean, she never missed the dating or wished she had, so she figured that she would do the same for me. In high school especially she would ask another girl to spy on me and tell her what I was doing. I did have some boyfriends in high school, but if we went out, it was more like a group setting. It was never alone. So, when I attended nursing school and after I had finished that, I moved out and lived in an apartment with two other girls for about two years. And then, I dated boys.

NR: Her mother never allowed her to have boyfriends? Was that why?

AS: Her mother never allowed boys in. Her mother took a lot of care mentally. I think she developed Alzheimer's, so she required a lot of care. Miss Stuart didn't dare let her out of her sight because she would run out the door and run the streets and wander off down the street hollering, "Help me! Help me!" So, Miss Stuart didn't have the opportunity to date anybody, except take care of her mother.

NR: Growing up, what were your feelings? Were you always happy? Because we saw pictures of you earlier, and you were always smiling. Was that your attitude all the time?

AS: I guess I could smile for the camera. (chuckles) Socially, I was kind of a loner. I used to like to sit under the walnut tree and draw for hours and hours and read. The time that I had gotten a splinter in my knee, I recall when it got infected. I was out there sitting at the table under the walnut tree drawing but not feeling well because I developed a fever, and it happened that I had to be taken to the county and hospitalized because septicemia resulted from just that splinter infection in my right knee. They had to lance it and give me antibiotics, and I stayed in the hospital for about a week.

Socially, I wasn't able to play with the other children or have them come over to my house. I sort of got along with most of them, because I was a loner. I really don't think I developed normally socially. Being an adolescent in the junior high

years, I was kind of rebellious and shaped under the restriction of Miss Stuart. I just recall having to live with a lot of very elderly women and being around elderly people. Some of them were sick. Then high school I was very happy. That's when I interacted socially with my classmates and remember the good times with them and making them laugh. I was kind of a cutup in class. Not a bad one to be expelled, but sometimes be the teacher's pet.

NR: So, you weren't shy.

AS: I was shy in a way, but at certain times I could really make the class laugh.

NR: Did you have any nickname?

AS: They called me Annie Oakley or Annie Orphan.

NR: How did you feel about that?

AS: Oh, I thought it was kind of a compliment. They would say, "Annie Oakley, get your gun," or Annie Orphan because, obviously, I didn't have any parents, but I don't recall taking offense at that term.

[00:40:18]

NR: Did you ever blame your parents for anything?

AS: Yes, I blamed my parents for not being able to take care of me and for being Japanese and being put in the camp for so many years. That I resented years later, but the resentment was more towards the junior high school years.

NR: How about the government? What did you feel about them doing that? Did you even think of it?

AS: Oh, I didn't think so much about the government as I thought about the parents.

NR: Your focus was on them.

AS: Yes.

NR: Did you have any pets or anything in camp?

AS: No, none whatsoever.

NR: Were you allowed to have any with Miss Stuart, or did she have any?

AS: We had cats, twenty-six cats at one time, and I recall they were in a big wooden cage. And having to feed those twenty-six cats—many of them were babies. They were

- cute, but there was no animal control in those days. Sometimes I would have to clean up their mess, and that was very disagreeable.
- NR: So, do you like cats today?
- AS: I hate cats. (laughs)
- NR: (laughs)
- AS: Miss Stuart has one little stray cat, and his name is Orangey. He's very affectionate. He stays around the house a lot. But that's the only cat I'll tolerate.
- NR: Do you remember during camp visiting anyone?
- AS: The only ones I remember would be Miss Robbins, visiting her house a lot, and the baby's room. But, those are the only ones I remember.
- NR: Was there any particular baby you took a special interest in?
- AS: I took no special interest in any baby. To me they were all cute and cuddly. Of course, I couldn't carry any of them, being so young myself. I just liked to look in their crib and touch them and talk to them.
- NR: Why?
- AS: Maybe I had sort of a maternal instinct, because like myself, kind of like being orphaned without a mother or father, maybe that's what that feeling came from.
- NR: Did anyone visit you from outside of camp?
- AS: That I don't remember.
- NR: When you left camp, did you want to leave? You told me you didn't know where you were going.
- AS: I had no choice. I didn't know where I was going.
- NR: But you maybe wanted to stay there?
- AS: I don't recall wanting to stay there. I was just very apprehensive of the future.
- NR: Do you remember anything about the *hapa*, the mixed children?
- AS: No, I don't remember any of them.
- NR: The conditions of the food, do you remember—

AS: No, I don't remember the condition of the food. I think we had rice and maybe oatmeal or hot cereal, but the food I really don't remember.

