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"Japanese American Farmers in the San Fernando Valley before and After WWII Oral History Project"

KATSUYE WATANABE

Oral History Interview

Interview conducted by Steven Kuranishi

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW of
Mrs. KATSUYE WATANABE (part 2 of 2)
Interviewer: Steven Kuranishi
Date: June 6, 1993
Place: 10641 Jimenez Street, Lake View Terrace CA
Length of Interview: 1 hour 30 minutes
Topic: Japanese American Farmers in the San Fernando Valley before and after World War II
Collection: Japanese Americans in the San Fernando Valley Oral History Project Collection
Repository: Delmar T. Oviatt Library. Special Collections and Archives

Interviewee: Mrs. Katsuye Watanabe (KW)
Interviewer: Steven Kuranishi (SK)

Interview:

[00:13] SK: I drew these in my class…

[00:17] KW: You brought the paper from your classes.

[00:20] SK: Yes. My name is Steven Kuranishi. I am from California State University, Northridge. We are participating in the San Fernando Valley Japanese American Oral History Project. I am conducting my second interview with Mrs. Katsuye Watanabe at 10641 Jimenez Street, Lake View Terrace, CA. Unfortunately, I don't have a camera man. Do you remember what you experienced in the ship from America to Japan?

[01:06] KW: I was around eight or nine years old. Nine in Japan, eight in America. The ship was bound for South America, it wasn't a very nice ship. We wanted to board that ship because it stopped at San Pedro. If we went to San Francisco, we could board nice ships.

[01:31] SK: It's a little far.

[01:33] KW: It was far. We had many kids in the family and our parents had a lot to take. It wasn't easy to go to San Francisco. So we waited for the ship that stopped at San Pedro and boarded that one. It was an old cargo ship. It had a long bed and many people were sleeping in line. The other side was facing this way, and they were sleeping in line too. There was a walkway in between. People were sleeping on top of each other and the space was not divided into rooms.

[02:09] SK: I see.

[02:11] KW: Pre-war ships like Tatsuta-maru were Oochika [sic] ships, and when I first went to Japan we boarded American ship called the 'Cleveland' or

something. They had rooms, and I wonder how many people were in a room, probably 6 to 7 people, but they were not sleeping on top of each other in a long row.

[02:34] SK: What did you do for fun?

[02:40] KW: In the boat?

[02:41] SK: Yes. Do you remember?

[02:42] KW: I don't know what was there.

[02:46] SK: Like what kind of games they had.

[02:48] KW: Did they have anything like that? We went up to the deck and played often. With boys… was there girls? … I played with many boys, I was a tomboy.

[03:06] SK: Did you stop at Hawaii on the way?

[03:08] KW: We didn't stop. It was a cargo ship going directly to Japan. We arrived in Yokohama.

[03:18] SK: Once you were in Japan, did you go to school there?

[03:23] KW: Japanese school?

[03:24] SK: Yes.

[03:25] KW: Yes. In Japan, their new school year starts in September.

[03:32] SK: Yeah.

[03:33] KW: We arrived in Yokohama. Because we were such a big group, we stayed at a hotel in Yokohama. My mother's sister and her husband lived in Tokyo, so we stayed there, too. After we relaxed, we went back to Fukushima.

[03:51] SK: Did you grow flowers in Japan?

[03:57] KW: No. We tried to do things like everyone else in Japan. When we first got there, we kids were all small, so we didn't work. As we grew older, and once my older brother graduated from his grammar school and went up to high school, we started to do things like the others. Everybody in the neighborhood, it was such a rural area, were making rice or raising silkworms. Since we were not so young anymore, they felt it didn't look good to let kids play when everyone else was busy, so we grew rice and raised silkworms as well. Since I was a girl, I didn't help to grow rice. I have an older brother and younger brothers, and their age difference is only one or two years, so my father took all three of them to the rice field. My father had experience working in rice fields before he went to America, so he knew what to do. He bought a rice field, which was not close from our house, but my father and brothers went and worked there. I never worked there. I went there to bring snacks or something, but never worked on the field, growing rice.

[05:39] SK: Only boys?

[05:41] KW: Yes. With our father. The field wasn't so big. What our parents thought was that it didn't look good if only they let their kids play while everybody else was busy during the summer. That's why we grew rice and raised silkworms. Cocoons from the silkworm. Do you know sericulture?

[06:05] SK: I don't know.

[06:07] KW: The field for silkworms… my mother did that. I also did get mulberry, mulberry leaves for the silkworms to eat.

[06:20] SK: Yes.

[06:21] KW: I went to the field to get leaves for the silkworms. That was house work, so I did that. We called the silkworms 'Okaiko-san,' 'Kondo-sama,' or 'Okaiko-sama.' We paid respect by using those titles because they were our source of income and we appreciated them. I didn't go to the rice field, but I

picked mulberry leaves and fed silkworms. I helped my family doing a lot of those things.

[07:17] SK: Work like planting rice was done only within your family?

[07:23] KW: Yes, because it wasn't that much work.

[07:26] SK: How big was the rice field?

[07:29] KW: The size of our rice field… let me see… I wonder how many meters it was and how much it yielded? I don't know how much rice we got from the field, but it was not too much. Our father thought it was not a good idea to let kids play around, and the neighbors were growing rice and raising silkworms which were the farmers' income. So we didn't have too much surplus. We gradually bought more land for silkworm farming. When you have a lot of land, mulberry trees come with it, so by the time I went to girl's school, they seemed to be doing a lot of silkworm farming. We lived in a rural area, so even schools were off when it was busy for silkworm farming. Two to three weeks. We called it "Nohanki (busy farming season)." During the break, we planted rice, took care of silkworms, and there were other things, too. So schools were off for about three weeks during this season. Even elementary school kids had to help out. So, I didn't go to the rice field, but I still had to help around the house a lot.

