INTERVIEW

I interviewed Mr. Thomas Shoji Takemura on May 9, 1991. He had some very interesting stories to relate to me about his parents coming to the United States and about his early childhood experiences as a Japanese American born in 1920.

We talked about religion, and farming and Japanese Americans who were most scrutinized by the FBI. He told me of his attendance of Japanese Language School and his visit to Japan when he was 5 years old.

Mr. Takemura related his experiences to me about when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and the eventual internment of him and most of his family at Camp Harmony. Unlike most of Japanese Americans, Mr. Takemura's family's farm was cared for by trustworthy neighbors during the war.

He also told me of his release to work for U&I Sugar Company and his education at Evanston Jr. College in Illinois, where his two sisters had been. Mr. Takemura told me of his feelings about his military classification of 1-A being changed to 4-C and then back to 1-A and how these events affected other Japanese American men's lives.

Mr. Takemura told me of his reasons for lecturing at the local junior high and high schools about his and other Japanese Americans' experiences during the war.

Mr. Takemura met his future wife while at U&I Sugar Company in Montana. They later married and had 4 children.

He also told me of his involvement in the redress hearings, the statement of which is in this booklet.

"YOU KNOW, IT'S EASY TO TRY AND UNDERSTAND. BUT TO UNDERSTAND IS ANOTHER THING....." T. S. TAKEMURA

Mr. Thomas Shoji Takemura is doing his best to try to get people who did not personally experience internment during WWII to "try to understand." For the past 25 years he has volunteered his time by speaking to junior high, senior high and college human relations class students and explaining, from his viewpoint, what it really was like to be incarcerated in "Concentration Camps, American style."[1]

Mr. Takemura believes, and rightfully so, that the historical aspect of Japanese Americans' internment is insufficiently represented in many aspects of our lives, especially the textbooks of the students in schools. Section 106 of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 makes available funds to alleviate this problem. A Civil Liberties Public Education Fund Board of Directors has been established for administration of these funds "to sponsor research and public educational activities, and to publish and distribute the hearings, findings and rcommendations of the Commission, so that the events surrounding the evacuation, relocation, and internment of US citizens and permanent resident aliens of Japanese ancestry will be remembered, and so that the causes and circumstances of this and similar events may be illuminated and understood;..."[2]

At the two lectures by Mr. Takemura that I attended at Mr. Mike Kim's class at Clover Park High School, he maintained a high level of enthusiasm. And he's been doing this for 25 years!

Mr. Takemura was easy to talk to and very willing to give me any information that I needed. If he didn't have the answers, he'd help me find them.

I interviewed Mr. Takemura May 9, 1991. The interview begins on the following page. After the

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[1] Pacific Citizen, Special Holiday Edition, 12/74

[2] War Relocation of Civilians, (Redress) 8/10/88, Sec. 106.

interview transcription is the transcription of Mr. Takemura's lecture to Mr. Mike Kim's (a student teacher at Clover Park High School) class on April 17, 1991. Also attached is a copy of Mr. Takemura's statement which was heard at the Civil Liberties Act hearings.

This is the text of the interview with Mr. Thomas Shoji Takemura.
My name is Susan Stout. I am a student at the University of Washington Tacoma. Today is May 9, 1991. This is an oral history interview with Mr. Thomas Takemura. I will be asking Mr. Takemura some of his life experiences especially his and his family's experience during World War II.

What things attracted your parents when they first came to the United States?
I think that my Dad mentioned to me that his belief was to get rich and go back because he heard that this was a land of opportunity and most of the Isseis who did come over here, Isseis are first generation, I myself am a Nisei, that's a second generation, he had mentioned when I was little, that that was their goal to make money and then go back to Japan. But here when he had told me that, this about going back, he'd been here I would say 12-15 years already cuz he came here in 1906 and when you look at 1906 to when I was born in 1920, that's 14 years and then I must have been about 7 ... So that's quite a length of time. But my mother came here as a picture bride and her idea was to leave the country and to come over to some foreign area like the United States and the picture bride was an opportunity for her to do that. She came over with about 20 other girls her age, about 18 or 19 years old and they came into Seattle, the port of embarkation. Their ride on the ships was something like 6 weeks. It took a long time. You know how fast ships traveled in those days compared to today, it's a lot different.

In 1952 or 53 my father was in the Air Force and we took, he went over to Okinawa, and we took a ship over and my mom told me it took a long time, with 4 little kids. Did your father pick your

mother out of those pictures?

Gee that part I don't know, but I do know it was said several times that she herself came as a picture bride. But it wasn't said anything further about selection or how they determined who would marry who.

What kinds of jobs did your father have when he first came?

When he first came, it was survival of the fittest. He found a job in a restaurant washing dishes. And he worked just for room and board. At that time, they were lucky to find a job and find food cuz there was nothing definite at his age when he did come.

You mentioned earlier to me that there was discrimination against the Chinese. How did your father deal with that?

Well, in the old days they tried to show the difference between the Chinese and the Japanese, and it was by name itself. However, most of the Chinese that came here was on a basis of contract to work in the railroad business, railroad yard or the gang. This is how they determined, in the gang manner, and I guess there is a certain distinction between a Chinese and a Japanese and they themselves could detect the difference very easily. And like my Dad said, he's tried to avoid being among the Chinese because of the fact that there was more discriminiation shown to them, like in Tacoma.[3]

Do you know what religion your parents were?