NR: You don't remember anything as being real awful, that you didn't want to eat it or being starved?

AS: No, I don't recall that.

NR: How about the clothes that were given to you? Did everybody get the same uniform clothes?

AS: I think they were allowed to bring in some of their clothes, but, as far as the way we were clothed, I really don't remember. I assume that the state clothed us because we came from orphanages.

NR: Do you remember getting new clothes or used clothes or anything like that or shoes?

AS: I don't remember.

NR: Can you describe your bed or your pillow in camp?

AS: The only memory I have of that was hiding under the sheets when the searchlights would come in through the windows, being afraid. I think we were like on cots, and there were rows of cots in our particular room. I think there were all girls. I don't recall any boys being in there.

NR: And why were you scared?

AS: When it's dark and the searchlights are coming in through the window every so often, I was trying to think what was happening there, why these searchlights. Maybe they were doing that because they were watching us or afraid that we would do something wrong, like maybe run away. I must have been insecure because I would wet the bed at night, so, of course, naturally, the people who were taking care of us would have to clean it up. But, I don't remember—they must have scolded me, but I don't recall their ever spanking.

NR: You wet the bed many times throughout the whole time you were there?

AS: Yes, I believe that, but once I got out of camp, I didn't do that.

NR: And the lights would go on every so often during that night. Would that wake you up, or once you were asleep it didn't matter anymore?

AS: Well, only when I was awake would I notice it, but once asleep, I assumed that—

NR: You got used to it.

AS: Yeah.

NR: How about when you were sick in camp, do you remember someone taking care of you?

AS: I don't recall being sick in camp. Although I understand that I did have bronchial pneumonia, but apparently I was not hospitalized. I was treated with antibiotics, whatever they had in the 1940s, which they didn't have too much of, bronchial pneumonia and measles. No, I didn't have measles until I was student teaching. I missed a week of school. Some little kid at that school gave it to me.

[recording paused]

NR: Going back now to more the present, you've been to a Manzanar reunion?

AS: Yes.

NR: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

AS: The first Manzanar reunion was 1992, I believe. It was at the Bonaventure Hotel, and it was the whole Manzanar camp. The ones that were at Children's Village sat together at two tables, and I do have a photo album of them. And then, we had a reunion in May of 1992, and that was awesome. So many people came, and it was a huge success. It was held at the Rosemead Sheraton. We had old pictures, similar to what I have and so many people remembered me. Whenever the name Annie Shiraishi [came up], they said, Oh, we remember you, and I was just absolutely amazed, after fifty years anybody would remember me. Mary said that she remembered myself as being a skinny kid with long monkey arms and being dark-skinned, but they enjoyed playing with me.

NR: That sounds like Mary. Did you remember any of them?

AS: I remember one of them, Kuniko, Taeko and her last name is Nagayama. I'm horrible with Japanese names, so forgive me for misspelling them or mispronouncing them. She was a teenager in camp, and we kept in somewhat correspondence since camp. The other ones I don't really remember, aside from Celeste, but she was not at the reunions.

[00:50:00]

NR: Why is that? Did she refuse to go?

AS: No, she did not refuse to go. She and her husband were traveling to Baja, California, and they just could not postpone the trip.

NR: What were your emotions?

AS: One of happiness, anticipation, going over memories, seeing the people, how they had changed after fifty years, hearing their stories of camp, talking stories, their reaction. Most of them had fond memories of Manzanar. There was very little bitterness. There was a lot of emotion because they were able to survive the camp and today are strong people because of that experience.

NR: You said there was very little bitterness. Did you ever feel that?

AS: Well, that was just when I was in junior high school and kind of being an unstable personality and emotions. I did have bitterness towards being put in the camp and being born of Japanese parents.

NR: How do you think the camp affected your whole life?