[09:20] SK: Did you sell what you grew? Or did your family eat it?

[09:28] KW: I think so. We had a lot of rice fields, rather we bought a lot of rice fields. What do you call it? We had people grow rice for us. We bought rice fields everywhere, here and there. So in the fall harvest season, people who used our fields would bring us rice instead of paying rent with money. We received a lot of rice, I don't know if I was eating the rice we grew or rice somebody else brought in. I think they were all mixed up. Not a lot, but we wholesaled rice, too. When we sold it, we sewed rice bags with sewing machines and milled rice. We bought those machines with the other farmers as a group. I don't know whether I ate the rice my family grew directly or not. People paid rent with rice and we kept it in our warehouse all together. When we sold the rice, we did not sell it separately based on where the rice came

from. I don't remember much about the rice fields. I came to America soon after I graduated from school, too.

[11:39] SK: Then you went to Hawaii by boat?

[11:44] KW: When I came here?

[11:45] SK: Yes.

[11:45] KW: Yes.

[11:46] SK: You stayed in Hawaii…

[11:49] KW: In Hawaii. Was it Tatsuta-maru? That was a good ship, not like the freighter ship we were on when we went back to Japan. Excellent ships before the war, Chichibu-maru, Tatsuta-maru, and Asama-maru, like that.

[12:08] SK: A Japanese ship?

[12:09] KW: A Japanese ship. They were good ships. But they were lost during the war. That's a shame, because they were such nice ships. So, we stayed in Hawaii when we came here. We stayed overnight in Hawaii. We were with an older lady with us at night. I also had my cousin in Hawaii, so I went to their place and spent a few hours. My uncle took us for a ride to windy places and other many different places. They treated us to dinner and then we went back to the ship, I think.

[12:53] SK: So you stayed there…

[12:58] KW: I think we came back on the same day. We could not speak English, and we had a lady with us who shared the same room on the boat. She was not Nisei like us, she was an Issei older lady who must have been in her 30s or 40s then. She was pretty and spoke English well. She took care of us. So, she came with us when we landed in Hawaii. We were farm kids from the country side, and had no idea where to go around the harbor, so she guided us through. Once we were out of the area, my aunt and uncle in Hawaii were

waiting for us. I think we landed in the morning and went back to the boat at night. I don't know if the boat left Hawaii on the same day, but I think we were supposed to come back to the boat within the day. The lady, who came from Los Angeles to Japan, was with us as well. She walked with us to my aunt's place in Hawaii since she did not have any relatives in Hawaii.

[14:34] SK: I see.

[14:35] KW: I wonder how she is now. I met her a while ago. I am already this age. She was already older back then, so she may not be around anymore.

[14:51] SK: Do you remember the food you had on the ship? What kind of meals they offered?

[14:59] KW: When I first came here?

[15:02] SK: I don't care. Either.

[15:04] KW: When I went to Japan later? Or when I came here from Japan for the first time?

[15:10] SK: I don't care, either, but let's say the boat from America to Japan first.

[15:18] KW: How did we eat on the freighter? …I don't remember. We probably went to a cafeteria or something. I don't remember. We went up to the deck and played there. Where we stayed was a small area, there were beds there and beds here. We put our stuff under the beds. My family had many kids, so my mother had all kinds of snacks for kids like candy and rice crackers. Our family was the biggest so we put our stuff anywhere we could. I don't remember where the cafeteria was when we went to Japan in the freighter. After that we were in Japan for ten years, then I came to America. I was only 18 or 19 years old, 19 in the traditional Japanese way of counting age. I was young. My mother would not send a girl to America alone, so she said if I were to marry someone and settle, then she would allow me to go. Originally, I was not planning to come to America… I wasn't eager to come. But my friends were saying I was lucky that I

could go to America, so I started to think about going. I think I was on Tatsuta-maru when I first I got here. The sleeping arrangement on the ship, who sleeps on the top or the bottom, was determined by the destinations, like who goes to San Francisco, who goes to Los Angeles and such. How many people were in a room? My brother who lives in Japan now, he came with me. The two of us traveled together. They said it was better to travel by twos rather than alone. He had graduated from Higher Elementary School and was still in the Middle School. He continued his schooling once we were in America. I don't know how many people were in one room on the ship. A Hawaiian was over there, and two people slept above him, my brother slept above me, and a person whose name was Tendo was… somewhere. I think more than ten people were in one room. Upper bunk and lower bunk, here again upper bunk and lower bunk. There were two beds over those beds too. There was a table in the center. I'm talking about our room in the ship. There's a window here, all you can see is sea water. We were on that side, upper and lower bunks. Here, there are also upper and lower, there might be four upper and lower bunks. And this side, there were several sets of two bunks, so maybe there was a total of 14 in our room. We had breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the cafeteria.

[19:07] SK: No one got sick there?

[19:11] KW: Well, when we went to Japan after the war, I took my boy who lives in Yoshiri [sic] now. When we first went, nobody got sea sick. We were fine. We slept on this side and there was a person on the other side who did not go to eat, so the person must have been feeling sick. We went and ate with people we knew at the same table. You didn't know other people from different rooms. Some people didn't go to eat even when we invited them, so they must not have been feeling well. We were fine, though. The only time I felt sick was when we traveled around 1950, it was only for one day. I was with a child. He was four years old, the one born in the camp. He wanted to go outside because the room was pretty cramped. Since he asked, I was going to take him out, then suddenly I felt tightness in my chest and felt nauseated. That was it. Only about a minute. When I started to walk to go out, I felt sick, then it was nothing after that. It wouldn't be fun if you got sea sick. I didn't have anybody with me the first time I traveled, so there was no problem. When I traveled after the war, was it Asama-maru? No, no no. It was the American ship called the 'Cleveland'. There was no

Asama-maru after the war. When I traveled on the Cleveland, I had a small child with me. My child really wanted to go outside, and there was a kid from West Los Angeles and he was about the same age as mine. They came up to the desk, too, and they played together often.

[21:37] SK: How much did it cost to board the ship?

[21:41] KW: How much was it? How much did it cost to go to Japan back then? I don't remember. Are you asking about the time I came from Japan? Or…

[21:56] SK: When you came from Japan.

[21:59] KW: I don't remember how much it was, and I didn't pay, my parents did. How much was it back then, really? I don't know at all.

[22:16] SK: But it cost more to go from Japan to America, didn't it? Because the ship was good.

[22:24] KW: It must have been more expensive than the freighter that departed from San Pedro. The ship was much better. The Japanese ships, Asama-maru and Tatsuta-maru were good ships. So it should have been expensive, but I didn't pay for it. It was such an easy time for me.

[22:54] SK: You met your husband when you got to America, and then started farming?

[23:09] KW: Yes, it was September… so September, October, November… we went to a flower farm in mid-November for the first time to work there. We didn't start the business. A boss was running the farm and we got a job there.

[23:35] SK: I see.

[23:37] KW: He was a single guy. So I cooked. But he usually went to the market in the morning, so he only ate toast or something like that. So I cooked for lunch and dinner. Until then I'd never had a chance to cook. The boss would go to the market and he would get things like vegetables, meat, and fish. I cut

the meat and vegetables, added soy sauce to fix a meal. But I had never learned how to cook. A whole fish with a head and guts, it might have been mackerel, and I had never removed the head. Because he was single, the boss was used to doing things like that. He cut off the head, opened the belly and removed guts. I was impressed watching him prepare the fish. Then he told me to chop it up and quickly simmer it with soy sauce. I really never cooked at home. Those days people didn't eat steak, and he would buy small pieces of meat. Meat precut into small pieces. The boss went to the market every other day, so if we had this much meat, I'd keep half in the refrigerator for tomorrow and use half today, then add some vegetables that he bought. He bought all different kinds of vegetables, too. He lived in a small house on the other side because he was single, and we lived in the house with a kitchen. We had meals together. I did not know anything because I never cooked. It was never my responsibility. My mother did everything for us. He really took care of me. His name was Morita. We sometimes sent him packages after he went back to Japan.

[26:24] SK: Ummm.

[26:29] KW: By the time he went back to Japan, we had worked for him for two years. He had a wife and child in Japan. He came to America all by himself. When he left for Japan, we took over the small house and the small land, and started our flower business, growing flowers. He didn't have much in the house because he was all by himself, and he did not take anything. He left everything from chopsticks to a rice bowl. We got everything from him and continued the work and started our own business.

[27:26] SK: Who was working at the farm? All of them were Japanese?

[27:36] KW: No, we had Japanese, but we had Mexicans, too, in busy times. Even Mexicans got used to the work if they came and worked for us long enough. When we were busy, the Mexicans would cut all different kinds of flowers and put them in a big tank. And we would bunch them on the table. There were long ones and short ones, so we separated them into 'number one' and 'number two' as we bunched them, and set aside the short ones. If a bunch was 24, we would usually get 25 flowers and wrap them together with a thread.

If one set was 24, a set of 4 makes 100. So we would count 100 done, 200 done and such. Men usually cut the flowers and when the boss went to the market, he would toss out bad flowers if there were any because buyers didn't want them. He taught us how to do business while we were working. He brought back some flowers sometimes. For short flowers, we would go out to the field and bunch them with 24 to 25 flowers and put rubber bands on them. These are the kinds of flowers we would go out to the field and bunch. We would bring long flowers to the table and bunch them. The place is called a packing house, there we would put four bunches of flowers in a tank and add water. Water is drawn when they are ready to be taken to the market.

[29:45] SK: Did many people buy flowers?

[29:47] KW: At the market?

[29:48] SK: Yes.

[29:50] KW: There were a lot. When we took flowers to the market early in the morning, there were people called shippers. They would buy and send those flowers to places. The good flowers were taken by them. Shippers could get in the market before others. It was set up in a way that the flower shop owners wouldn't mix with the shippers, so the opening time of the market was about an hour later for them than the shippers' time. Shippers would get in early and we would give them their ordered flowers, too. That's how things were done at the market, but I don't know the details because I never went there to sell flowers. I just heard them talking about the place.

[30:41] SK: Did you sell only flowers at the market? Anything else like vegetables?

[30:49] KW: Vegetables were sold at the vegetable market. They are still there. The flower market is on 7th, do they call it Flower Street? It is on the corner of 7th street, I think it is near San Pedro Street. The vegetable market is also around 7th and 8th street. They still have the vegetable market and the flower market. We are already retired, but we still are a member of the flower market, so we are still getting announcements and notices such as New Year's

meetings and so on. We don't go, though. My younger brother had a flower business in Sylmar. Do you know Furuyama?

[31:35] SK: No.

[31:35] KW: Of course you don't know. You are much younger. People like Gary didn't go to school much either, to Japanese school. So they might not know either. My younger brothers, when we started the flower business after the war, returning from the camp, we started with my brothers as partners. Because we had larger land and were selling more flowers. When we were doing it on our own, it was small. We had about two Mexican helpers, and we also had small room within the house where we had live-in Japanese workers. We didn't speak English so we needed Japanese live-in workers. They helped us a lot.

[32:29] SK: Did you help grow flowers too?

[32:23] KW: I worked very hard.

[32:36] SK: You fixed lunch and dinner as well?

[32:42] KW: I didn't cook for the Mexicans, but I cooked for the live-in-Japanese workers three times a day.

[32:50] SK: That's hard work.

[32:51] KW: It was hard. So I wanted to learn English. I went to a school near Mission in San Fernando. It was a school for people who grew up without learning English, like Mexicans. I don't think the school is there anymore. They have classes at the high school in San Fernando now. I learned something in English in class. They taught us strange stuff which wasn't useful. And once I was home, I didn't think about English at all. I thought about something like, 'I serve white rice with the entrée and pickles'… as I picked or bunched flowers. I didn't have time to think about English. Even if old people want to learn, we can't remember English. I didn't get anything at all from the class. The only thing I got from the class was writing my name in English.

[34:06] SK: How many times a week did you go to school?

[34:09] KW: Twice a week, I think. Tuesdays and Thursdays. I think it was from seven to nine o'clock. The students in the class were adults, there were 2 to 3 Japanese, some Chinese, Mexican, and Caucasian, they were from Europe who didn't know much English. There were many Mexican students. Older Mexicans couldn't read at all when they were ask to read. But they spoke well because they used English for work. So I wondered what they came here for. But when it was our turn to read, even though it was not smooth reading, we could read better than the Mexicans. The Mexicans' language is similar to English, right? That's why it is easy to talk, isn't it? Everything is opposite in Japanese, when you compare it to English grammar. So, it wasn't very useful going to English school, but at least I learned to write my own name. It was useless to learn things like "I am…" or "you are…" or "it was …" in the beginning of the class. Teachers taught them because they had to. While I was taking those classes, I listen to the conversations of my kids who were still kindergarten age, and asked them some questions in English like "Are you…?" Even then they knew how to answer, even the preschool age kids. Because they played with other kids. People like us who think and speak in Japanese all day, we couldn't learn English.

[36:34] SK: It's difficult.

[36:35] KW: My sons, one of them is now working at the Japan Foundation and the other one who died later, when they were around the first grade, I tried to study with them. But as they went to school for one to two months, they made friends and talked with them in English, right? We didn't have chance to talk in English, so we couldn't catch up with them anymore. That's why I think English was difficult. I couldn't do it.

[37:12] SK: Your husband's English…

[37:14] KW: He wasn't very good. He came from Japan, but not as a student. He came to make quick money. He was in Utah at the time. It was cold in the winter, so there was no work. He had time in the winter for three months, so he went to school during that time. But when there was work, he stopped going to

school and worked. When he left Japan, his grandmother and grandfather told him to work hard and make money and come back home soon. So he worked to make money rather than go to school. I didn't need English at all when I came here as I became a live-in worker for someone who my mother knew. I didn't have a chance to practice. I have been here over 60 years, but I got old not speaking English at all.

[38:29] SK: Did you have your own farm before the war?

[38:35] KW: We had our business, but the land was not ours. Only the houses. We built a new house and a packing house on the land we were renting. There was nothing we could do because we couldn't buy land, but we courageously built a packing house on the land that belong to the owner before the war. We grew a lot of flowers. A long time ago, we were in Pacoima, no, not Pacoima. We were on La Canada Way, then we moved to Pacoima. Then we went to the camp. We built our house, the packing house, and added a bathroom. Not knowing there would be a war that year, so we moved in and the space was a little larger, so we laid new pipes and grew flowers. The flowers in San Fernando were grown to sell in the winter. Winter in San Fernando is still warmer than other places near beaches. People who make flowers in Redondo Beach or Hermosa Beach grew flowers to sell them in the summer. The flowers in San Fernando grew in the hot weather, so they didn't get big, but people who bought them said they lasted longer. The flowers from Redondo Beach grew in cool weather and bloomed large and beautifully, but they didn't last that long. We mostly grew winter flowers in San Fernando. We did grow some in the summer just a little, but different kinds of flowers. We were not doing carnations at that time. People around Torrance area were growing carnations. Nobody in San Fernando were growing carnations. So we were growing snapdragons, asters, geraniums, stocks and so on. Also anemones and ranunculus. Then, the war started. We had just moved to Pacoima, on Laurel Canyon. We lost a lot because of it. We had just built a house and then moved, which cost us a lot. Then the war started in December. My brothers were doing business in North Hollywood. Nisei were allowed to go to the market, but my husband couldn't because he did not have citizenship. Although it was the harvesting season for our flowers, November and December. My younger brother worked hard to bunch flowers and brought them to the market, but our flowers were getting old

in the field. If they were carrots, you could bring them to the market big or small, but flowers couldn't be accepted when they were old. We wasted a lot, but it seems somebody campaigned against the rule, because later Issei were allowed to go to the market. We had a curfew where we were prohibited to go anywhere beyond five miles, which took effect before we went to the camp. We couldn't go anywhere, but until then we had a little window of time to bring flowers to the market. We lost a lot for those flowers. It just happened that the war started in the year we moved to that location.

[42:57] SK: How did the notice come for you to go to the camp?

[43:05] KW: Maybe newspaper, maybe notices? We didn't have television back then, but there were notices everywhere. Other than that, newspapers and word of mouth. We had a radio at home, so we could get Japanese news. When the war started, we heard on the radio that the Japanese Emperor had declared war. When there was certain news, everybody went inside their house and turned on the radio because we could tune into Japanese shortwave radio. We listened to that. I don't know what to say, I think I understood what was going on, but I think I was really scared, too. I heard about the declaration of the war, when the Emperor spoke about it.

[44:03] SK: Who was the emperor at the time?

[44:07] KW: I think it was Emperor Taisho. No, not Emperor Taisho. The current one, Emperor Showa. Emperor Taisho passed away when we were in Japan, when I was still going to school. Emperor Taisho was not physically strong, so the current Emperor Showa became the Emperor. While Emperor Taisho was ill and resting, Emperor Showa was young but became the Regent. So Emperor Showa became an emperor when we were still in Japan and Emperor Taisho passed away. What year in Showa did I come here? Was it Showa Year 8? I came to America in Showa 8. What year in Showa did the war began?

[45:24] SK: I don't know…

[45:26] KW: It was in 1932, ten years after I came to America.

[45:32] SK: Then it was around Showa 18.

[45:35] KW: That's right. I came to America around Showa 8 and it was about 10 years after. My older boys, the son who works at Douglas was eight, the son who goes to work in Vandenberg was six, and the younger one was four, I think. I went into the camp with three kids. We could only bring what we could carry in our hands. With three kids, we had to bring our own clothing and other items, too. We put stuff in suitcases and large bags. We boarded the bus from Burbank. Big trucks with big cloth on the sides, something like grocers used to move vegetables, came and they put our luggage in them to take to Manzanar. They said we could bring what we could carry in our hands, but people who brought a lot more were lucky. They didn't bother and put anything up in the trucks anyways. We brought only what we could carry. We ended up not needing it, but we bought and brought sleeping bags, one for each, and had the kids put them on their backs. Those other people had babies or something, so they brought a lot of stuff. Even if it was more than they could carry, they benefited by doing so. Our land owners in Pacoima were such nice people. When we were going to the camp, they said 'people might harass you by throwing stones or something because you are Japanese, so the government are sending you to the camps for your safety. It is safe for you to go there'. Our landlords were really nice. We left things unsorted in the house when we left for the camp. But they packed everything including beds into boxes and placed them in our packing house.

[48:18] SK: All of it?

[48:19] KW: Most of them. We had our beds sent to us and we slept on them. Our landlord sent them to us… They sent us other items to the camp later as well. How did they send things to us? I don't know, they might have asked carriers. We didn't bring our beds when we went to the camp and had them shipped to us, but I don't remember that well either.

[49:02] SK: Were there many Japanese haters when you were going to the Camp?

[49:08] KW: Our neighbors were nice, so we never had stones thrown to us. They didn't do anything unreasonable. After the war began and before we went to the camp, we had drills in case airplanes came to America from Japan. We had to turn the lights off at a certain time for few hours. One day our youngest boy caught cold and ran a fever. And every time he ate, he threw up. We had to turn the lights on and clean up. The people who lived on the block next to ours, who were taking care of the area, they came around and knocked on our door. They said they saw lights from our room. I said he was sick and we were taking care of him. Then he said 'alright, but make sure your lights cannot be seen.' People around this area were nice. Our landlord was from Switzerland. Our neighbors were really nice. They, the husband and wife together, came to the camp in Manzanar to see us. They brought us fried chickens and cookies and other things. Oh.

[50:57] SK: Just a second.（SK flips the recording tape） Here. Go ahead. Sorry.

[51:12] KW: There were many Japanese neighbors in the area. Inada-san, is still living there, us, and Fujinami-san across the street. Inada-san had a daughter-in-law from Denver, so they evacuated there. Fujinami-san who lived across from us. We evacuated to the camps on April 26, 27, and 28th. They made sure there were no Japanese in the San Fernando Valley after that. Voluntary evacuees left for Utah, Colorado, or other areas much earlier, like one month prior, before the five-mile travel restriction was imposed. We were planning to do that, too, but we were too slow. Travel restrictions took effect before we were ready, so we couldn't go. But we were glad that we went to the camp.

[52:13] SK: Really?

[52:14] KW: Yes. People evacuated voluntarily, some of them did not have a place to sleep once they got there, or there was no drinking water so they had to travel to fetch it, and some placed a box in their tent to make stoves for cooking. We were lucky to be in the camp. In the beginning, we had mattresses made out of hay. After we stayed there for 6 months to a year, the government provided us with new ones made of cloth.

[52:50] SK: Umm hmm.

[52:51] KW: Life at the camp got gradually better. My last name is Watanabe, so we were at the end alphabetically. My brothers' last names are Furuyama with an 'F', so they left pretty early. The neighbor across the street was Fujiyama with an initial 'F', so they left early, too. We were gathered at Burbank, and the buses left from there. I don't know if we had the most number of buses because we were the last group. But on the way to Manzanar, there is a place the road turns around. I don't know exactly where but it's all the way out there, our bus was not the first ones in line but when I saw it, I could see a long line of busses. I counted up to eighteen.

[53:56] SK: Wow.

[53:57] KW: It was like a train. All greyhound busses. They must have gathered them from all over. We left for the camp on the 26, 27, and 28th, in three days. People from west Los Angeles arrived at Manzanar on the same days.

[54:14] SK: Umm hmm.

[54:15] KW: When we arrived at Manzanar, those who came in early said that as soon as the bus stops, many people will come and say, "let me help you, let me help you," and they will offer to hold your bags and other stuff. In the meanwhile, you'll have to process your room assignments. The people who have your baggage would go back to their own room.

[54:46] SK: Umm.

[54:47] KW: So they said not to let anybody take your stuff. But I didn't experience any of that. We didn't have much stuff anyways. There seemed to be unfortunate people. Such things happened even though we were all Japanese.

[54:59] SK: That's scary.

[55:00] KW: Those who didn't bring much of their own stuff might have done something like that. Not all Japanese are good people. So I was told not to give our bags to strangers. When you are getting off from the bus, they might say "let me help, let me help" out of kindness, but it would be OK only if you know the person. My cousin, my husband's cousin was single and young, so he was sent to the camp early. He went even before the buildings were put up, and he helped build the buildings and rooms as a job. Since I was told not to give our suitcases, I stared at whoever was helping us. Then I realized it's Masao, the cousin! Such coincidences happened. They found out our bus and took our stuff, and then they took us into a building and told us where our rooms were. Even though a number of us went to the camp from San Fernando in the same bus, we were separated into different buildings. It wasn't like you are here, you are next, and you are next, not in the same barrack. They must have thought it out. Families with kids were near schools, and older people were near mess halls, something like that. Our place seemed to be near the schools. Although at that time, I didn't know why we were placed there. Our neighbors from across the street, they got there earlier because they were initial "F", and they were in different barrack. I am glad we were there. If we had voluntarily evacuated to Utah or Colorado, we would have had to work to eat, to buy food, and if there was no water or electricity, we would have had to make it work, like using lamps to work. Although they were barracks, we had electricity, water, and baths. Our bath was a shower, and it was just built up and the shower water didn't squirt out. We washed our body under water or hot water drizzling out of shower head. When we went to the mess hall, in the beginning of our stay there, we had to travel to eat. Later, every barrack opened a mess hall and people in the barrack would eat there. To open a mess hall required a lot, from plates to workers. Just for workers, you needed cooks, waiters, dish washers… I didn't get work because we had kids, but most people got jobs for different things like working in the kitchens. Old ladies were washing and drying dish cloths and wipe cloths. Even that was one of the jobs.

[58:38] SK: Ah ha.

[58:38] KW: People had many different kinds of jobs, but I didn't work because of the kids. My husband helped with farming and other things. In the beginning, he was one of the rake crew. There were a lot of leaves in the camp. If you

leave them it gets dirty, so they raked all over the camp. Mr. Murakami who lived on the waterfront over there was the boss and there were crews of fifteen or so. They raked around a barrack, and once they cleared the area, they would move on to the next barrack. He was in the rake crew and gradually moved into the agriculture crew. He changed his jobs every now and then. I didn't get a job because of kids, but I was fine in Manzanar. I first went to learn sewing, then learned to make artificial flowers. When I went to the sewing class with my youngest, he was not even four, he told me to make pretty flowers. In the next room, it was only divided by partitions, they were making artificial roses. So I made something like that and did some sewing, I also visited English class, too. I went to a tailoring class with Ms. Kondo. There were many classes available.

[1:00:21] SK: Umm hmm.

[1:00:23] KW: It was not the first year that we enter the camp, but the next year, when we made bento lunches for the 4th of July. We were not allowed to go toward the roadway, but we could go to the mountain side. Do you know where Manzanar is?

[1:00:47] SK: Not at all.

[1:00:48] KW: There is a ceremony on the last Saturday of April. You should go there, to Manzanar.

[1:00:53] SK: Yes.

[1:00:54] KW: I wouldn't have minded going this year, but my husband is not with me anymore, so I didn't go. Was it last year? The 50th anniversary. It was last year. I went there for anniversaries several times. I go to Manzanar every year to pay a visit. Even after the war, we often go toward the High Sierras to go fishing, so we stop by the monument at Manzanar cemetery.

[1:01:29] SK: Umm.

[1:01:30] KW: I haven't gone fishing since my husband died, so I haven't been there for a while. But last year I went to Lake Crowley with my sons, we passed

the Manzanar area, so we stopped by to pay a visit. My sons who live in Los Angeles now, went fishing too. Lake Crowley's opening and Manzanar's ceremony were at the same time. There is, what do you call it, a Manzanar pilgrimage or a visit to the grave, right? In front of the monument, people dance and bring bento or eat buffet style meals with friends. When I go that way, every time I wonder how I get to the monument? When I went on a trip with some San Fernando senior citizens, we stopped at Manzanar. Then I go to the grave, too. My child died in Manzanar. The youngest one. He had a weak heart. He caught cold and couldn't get better, so he was hospitalized. They said his heart was a little different. Once he got a little better, they said they would process the paperwork to get a permit so that he could go to a hospital in San Francisco. But it was no use. Because he was only four. If he could go out of the camp, I would have taken him, and the nurses told me they would get me a permit, too. But it didn't happen. I went to school to learn and made flowers. I couldn't do the "Shigin" but many people were practicing very hard at the camp. Everybody had spare time.

[1:03:56] SK: There were many activities there.

[1:03:58] KW: Yes. So, on the Fourth of July, on the second Fourth of July, they made bento for us and there, is it the 5 freeway that goes that way now? Manzanar is north of that. It is at the end of the road. You have to go in a little. You can see where the camp was from the road, where the high school auditorium was. You cannot see the monument from the road because it is on the higher ground. The camp was good because we had kids. I didn't have to work because we had small children. I couldn't get money, but we took classes, and we were able to bring the kids around. I took them to take classes too. As for food, in the beginning they served stews. It got better later. People were talking about food like, they got chicken today, things like that. We had many good meals. First, we used plates made of aluminum, things soldiers used. Rice too. They said the soldiers made the rice. The container was made of aluminum with a handle and a lid. They put rice in them and poured the stew over rice. The longer we stayed, more stuff like plates, spoons, and forks were rationed. The meals got better too, with rice and entrees, like chicken and meat, and others. We got milk and pretty much anything.

[1:06:00] SK: Half Japanese and half western food.

[1:06:03] KW: Yes, all different kinds. Workers were all Japanese Volunteers. The section bosses were paid 19 dollars per month. Others were 16 dollars per month. College graduates or not, anybody who became a boss, it was 19 dollars, and others were 16 dollars. Things were cheaper back then, so even with 16 dollars, you had enough to pay for necessities and have extra. We also got big black jackets as a ration. I don't know where they went. They gave everybody a jacket for the cold weather, which looked like hand me downs from soldiers. What else did they give us? I think they gave us clothes sometimes. But they were often big. People who were good at sewing undid the seams and altered them to fit their bodies. I didn't do such a thing. It was easy to put on when it was big, rather than small. We didn't get anything after we relocated to Tule Lake. There was not much difference between Manzanar and Tule Lake, but I guess I didn't go to any classes after we moved to Tule Lake. Because we had small kids, I was busy from the morning doing laundry and other things.

[1:07:46] SK: When you got money, was there any store to buy…

[1:07:51] KW: There were. They were called canteens. They had two canteens in the camp, in barrack number 22 and number 1. They had T-Shirts, pants, shoes, kids' tennis shoes, and so on. In the same barrack, the other place sold things like ice cream, candy, and potato chips. They were selling many different things. Once we were in the camp, what we brought in from home was not enough. When a neighbor boy was wearing new clothes, my boys wanted them too. Because of that, people in the camp were wearing similar clothes. I don't know if the stores made money or not, but 16 dollars a month wasn't enough, so we had to use our own money we brought. If you had kids, you had to shell out a lot of your money. It didn't cost much for the grownups, but kids' tennis shoes wear off easy, and they want T shirts with the picture others were wearing. Kids cost extra. My husband worked and made 16 dollars, but I didn't do any government work because I had kids to take care of. Later on, we could live with people of our choice, so we lived with my older brother's family. My older brother's family lived in one room and we lived in the second room and we were going back and forth between our places. We talked about things like, it is good here, even if we went to Utah and worked hard, there is no way we would

make that much anyways. You would grow cabbage or something if you went to Utah. Staying in the camp, we could eat and sleep, and if you worked, you would get 16 dollars. There was no big success, though. If you started it on your own, you could grow cabbages, and if the prices were good, you could make a lot. But if you wanted to enjoy a vacation, it was good here. We talked something like that. That's why Shigin was so popular in the camp. What was it Kokuseikai and something. Shigin classes were everywhere. They had many different kinds of classes. We have karaoke now, but we didn't have it back then. I said to my husband that was thinking of learning Shigin, then he said you have a bad voice, so it won't be good. I thought he might be right. And there was a guy, his name was Motoike from San Fernando, he was in Manzanar too. He and his wife were learning Shigin and they practiced a lot. But they could not master singing in a good voice. There is the voice you were born with, which might be good or bad. So I told the teacher, Ara, that my husband said I didn't have a good voice, so there was no use practicing. Then the teacher said that was not true. If you are willing to learn, get started because the voice coming from the stomach is different from one's speaking voice. But my husband was not so eager, so I thought it was ok not doing it since I may not improve anyways. So I didn't go. I liked sewing classes, tailoring classes, artificial flower making classes. After my small boy passed away, and then I got pregnant with my child who was born in Manzanar later, I stopped going to classes. I got busy with laundry, feeding baby food, among other things. I didn't go to Manzanar this year. I went there last year but we couldn't catch any fish. My sons went there this year. They seemed have fun, as they came back happy.

[1:13:17] SK: After the camp, you went back to the place where you grew flowers…

[1:13:22] KW: We came back, but…

[1:13:24] SK: There were two buildings still?

[1:13:27] KW: White people, they seemed to be Jews, they were making flowers in our field, using our tanks and everything.

[1:13:40] SK: Really.

[1:13:40] KW: The landlord offered to buy the house. The land was theirs, so they paid for the houses, how many thousand dollars was it? Then we entered the camp, and our belongings were placed in the back end of the packing house. The front side of the packing house would be used, since those people would be using for doing flower business. Half of the packing house was filled with things like our beds, chest drawers, and dining tables. Although we didn't own that much stuff in those days. Later we asked them to send us our beds and chest drawers to the camp from the pile. Our field had everything installed like pipes. For growing flowers or anything, the white guy used everything we left such as sprinklers, water hoses, and the new pipes with knobs. The pipes ran 120 feet and faucets were erected for spinning sprinklers at 30 feet intervals. So, the guy's name was Doyle, who was growing flowers there. The landlord told him that since the owner of the place had come back from the camp, 'you will have to leave as soon as the lease period is up.' So we rented a house until his lease expired. We were there on Laurel Canyon, do you know Fernangeles Park?

[1:15:41] SK: Ummm.

[1:15:42] KW: No? North Hollywood side of Laurel Canyon. We rented a house near there. When the lease expired and the guy left our house, we went back in. After that, the city was planning to build a school where our house was, so we had to leave. We moved to the area called Granada Hills, did they call it Granada Hills back then? Granada Hills is still Granada Hills now, right?

[1:16:25] SK: Yes, it is.

[1:16:26] KW: We moved there.

[1:16:28] SK: The windy place.

[1:16:29] KW: That's right. We didn't know that it was that strong there. We grew flowers like chrysanthemums and asters outside, and anemones and stocks in the green house. Stocks grew beautifully in Pacoima, but the soil was different in Granada Hills. It was not sand but clay. Stocks do not need much

water. When it rains, it doesn't get dry soon enough. The soil is good for growing vegetables. But not good for flowers. It was windy too. We grew asters or chrysanthemum. When they bloom and are ready to cut, wind was blowing constantly. At the time we had a washer but no drier for laundry. We hung laundry up on the clothes line with pins, then the wind blew and laundry got coiled up with the wind. It was so windy. We might have been there for two to three years. Around the time, many new houses were getting built in the Granada Hills area. We were asked to sell the land. Flowers bloom in the area where the wind is so strong. It was windy every day. I hear it was a lot stronger than now. It is pretty windy now too. My grand child who lives in Granada Hills said it is so windy that trash and so much stuff get into the swimming pool. It was windy every day when we were there, too. Right there near Eldridge, the way up to the cemetery, we moved there and the soil was good. It was more clay-ish than the soil in Pacoima, but it is part of the farming business to work with the soil. Pacoima's soil was sandy and good, but sandy soil needs a lot of fertilizer. Still, if you can produce good flowers, it's better than clay soil. You cannot make mistakes in that. So, we moved from here to there. My younger brother moved to Sylmar. At the time my husband was 61 years old. He had a pain here. He worked hard since he was young. His body got tired. He went to acupuncture and massage treatments. Our business was a partnership with me and two of my little brothers. We quit and my younger brothers bought land in Sylmar and continued their business there. They had been doing the business just by themselves, but quit about 10 years ago. I don't remember exactly when. It's been 30 years already since we moved to this house.

[1:20:14] SK: Did you get money from the government because you were in the camp?

[1:20:22] KW: Money to compensate the damages for things we left?

[1:20:25] SK: Yes.

[1:20:26] KW: I guess we were too honest. They said if the damage is only 2000 to 3000 dollars or less, we would receive the money quickly. You filled out on a paper that this item and that item were left and they went missing. You claimed your damages like that. Wise people, or you might say greedy people, they filled

in thousands of dollars in damages, including rice bowls and chopsticks. Those people didn't get money until much later. The government investigated for a long time. We were not sure if we would get money or not, so we quickly processed our claim including sprinklers and pipes. Those were the items we left and the white people used, so it was same as lost, and other tools like scissors, sprays and other stuff which we didn't bring to the camp because they were no use there. Therefore, we only received about 2000 dollars. To those who claimed the damage as about 2000 dollars. Can I go?

[1:21:47] SK: Yes, please.

[1:21:50] KW: You may want to stop the machine.

[1:21:51] SK: No, it's fine.

[1:22:01] Katsuye's son(S): Hello

[1:22:03] KW: Yes.

[1:22:04] Katsuye's Granddaughter: Hi, grandma.

[1:22:10] KW: Hi, you are early. I thought you would be later because you were going to church.

[1:22:16] S: I did [inaudible].

[1:22:18] KW: Oh, OK. He is Mr. Kuranishi's son. He is here to interview me about the Manzanar camp and pre-war times. If I talk with you now, you'll get recorded too.

[1:22:32] S: Mr. Kuranishi?

[1:22:34] KW: Mr. Kuranishi was the chairman of the board for the school. Very funny guy. He is this boy's father.

[1:22:40] S: Are you working with Dean?

[1:22:41] SK: Yeah.

[1:22:43] KW: He goes to the school in Northridge.

[1:22:46] SK: Yeah, he couldn't show up today because he had something to do. He was supposed to be my camera man today.

[1:22:51] S: Oh, OK.

[1:22:55] KW: OK. Yoshi, can you cut the longs, please.

[1:22:59] S: OK.

[1:22:59] KW: Then put them in the thresher there.

[1:23:03] S: OK

[1:23:07] SK: Your son?

[1:23:08] KW: Yes. He graduated from Northridge, and now works for The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles' service center as a social worker.

[1:23:23] SK: With Dean.

[1:23:24] KW: What?

[1:23:26] SK: With Dean Mimura.

[1:23:27] KW: He said he knows Mimura-san, he doesn't work there, does he?

[1:23:33] SK: Ah, I don't know.

[1:23:34] KW: He said he knew him.

[1:23:36] SK: Umm…

[1:23:37] KW: They are in different sections. I am not sure what he does. It sounds like many people are working there. He's worked there for 10 years already. He says he is a director or something. I asked him to cut the long ones, that's why he came today. Shall we get back to the story of Manzanar?

[1:24:02] SK: Yes.

[1:24:04] KW: What was I talking about? We were talking about the strong wind. After the camp, we moved there for the partnership business and then moved to Eldridge right there, then we quit the business because my husband had trouble with the nerve pain and he was going to massages and other treatments. I thought it was a good time to retire, but if he worked for one and a half years longer, he could have gotten more Social Security. He quit before he turned 62 years old, so he was only entitled to a small amount for a long time. Back then, your social security benefit was determined based on the last three years of your earnings. We had quite a bit of market income, but we didn't work much in the last three years, so we ended up getting very little. But there was nothing we could have done, because my husband was hurting. He had pain in his legs and shoulders. We said we retired at the right time. Come to think of it, it is already thirty years since we came out of the camp. Not 30 years, it's been 30 years since we came here since we retired. It's been 50 years since we left the camp. He was born in Manzanar.

[1:25:41] SK: Really.

[1:25:44] KW: When they went fishing in the High Sierras, there was a festival at Manzanar. Everybody gathered there on Saturday, right? At the time he went fishing, we went there the day before. He went on Saturday. He stopped by at Manzanar and met people from the news production, and he told them that he was born there. They were surprised and took his pictures and that ended up on the TV news.

[1:26:21] SK: Wow.

[1:26:22] KW: With that in Manzanar. The boy who was born here. The picture there. This time my grandson's wife recorded the news on video and showed everybody later. They said he may be on the news tonight, so watch it. I watched the dance in Manzanar and then went to Crowley Lake. People from the news, they probably thought it was unique to meet somebody who was born in the Manzanar camp. He was born in Manzanar and another boy was born in Tule Lake, who went out there after graduating from UCLA and died. It was an accident, I told you before.

[1:27:14] SK: Yes.

[1:27:16] KW: He went to the lake and got on a boat. It was [inaudible] wind. It was an accident, nothing you could do. He was happy to go boating. Asao's wife came here and told me "my husband suffered with pain but your son boarded a boat with a camera. And while he was enjoying the ride, the wind knocked it down and he died." "Comparing it to my husband, who got cancer and was hospitalized and died in pain, it was a good way to go." If you think about it, it must have been really tough seeing her husband suffer. I was very sorry losing my child there. Anything else?

[1:28:19] SK: Let's wrap it up.

[1:28:24] KW: OK. The food was good in both Manzanar and Tule Lake. What was bad was we left the camp toward the end because of our initial "W." People who came into the camp early had initials A B C, and they were excited that they got notices that they could leave the camp. We didn't receive the notice until much later. There was nothing we could do because we were "W". That's the name we got. My husband left early. I got citizenship while I was in Tule Lake. That's why I could not leave. Although it wasn't like they investigated or anything. So, that's it. It wasn't particularly good story in Manzanar.

[1:29:17] SK: It was, it was.

[1:29:18] KW: Ok, then it is alright.

[1:29:21] SK: OK I am concluding my interview at three o'clock. Today's date is the… Is today the 6th?

[1:29:32] KW: It may be so.

[1:29:34] SK: 6th? The 6th?

[1:29:35] KW: It is the 6th.

[1:29:38] SK: 6/6/93. Thank you. Thank you very much.

[1:29:43] KW: Thank you for your troubles.

----------End of Transcript----------