My folks were Buddhists when they came over here. My Dad was not a strong believer in Buddhism, yet he was exposed to Shintoism, which is belief of the Emperor. My Mother was not a strong believer in Buddhism, therefore, in later years I remember her going to a Methodist Church and she accepted the Methodist Christianity in that manner. There were churches here, the Buddhist Church

[3] Murray Morgan, Puget's Sound, A Narrative of Early Tacoma and the Southern Sound, (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1979), p. 212.

and the Methodist Church. They had a minister that was Japanese in the Methodist church and I myself was baptized a Methodist. So I could remember that my Mother had acceptd Methodist as her religion.

Did you attend the church services at Camp Harmony?

At first when we were in Camp Harmony, they did not have the Chapel. It was in a mess hall then. If some person who had taken the religion real seriously would conduct a meeting where more of the internees were Buddhists and they had their Buddhist, what do you call their church...every Sunday or so. One thing I would like to mention, since you mentioned about religion, in the camp itself, like the relocation center of the 10 relocation centers that they had, the religions was accepted except for Shintoism, which was belief in the Imperial Emperor and they condemned that religion. Others were acceptable.

Did your Mom have any Bibles in Japanese and were they confiscated?

Gosh, I don't remember that. I remember she did have a Bible in Japanese. Other than that I don't remember it being confiscated. My father had passed away in 1927 so as far as records was concerned, we didn't have any search or we never had any incident of the FBI coming to our residence. Whereas some of the other families who were very active in the community service, the parents were active, they were investigated by the FBI and those who did have that type of background immediately [were] picked up by the FBI the following day after Pearl Harbor. A lot of them were taken in by the FBI and it was a matter of minutes after the FBI came that they were taken out.[4] And many of the families did not know where their father had gone. Now I would say you hear the stories about the European incidents, like in Europe how Germans this and that, you know, you don't hear of what happened here in the United States. Those incidents were all hush hush,

[4] Personal Justice Denied, Government Printing Office, 1983, P. 284, 311.

naturally, which in this country is so that the media itself didn't play it up big because the government wouldn't let it out to that point where the news or newspapers got a hold of information like that.

What kinds of activities were they involved with in the community that would cause the FBI to want to pick them up?

A lot of them were leaders in ... the Japanese community and naturally their background, going back to Japan, some of them were in the service. They were in the Japanese army or had military background when they were youngsters just before they came over here to the United States. And I believe through immigration, that they had that type of record pertaining to the families that were picked up and interned and those who were interned were taken ...to Missoula which was a Federal internment camp that they had for that type of alien internment.

And then later did they to to Tule Lake?

Generally, a lot of them stayed until the end of the war and they did not get together with the family. Some did get out. They were released according to their record. They were released then they got to the relocation center where their families were, and it's not just Tule Lake. I say that because you mentioned Tule Lake. Tule Lake was an internment camp where they had the largest amount of internees and which amounted to about 18,000. The others were about 9,000 - 10,000. And the reason for the 18,000 was that lot of the internees who were pro-Japan were segregated and put into Tule Lake where they had this separated camp for those who were pro-Japan.

So that came up right after the loyalty question?

Yes, well, even before that when they indicated that they were pro-Japanese.

Did you have to answer those questions?[5]

Not myself because I was out of the camp and I was in Montana at that time when that loyalty test was given. And that loyalty test came within a year after the internment and I was out of the camp, being interned about 6 weeks in the Assembly Center here in Puyallup.

What kind of treatment did you receive when you were young? Were you treated differently than the white kids in school? Or in the community?

Well, I would say that in grade school, the teachers did not show too much difference of teaching Caucasians and the Orientals. The reason for that, it seems that the Orientals seemed to have learned quicker how to pronounce the vowels in the alphabet and read and write. And, however, our handicap in a way was they we spoke our own language at home to communicate with the parents. And after learning the English language, it was a lot more easier to learn at school what we were being taught. So I would say there wasn't too much discrimination except maybe when it became something personal or like a school play, they showed preference to a person taking the part to a Caucasian who could do it better perhaps. And it may have been felt by the child or person that being that they are Oriental, they are Oriental, they couldn't get that part, in that sense. Even today you don't find too many taking a major role in that manner even in the movies. Because they don't fit that part. You have to accept that.

Is Thomas your given name?

No, it isn't. I'd like to talk to you a little bit about that. My real name or my legal name is Shoji and that's on my birth certificate. In fact even my birth certificate is incorrect as my Mother told me. I was born on January 15, 1920, but my birth certificate reads January 8, 1920. Now the humor, I always make it as a humor, that they knew who was going to be born to start with so they issued the

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[5] Personal Justice Denied, Government Printing Office, 1983, p. 191-192.

birth certificate early, but that's not true. (Laughter) I believe that being born on the 15th, my birth was reported on the 18th, and as my birth was reported I think it was a typographical error that the clerk omitted or deleted or did not put the one in front of the 8. Getting back to your question about whether or not Thomas is my legal name. No it isn't, because I could remember when I was entering grade school, my sister said you should have an English name and we went around and around suggesting different names. And first was George, then Charlie, but they were all too long to write so we got down to a simple name, it was a choice between Sam and Tom. And Tom was the name because, it was a couple of strokes, I could draw a straight line and cross the T. And that's how it came that I got the name Tom. Then later on when I went to high school, it became Thomas. As I registered for the Draft, it was Thomas S. that I went by and it has been that way that I have gone by Thomas S. as my legal name. The S. stands for Shoji.

When you were young, did you help your parents on the farm?

Yes, there were 9 in our family, 9 children. And my father died in 1927 and my mother was left with the farm and my oldest brother (born 1909) was 10 years older than us so he was approximately 17 or 18 years old. And we had a 15-acre farm right next to North Levee road here in Fife, and that farm was purchased in 1920 by my dad and it was paid for in 1927 shortly before he had passed away. It was April 4, I believe that he had passed away. It was just like security for us, the farm was all paid for. It was worth I would say somewhere, well he paid somewhere around $10,000 for the 15 acres.

Could you tell me what truck gardening is?

OK. That's what our farm was, a truck gardening farm. We had vegetables which was like lettuce, carrots, radish, spinich. That type of table food, plus maybe corn and squash to fill the acreage out. We did have also raspberries. We grew about 5-7 acres of red raspberries and so it's a variety of fruit and vegetables grown on a farm which my Dad did peddle. It was what they called a vegetable

peddler up in Tacoma area in his horse and buggy in the early days. And through that he earned the money and paid for the farm.

Do you ever remember going with him when you were young?

No, I didn't go on that, I guess there were too many of us around.

Did you attend the Japanese Language School when you were going to school?

Oh, that was one of our chores I would say from the first grade on to the eighth grade in the Firwood Community. We had a Japanese school which was instructed by one teacher and he instructed all the grades from the first grade on. But it was only for about an hour and a half right after school and most of the Japanese families sent their students to this school up to the eighth grade. And you learned your basic alphabet and to read and write the language itself. But, like myself, we participated in sports and many of us did attend school, but it was only for maybe half an hour or so after participating in sports and so we didn't get too much out of it. However, some of those fellas that didn't participate in sports did learn a lot more than us and they could read and write the language quite well. Since the communication with our parents were in their language, the Japanese language, as time went on it became sort of a mix between English and Japanese in the family. Even our parents understood the English more and more in that manner where we spoke less and less Japanese.

Did your parents correspond with anybody in Japan when they first came?

No, I hate to say this, but I could remember my Mother and Father saying that they had cousins and sisters and brothers there. And I could remember them saying that they hadn't corresponded with them for a good long time and I know that, like my Father or Mother wanted to write to them, they would ask my brother or sister to address the envelope and they would address the envelope on the side of the envelope in Japanese because it had to be in that manner. Otherwise if it was in English,

when it got over there, there was hardly any interpretation done and it made it a lot more simpler that they wrote the address in Japanese. And it was written in English so that it could go from here out of this country to Japan. I could remember that they didn't correspond much at all and it's a lot different than now that situation the way it is now.

Once in a while when we have Japanese students visit us for a couple weeks over the summer we correspond with them. The address is quite lengthy. They live in Yamanashi. I think it's called a prefecture.

It's like a county here and my relatives lived in Naraken. The "ken" is a prefecture that they go by like Pierce County or King County. And I believe Nara is near Kyoto. It's where all, more of the Shrines are than and it's close to Tokyo the largest city. When I was 5 years old my Mother took me back to Japan. My Mother took me and my two oldest sisters and we went back and our Dad sent us there and I could remember riding on the ship and, oh, I was sick all the time. And it was a l-o-n-g trip. I think it took about three or four weeks to get back there. I had my head buried in the, in a can, you know. It was terrible. I guess I did have a weak stomach to start with cuz I could remember even riding in the back of a truck I would get car sick, so that's how bad it was.

I was about 2 when we went over to Okinawa on the ship. I don't remember any of it. What kinds of things went through your mind when Pearl Harbor was bombed by Japan?

I think I could still remember that incident. I was back on the farm and it was on a Sunday and it was a good day, it was a decent day. And I came in to have lunch and turned the radio on and I heard that Pearl Harbor was bombed. And my thought was, well since I've been registered in the draft, I wonder when I'll be called or what will happen. And that was the first thoughts that ran through my mind. Then as a couple days went by, I thought well, I'll see if I can join the service and I wanted to get in the Air Force and I inquired at the Army recruiting office. And they told me, no

we're not accepting any one now, especially your race.[6] And so that was the answer. And then several days later I was reclassified by the Draft Board from 1-A to 4-C, enemy alien unfit for military service. That shocked me more than anything because after all you know you're taught throughout grade school and high school that the United States Constitution was there for you to be protected by it and if you were born and raised here, you're a citizen of the United States. And then you are informed that you are an enemy alien unfit for military service. Alien is a person without citizenship of this country. So there my rights were taken away. However, as time went by, the shock wore out, you know, and it was one of those things that you've just got to wait and see what will happen. Well, it did linger on from December to January, then February. Then in February we found out the Executive Order 9066 was signed by Roosevelt that all the West Coast would be evacuated with persons of Japanese ancestry and that was from the Canadian border down to the Mexican border and that was west of the Cascades. So that was determined and as time went by, there were rumors that the FBI and the Naval Intelligence said there was no need for evacuation, yet there was the Dies Committee, I believe, conducted by Congressman Dies who claimed it was necessary to evacuate the West Coast because of the danger of sabotage or espionage. And they went on with that and the order was issued then that we would be interned in an assembly center and put into a relocation center. And these were all glorified concentration camps but they used the words relocation and assembly center.

What kinds of feelings did you have when you were told to stay in your house for curfew and you could only travel, what, 10 miles radius?

At first it wasn't too bad because of the time involved which was, I think, 8 to 8.[7] And the radius was at 10 miles you had to get permission through the sheriff's department. But it wasn't difficult to get a permit, as long as if there was produce or a trucking concern was traveling to get crates or

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6 PJD, GPO, P. 187. The Selective Service, immediately after Pearl Harbor, left up to the local boards whether or not to induct Japanese Americans. The West Coast was the center of discrimination practice.

7 GPO, PJD, p. 101, (8 pm - 6 am)

something like that. You didn't do that every day, however, as spring came by and as it came closer to the harvest time there was things that had to be done which you had to have a permit to really get around. You had to get a permit everyday for that occasion. Other than that, well, in fact it was 40 some odd years ago now that it was on May the 12th that we started to come into the Assembly Center around the 8th.

I think it was around April 28.

Yes, from Alaska or so that they came in. And we were to intern ourselves around the 12th or the 13th, I believe. We had to check in and we had numbers. Family numbers and we wore an ID tag. It was like a potato sack tag that we had on our lapel identifying the family. And we got our neighbors to drive us to the Puyallup Fairgrounds to check in. But before that, the government, which was called the War Relocation Authorities, had determined one meeting date to register the family and this is where we got our family number.

What do you suppose is the reason that there wasn't a major resistance on the part of the Japanese Americans coming into the Assembly Centers?

Well, there were several reasons that there wasn't that much resistance. One was as through the Japanese American Citizen League they said we will cooperate with the government and try to show our loyalty be cooperating. That was one of the reasons that they used. Other was, many of the fellows who were in the service, who were drafted, they tried to show their loyalty to the government. The other was that, well, there's nothing you can do about it. We might as well go in without resistance and even if we did resist, what good would it do? That was the attitude. And with the guidance of our parents, our parents guided us also in the manner that it's better to cooperate without resistance and as long as they are going to treat us to the point where they were going to feed us and care for us we would cooperate in that manner.

You mentioned that the Carlsons and the Olsons took care of your property when you were interned so long as they paid the taxes. Did you feel comfortable with that? Were they good friends?

Personally, I would say they were, well, we grew up as good neighbors and Carlson, he was a bachelor and he was real good to us kids. For a while, we didn't have a radio and we would go over there and go after milk. We bought milk and we bought eggs from him. And we'd go over there during the news time and there was a couple of programs on. I could remember the Air Adventures of Jimmy Allen and I'd go over there and listen to his radio just enough to hear the half-hour series, and listen to that and pick up the milk and come home. Well, he did a lot of our tractor work since we didn't have a tractor and we had a horse to do our farm work. He had a tractor and it was a John Deere tractor that he used and he would come over and plow our field, the rest of it was done with our horse. And he was real good about it. Then the other neighbor, Olson, he was a one-armed fellow who lost his arm when he was a young fellow, about 13 or 14 years old, I believe a shot gun went off and blew his left arm by the elbow off. Gosh, I don't know if he was married or not. Well, anyway, he was a good friend and was a couple years older than my brother and several fellows of the community that were about the same age were real good friends and he was the other person that ran our farm with the agreement to pay just the taxes and that they woud take care of the farm. And the earnings that they made from the farm was theirs to keep and taxes was the only thing that we were concerned about. We didn't know how long we would be gone which was one of the things that we were concerned with. It was an element of doubt of the indefinite time, length of the war. I could remember thinking you know, you don't know how long the war would last. But we were very fortunate that we did have good neighbors such as that and my other neighbor on the other side, who was a Japanese neighbor did the same thing: ask that they take care of his farm, because it was adjoining to ours. And they did ok it on the same basis. They had around 30 acres and we had 15 and between the two Olson and Carlson, they had about 20 acres apiece. So that kept them pretty busy during the war time and they took that chance and they didn't know how they could take good

care of it, but yet they did a darn good job, I would say. But they did avoid vandalism being that they were there.

Some of the other people who were interned who had leased their farms, they had to give up their lease. They didn't know what to do with their machinery or equipment, yet Uncle Sam told them they would store it for them. And many of them who had their machinery stored, when they came back they couldn't find it. Uncle Sam, or the Sheriff's office told them that there was vandalism and it disappeared in that manner and the losses were terrific in that way. Then others who didn't want to store tried to sell it. And to sell merchandise when you're forced to sell, you know what you can get out of it. Peanuts! And you can't do anything with peanuts!

General De Witt issued an order that said there would be stiff penalties for sabotage of crops. Do you have any ideas why he would have said those things?

Well, the economic pressure was there. The Japanese farmers were one of the persons that did take unusable land and made it become usable. And all it took was a little bit of care and water and like in the California area, all that was sagebrush and that sagebrush area, all you had to do was apply water to it. And give it a lot of care, which was done to increase the value of the land. And during the war agricultural farming was a vital necessity of the country and naturally the crops were in to the point where it could be harvested and yet it wasn't harvested because of the evacuation or the internment. So naturally, a word of warning was given that if in case there was any sabotage of the agricultural field, well, there would be severe punishment and ... a lot of the pressure was put on because of economic reasons. And the farming or agriculture was a vital necessity of the country and it took a lot of work to grow the vegetables and any fruit or food that was needed. So naturally the warning was given and you could feel the resistance or the feeling of, here I'm just about ready to harvest it and I have to leave or take the loss, or what can you do? And another thought would be well, set a

fire to it or whatever or destroy it for revenge. And this [the warning] is I think for that reason. But really the economic pressure, the political pressure was there for him to give that type of an order. And he was in our eyes, he was one of the individuals we cared less to rule us. And I know that in my testimony I did mention about educating people and putting more information into the books. And they are going to set up a program where the money that was allocated that is a surplus ... would be used to be put into a trust to use for that purpose of education ... for the public to be informed more of the concentration camps.

You mentioned the Pacific Citizen. I got some articles from the Pacific Citizen and this was one, I was going to ask you what does this symbol mean?[8]

Actually I believe they took the number, 1, 2, 3, 4.

Oh, like Issei, Nisei, Sansei...?

Yes.

And that is what that represents?

Yes, Right. And you know the circle is Maru. You notice the ships? OK what did you hear about the ships?

I used to work for First Interstate Bank in the International Department in Portland, Oregon and we worked with import documents. We compared the documents against the letter of credit and, I don't recall if the name of the ships were specified, but all the time the logs would be shipped the name Maru always came up.

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[8] Pacific Citizen, 12/8/78, p. 3 (See attached copy of this article).

I inquired about it to several persons who I thought would know more about why they use Maru. And I found out that the Maru was an emblem, or insignia to show that it's round. The circumference always went around and came back to the same point.

Oh, so like shipping would be round trips all the time?

Yeh, and it was sort of a superstition I guess of the word Maru saying that what goes around comes around, or comes back, you know and that's how I have determined it which has a lot of meaning to it.

I took copies of a bunch of articles from the Pacific Citizen and that particular one talkes about the trek back, I think it was 1978.

Right.

Could you tell me what your involvement of that was?

Well, since I was here in the Puyallup area, I knew the people on the Board of the Puyallup Fair, and so this being an Assembly Center, we wanted to get some kind of a monument identifying this was the place where we were interned. At first we did not know what we were going to put up for that insignia or memory plaque or identification mark. And we had to get permission from the fair to do that, so knowing many of the fair board members, this is where I came in of setting up the meeting and consulting with the board. It took a long time to organize and come to the terms of where we would place that monument. And that sculpture became an item that was put up by George Tsutakawa to set it up. And it is something now that is not an embarrassment to them at all and it's an asset to the fairground actually.

And with so much traffic in and out. I got a list of things happening just in 1991 and I think there is something every single weekend. So it's not just the fair any more.

And not just a fair grounds, you know.

It's like a multipurpose center for the whole community.

And like I told you we had problems by different organizations. One was the American Legion[9] which many of us belong to and yet through one of their yearly conferences, a resolution was passed. I should say one of the instigators was Vern Hill who was a very prominent person in the community and yet he denied all this and seems like every year the subject of that monument through the American Legion, it comes up.

Even today?

Yeah. And I can't see why they continue doing that. When we heard that the American Legion was going to have that resolution -- something pertaining to the internment -- we would try to get a representative to contact them to try to have them delete that subject because anytime I think you get a negative thought toward it, it sorta mushrooms and it doesn't help one bit. Here you are trying to erase the wrongdoing which in some of the eyes was a "rightdoing," the majority would say it was a wrongdoing. And when you go back to the part where the Constitution, if you are going to look at that as a law of the United States, it is wrong though, you know, I would say that.

I agree. When you were at Camp Harmony, you mentioned that it was very boring and you even would go so far as to clean the latrines. Were there some other things that helped you from being too bored?

Well, I wasn't in too long, that's one of the things. And when the chance of leaving the Assembly Center came, I took that opportunity and I went to Oregon and then the condition was bad there so we came back and then we had another opportunity to go to Montana to work in the sugar beets. So I

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[9] PJD, GPO, p. 69.

took that, and yet some of the families, some of the parents of the fellows that I went with, were afraid of Montana. They didn't know what Montana was like and I could remember one parent saying, "well, you be careful, there's a lot of Indians out there!" And when you think about it now, it's an old saying and you laugh about it, you know.

And I think some East Coasters still think that we are feuding with the Indians even here.

Right, Right. They hear or even read about the Indians and it's still the Wild West. So when you look at it in that manner, our opportunity came to leave this camp and we went out. A lot of them went back to camp after they were in Montana. But like myself, I wanted to go back East because I had two sisters in Evanston, Illinois and I had a chance to go to junior college there so I applied for a release to go there and finally I got my release and I went to Evanston Jr. College. But the thing is, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) was our "hammer." They were the officials in this and we had to go through them and leave our name and address.[10] The address was the biggest compulsion that was held against us to travel, which was all right. And I found out that going over there, nobody bothered you. And the funny part is, they tell you they put you in camp -- in Assembly Centers and Relocation Centers -- that it's for your own protection and you go out into the town like Chicago,[11] and it's such a big town and yet they don't bother you. That's the funny part of it. And here you grow up and you are raised with the people here and you are supposed to be afraid of them or they are supposed to be afraid of you. I can't understand that.

Yeah. Did you write to your Mom when you were in Chicago and tell her these things?

Yes, and she finally, we finally got an apartment, my sisters got an apartment and they called her out. If she had a place to go, they would release them because they wanted to clear out the camp. They

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[10] PJD, GPO, p. 101.

[11] PJD, GPO, p. 205.

encouraged after a year and a half, after the war in Europe was over, they encouraged everybody to leave camp and if they had a place to go they would let them go and they would pay the rail fare to the destination and my Mother came out and she got a job in a hotel restaurant peeling potatoes, working in the kitchen.

She went to Illinois too?

Right.

And so she didn't go back to the farm until after...

Until, the West Coast, see even then they could go East but they could go out to the West Coast. And then when they lifted the ban,[12] from the West Coast, then my sisters, my oldest sister and her husband, went back on the farm. And he was on the farm for, then my Mother came back to the farm.

Did any of your brothers go with you to Montana?

Well, I had one brother and he went to Idaho, and from Idaho he went to work for the state and he worked on road construction. He ran a grater for them.

The few weeks that you were at Camp Harmony, I had read in different places that a lot of traditions came to a halt with regard to eating together at a meal. Did you find that too where the kids went off with the kids and the adults stayed....

The reason for that was you ate in a mess hall, so naturally, the kids went with their friends and they went in groups to different mess halls to eat and so that's where you got the information in that manner. But in the Relocation Center, it was more so because as they grew older they made friends

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12 PJD, GPO, p. 235. "Dec. 17, 1944, Public Proclamation No. 21 was issued, General DeWitt's mass exclusion orders were rescinded."

and the activities were among the friends and the control of the family started to loosen the feeling of the parents. It came to the point where they didn't care as much because of indefinite stay in the camp and I think if you could look at it in that manner that the pressure of being concealed or enclosed would get to you and the aim or the future was not -- there was no future actually to speak of. And some day we may get out. Some day. You know and that some day is very indefinite.

That must have been the worst part, or not the worst part, but one of the worst parts.

You don't understand that until you go through it yourself. You know you tell people we were interned, we were in a concentration camp. "Yeah, I feel bad for ya. I know how'd it would be." They don't -- they really don't know until you get behind that barbed wire fence and you're enclosed and you can't get out. See if you have had that feeling of you can go and leave anytime you want to, like when you're at home, that's good. Your mind is all right, because that's the way you were born and raised and that's the way it is. But when they take that freedom from you, that's what it is, they take away all that. So where do you go to jail, it's the same thing or penitentiary, ya go...

Well, it's not quite the same because when you go to a penitentiary you did something wrong and you go to a penitentiary but there was nothing wrong that you did.

I know, but in the eyes of the guy that goes to the penitentiary, he says he didn't do it. Yet he's going to the penitentiary. See? And there are some that are not guilty that are in there.

Through different circumstances.

Yeah. And the thing about it is you're trapped. You know just like Ivan the gorilla[13] at the B&I. Personally, I feel that he's happy there now. He's been there how many years?

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13 Ivan, the gorilla, is on display at a variety store called the B&I on 80th and South Tacoma Way. He is in a small concrete and glass cage and has been isolated for some 20+ years. Some activists want Ivan placed in another type of environment, like a zoo, with other gorillas so he can have better social life.

Long time.

And the thing about it is, if I say that it's wrong for him to be in there, it's none of my business if he stayed there; but it is your thinking that's making it wrong that he's there.

He may not know how to relate to other gorillas if he's moved. It might be more traumatic an experience for him.

Yeah.

But it relieves the minds of people who are concerned about his welfare, maybe.

I think they have their own problems (laughter) to take care of, don't you?

Oh, yeah.

I would. I mean there's a lot of other things I could think of to do than to worry about a gorilla! I mean I'm just using that as an example. Even like the spotted owl. Sure you're going to diminish the spotted owl, but how about the people that are affected by it? Their jobs, they are going to go out and struggle.

And maybe as a result, we might have more social problems to deal with.

And what makes me laugh is that when at first when they started to talk about it they couldn't find any spotted owls to show the people that this is what they were crying about. But I don't know -- we're getting off the subject. That's my personal feeling though. And being interned is that way, I would say, because they talk about Halocaust in Europe. Sure, it happened. But right here, right under their nose, they did it themselves.

Well, a lot of people were ignorant. We shouldn't have been though.

No. The word ignorant is right, I would say. But I was using those excuses, it's an excuse for the incidents happening. Now it is said that there was not one case of sabotage or espionage that can be proved ...

And there were over l00,000 people. That shows loyalty to me.

Yeah. There were a lot of them that expressed their opinion; but it wasn't expressed in a physical manner to destroy or evidence to show espionage or sabotage. Now I just want to mention another thing. One year after we were interned, Uncle Sam finally decided that it was clear that the Niseis could serve in the service.[14] First they could only serve in the army. Then as time went by, several years even after the war was over they opened up the Navy, and they opened up the Marines and the Air Corps (or the Air Force); but those who were interpreters or interrogators were attached to the different branch of service.[15] And not only within their own country, they were attached to other countries' military service, so therefore, of the 10,000 Niseis that were in the South Pacific or the Pacific area were not only just in the MIS or Military Intelligence Service with the Army, they were attached to the various allied forces.[16] When that release was made so that they could join the service, we were given an option to join up or to be drafted or refuse. There were quite a few that refused the draft and they were draft resisters and they were found guilty and put into federal penitentiary.[17] And that became a little more severe, because when you are put into a federal penitentiary, you are found guilty, you lose your rights. All your rights. And even though you are in there you become a man without a country. You lose your citizenship. So then those who were put in there, after they got out they got Presidential Pardons, so that that restored their citizenship. Did you

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[14] PJD, GPO, p. 253 -- At the end of 1942, Secretary Stimson, et. al., decided to establish a volunteer combat team of Nisei soldiers (for those who had passed the loyalty review p. 13 Administration

[15] of the team began 2/6/43 - p. 191)
Documentary "Color of Honor" airing on PBS 5/8/91 -- They were attached to every branch of U. S. Military.

[16] "Color of Honor" -- The Nisei military Intelligence Linguists were also attached to Allied forces' military.

[17] "Color of Honor -- For example, there was the "Play Fair Committee," Draft resisters who went to Federal prison.

know that?

I think you mentioned it to Mr. Kim when I was listening to your conversation. I read two different articles out of the Times. One said that there was no furniture provided for Camp Harmony and one said you got a cabinet, table, shelving, beds and mattress.

Well, actually at first there was nothing. Then came the mattress cover. They gave you a mattress cover and they gave you a straw pile and you filled your mattress cover with straw and that was your bedding. You brought your own bedding such as a blanket or two. What we could bring was whatever you could carry. That was the instructions given to those of us who were being interned. So if you were lucky to carry enough blankets, you had enough blankets; but you had to use that blanket as a partition from the other family. So these were the burden of difficulty that we had to face. Now eventually as time went on they supplied a chair, maybe, or they supplied a bed, but not at first. You slept on the floor.

Did you use any of the left over lumber to help your folks build?

Well, no I didn't. Actually in the Puyallup Fairgrounds, there wasn't any to speak of at first.[18] Then as time went by the WRA people made it available that you could get used lumber here, there or where ever it was available. But they put it in the manner that you're not going to be here very long which was, you know, about six months.

It was from April to...

April to October or September, right in there, so that's 4 months.

And they didn't even expect it to go through September, because at the beginning I saw a couple

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[18] Monica Sone, Nisei Daughter, p. 175. The first arrivals to the Camp hustled to get the scrap wood and scattered nails to build tables and chairs. So for the East Pierce County Japanese who arrived in May, there was no left over lumber at first.

different articles that said the fair is going on as usual. But then I don't think it went on until, 1946 was the next one.

Right.

I read in one of the articles that Camp Harmony was dubbed, "Little Tokyo." Did you know that?

No.

What is your response to that?

Well, I think it's just a matter of somebody's expression where if there is a congregation of "Buddha Heads" they would say it in a mild manner instead of making it so derogatory. I would say that.

In July, I know you weren't there, but on July 4th they had some Fourth of July festivities and it was mentioned about a snake dance. Do you know anything about a snake dance?

No I don't, I'm sorry.

Oh, that's OK. I was just curious.

Did you read where there were Alaskans?

Yes, I had -- go ahead.

They were one of the first to be interned here from Alaska. And these people were off the islands up North which they went through a little more severeness than we did because the treatment that they got without the knowledge of where they were going and they didn't have much to bring. They were considered more of an enemy in the manner when they were being evacuated out of Alaska.

Because of their proximity to Japan at the time?

Right. The war situation, they had activities up there as to the military invading their residential area. They didn't have much of a residential area but they were treated in that manner as an enemy.[19] Where, here, we were more or less volunteered to bring ourselves into camp. I'm saying it in that manner so that it was expressed. They had expressed their feelings of being located there.

My brother went to Puyallup High School in 1980 and he heard you speak at one of his classes and I was just wondering how it came about that you started speaking at the high schools and the junior highs?

Well, I got acquainted with a couple of the teachers through sports and with that they were instructors in history and, through conversation, I acknowledged the fact that I would come and talk to their classes about being interned. It just grew year by year and day by day, actually day by day and through different history classes. They were real concerned because they were only children when this happened and they didn't know a lot about it; they just heard about it. Their parents might have spoken about it. But you look at it today, the kids don't know one thing about it and the parents don't know anything about it because they were just a kid. It was their grandparents that were alive that went through the experience and they haven't said too much. And besides that, the history had only one or two short paragraphs in about the internment which the word "internment" wasn't used, it was relocation center and assembly center. I stressed the two words very strongly because many many who objected about our redress and about, well they didn't object, they favored the internment, call it assembly center and relocation center and they try to tell us we were wrong in calling it a concentration camp and an internment camp for where ever we were being incarcerated. And they say it was wrong because we were put there for our own protection. You know. And when they have that in their mind, they're on the other side and we're on this side and we have a different feeling about it.

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19 PJD, GPO, p. 318.

So before your family was moved to Camp Harmony, did you know of any experiences that any of the Japanese American families had where Caucasians were mean to them?

No, we never had that type. Only thing I would say is that some young group would call us "Japs" and "Go back to your country" in that manner. But that is all that was, it didn't go much further than that.

There is a new word I have come across and it is Nikkei. What does that mean?

That's another word for Japanese American. Now there is another word, beside Issei, Nisei and it is Kibei.

Those are the ones who were educated in Japan?

Yes. They were born here and educated in Japan and brought back.

And those were the ones they used in the military in the special investigation where they used them as interpreters and interrogators?[20]

You know, I was having coffee this morning with a fellow from Pohlmans....

Variety? (Pohlman's Variety Store in Puyallup)

Yes, and he said that last night on Channel 9....

I recorded it, I haven't watched it yet, would you like to see it?

Yes.

You got a Distinguished Citizens Award from the Municipal League. Could you tell me what kinds of

[20] "Color of Honor," The military also educated Nisei at secret language schools at Camp Savage, Minn., and used them to interrogate prisoners, translate documents, intercept communication and write propaganda. The teachers were almost entirely Kibei (those who returned to Japan as children for education).

things they looked at in you to...

Every year they give out this Citizenship Award, this was back in -- '82 and they submitted my activities in the community and like being a member of the PTA, and being in the Lions Club, and the Elks and seving on different committees, Mental Health Committee for Good Sam and serving on different committees for the Puyallup School District and it was submitted to the Municipal League in Tacoma. And at that time they selected one from Pierce County or one from this area and I was selected at that time with I think George Weyerhaeuser was another from the city of Tacoma at the same time. We had the Awards Banquet at the Pavillan at the Sheraton. It was an annual function. Other than that it was one of the activities, you know which was nice. In fact, in PTA, I got the Golden Acorn Award.[21]

What year did you get that?

It was back in about '62 or '63 or something like that.

And that was for Firgrove School, right?

No, Riverside.

I notice when I go past the Firgrove School, it is all boarded up. But that's where you went to school?

Oh, Firwood.

Oh, Firwood, excuse me.

Yeah, it was a grade school that all my sisters and brother went to grade school there, but we lived about 3 miles away on North Levee and we would walk to school. There was a bus also. We would

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21 The Golden Acorn Award is an acknowledgement of outstanding service to the students by someone given by the school's Washington State PTA.

ride to school and walk home.

Then how close was the Language School?

The Language School was about 3 blocks away from Firwood School.

Is that building still there?

I don't think so. I haven't been by there lately. It's been quite a while now since I've been by there. It's on 78th. We used to walk on the Gale Road, a short cut that we'd go by and the farmer had dogs there -- we would always carry a club or something when we'd go by there to protect us.

Could you tell me how you met your wife?

Oh, very simple. I went to Montana and we went to Chinook, Montana, where the sugar beets, U&I Sugar had a factory there. And there was a farmer there that took us in. There were about 3 or 4 farmers which used us and they had labor houses. The closest town where there was any sort of recreation was Havre, Montana which was about, I think, 29 miles from Chinook. And there was some Japanese families in Havre because there was a roundhouse there, a Great Northern Roundhouse. And they used the Japanese for the railroad and her Dad worked in the Roundhouse as a boiler cleaner. It was those days when they had coal burning trains, locomotives that he had to clean and they lived close by there. There were 5 or 7 families in that town and we went into town and one of them ran a Chinese restaurant -- a Japanese running a Chinese restaurant -- and so we got acquainted with them and as time went by we got acquainted with all the kids in that area and she was a couple 3 or 4 years younger than us. And there were other girls her same age and through acquaintance, she went to nurses training through Sacred Heart Hospital, it was a Catholic hospital. And then after the war was over, she got a job in Swedish Hospital in Seattle. And when she got a job over there which was about 10 years later or 9 years, something like that, I just happened to call her up and looked her

up and that was it. And so then her friend got married. She was a bridesmaid and after the wedding was over, I got brave enough to ask her if I could take her home, she lived in Seattle. And after the reception I took her home and from there on it went to the point where, let's see, it was December that her friend got married and then the next year in October we got married. In the meantime, she was working at Swedish Hospital and her Mother got sick so she has to go home to Havre and she got a job back at the hospital there. And it had got to the point where we had agreed to get married and I used to fly, so once a month, I would fly over there to see her and then we got married. I had bought a house and she worked at the Indian Hospital right away because it was only a mile away from were we lived.

Has JACL ever approached you to address conferences or meetings?

Well, they have done it themselves. They haven't approached me. But they are doing it through the national organization into the different organizations [as] the results of the redress ... information to the public to be used for educational purposes.

You mentioned you were on the committee for redress until the national organization took over.

Right, we were one of the first to push the issue of redress here in the Seattle group and our group was the first. Then as time went by [it was] more and more national, which was through Washington D.C., through Senator Inouye and Senator Matsunaga and Representatives Minata and Matsui. Matsunaga passed away about a year ago. He was from Hawaii. He was one of the 100th Batallion individuals. And Dan Inouye was the other one. He lost his arm in WWII. But I want to mention to you of one Senator that we had, Senator Hayakawa. He was a Senator from California who opposed redress and he favored evacuation of the West Coast. And he was the president of San Francisco State College, I believe before he became Senator for California. Prior to being president of San Francisco College he was a

professor during the war at Michigan, I believe, I forget which college it was. And during the war (he's a Canadian) and he came into the United States and taught at one of the colleges in Michigan. And he became a naturalized citizen after we had pushed the issue of naturalization...

And that was the McCarran Act?[22]

Yes, and he had the gall of saying that the evacuation was good for us.[23] It eliminated the congregation of ghetto type situations where, if it wasn't for the evacuation, we would still have Japanese communities here there and everywhere instead of them being spread out. This is one of the reasons he gave and I don't know if you've read about that or heard about that, but I thought I'd just mention it to you so that when you hear anything about him, you should sort of look into it a bit further ... I mean, you know, it is a hearsay for you and I'm just telling you hearsay too so, but my hearsay is what's been reported in the Japanese American Citizen League paper. And when Hayakawa was really in his prime as a Senator for California, he really made a big issue out of our evacuation.

So did he come, do you know about what year he went to Michigan from Canada? Was it just before the McCarran Act?

Before, yes it was way before. In fact during the war I believe that he was in the United States at one of the colleges. He was never interned because he was a Canadian citizen at the time.

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[22] Asian American Critical Events in U.S. History, State of Wash., Superintendent of Public Instruction, p. 11. On June 27, 1952, the Walter-McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act canceled the 1924 Oriental Exclusion Act and also allowed alien Japanese to become naturalized citizens.

[23] PJD, GPO, p. 296.