AS: It was four years out of my life. It was an historic event, written forever in history. I did not realize at the time that it had been an enormous injustice to the Japanese people who were singled out at that time, real racial discrimination and revenge. But, somehow those people, or most of those people, were able to rebuild their lives amazingly well and come out of abject poverty to become productive citizens. Most of them were already citizens, so they really didn't have any reason to be put in camp and be relegated to the label of non-person.

NR: Why do you say *them* and not *us*?

AS: You mean the Hispanics? Or the Americans.

NR: No, the Japanese.

AS: Why they were singled out?

NR: You mentioned *them*, like, most of *them* came out of it and they did good.

AS: Oh, because from the reunion I heard very little bitterness. Some of the families were torn apart, of course, being put in camp. Some of the fathers were put off into a separate camp, so that kind of split up the family, and the children had to be put in a children's home until their parents or father were reunited with them.

NR: What reminds you of camp today? Any particular word or something you've seen?

AS: The word that might be striking about camp was the orphanage, being with Miss Robbins, not being too unhappy, just those incidents that I have already mentioned.

NR: Anything else you want to tell me? I'm sure there's a lot that you haven't told me.

AS: (sound of dog at the door) The dog wants to get in. He can smell the food and wants to get in. Anyway—

NR: I'm sure it picked it up, and it's good that you explained.

AS: It's a dog pounding on the door! Anything else about the camp? It was an experience that no other race has endured, except what happened in Europe to the Jewish people. One thing about us in the camp is that we were not murdered or tortured. I'm sure some of us were interrogated, but we were not badly mistreated. From reading literature, that event was to be forever etched in history.

NR: Can you tell me one of the hardest events in your life? Something that you went through.

AS: Traumatic, you mean?

NR: Yeah.

AS: Even in recent years?

NR: Um-hm.

AS: The fact I was kind of a nerd in junior high school. Not too many real close friends that I could talk to over the phone, relate to. Not really knowing too much social graces. Of course, I wasn't—what do you call it? Social manners, I didn't have vulgar or crude ways, and I guess I didn't really enjoy spontaneously talking to people or strangers until recent years, maybe even the last ten years. Especially with adults, I was always very hesitant to freely talk to them.

NR: What made you decide to talk to us?

AS: What made me decide to talk to you folks? Because it's unusual for Hispanics to be interested in Japanese culture, amazingly so. And I wanted to meet you and see what you were like and why you got into the Japanese culture, because I know of no other Hispanic group that have taken the Japanese culture as a minor or major.

NR: That's interesting. Okay. I'm going to let Celia ask you a few questions.

CC: I just have a question. I just want to know, when you got the letter from President Bush, what were your thoughts about it?

AS: It's about time. What I liked best was the compensation money.

CC: How much was that?

AS: Twenty thousand.

CC: Did it make up for what they did to you?

AS: Well, I felt like it did in some measure, because I was only three years old and to get \$20,000 a lot of money. But, for the older folks, I understand that some of them said that no amount of money will ever do justice to what they endured in camp.

CC: I can understand that because a lot of them lost their property, not just material goods, but their self-esteem.

AS: That's true.

CC: It's different when you're a child because you don't know what's going on sometimes.

AS: Right. I didn't have any loss of property when I entered camp, but I understand that people had to leave their homes, businesses, within a few hours. They were given forty-eight hours or seventy-two hours to just get one suitcase or a few belongings and get shipped off by train or car to these different relocation areas. That must have been horribly traumatic. And not being able to sell property and then having that taken away by the government. It is indescribable, something that I can never fathom.

CC: What year did you receive your money? Because I understand some people haven't received it yet.

AS: Oh, really? This occurred October the 3rd, 1992, and I have made a photostat copy of it. I thought we would never get it, but then understand that Congress appropriated more money. We had understood that the money would be frozen because what some members of Congress wanted to do was to put it into the general budget and freeze that, even though it was signed into law that we were to get that compensation money. But, that did not occur thanks to the efforts of some Senators and Congressmen. I wrote a letter of thank you to the different people that made it possible. You can read it later on or right now. I don't know how many people wrote to the government thanking them for the compensation money.

CC: Wow. That's good. Back to you, Noemi.

NR: Okay. That concludes our interview with Annie. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW