

## INTRODUCTION

As required for the course "Doing Community History," TLSUS 437, I conducted an interview with Joseph Kosai to obtain from him his experience during that period in history when personal freedom and justice were denied to all people of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast soon after the outbreak of the Second World War. This is the period when the Japanese Internment Camps were set up. The interview begins with a brief personal introduction of himself and his occupation. It then describes the situation when he and his family were ordered to evacuate and the journey to their final destination at Minidoka Relocation Center. He recalls, what he can for a boy of 8, of activities and events while in camp and then his experience, education, and opportunities after leaving Minidoka. The interview continues with a description of his involvement in the Redress movement and concludes with his personal insights of the cultural and economic changes of the Japanese Americans.

### SYNOPSIS

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# A JAPANESE INTERNMENT EXPERIENCE

*An Oral History of* **JOSEPH KOSAI**



*at*

Tacoma Buddhist Temple

*on*

April 19, 1991

*by*

Arlene Mihara

University of Washington, Tacoma Branch

*I'd like to know you full name, where you were born and when?*

Joseph Hideo Kosai and I was born here in Tacoma on May 7, 1934 at St. Joseph Hospital. Until May 18, 1942, my address was 1337 Commerce St., Tacoma, WA.

*What about your occupation?*

I retired in 1989 from Tacoma Community College where I spent 23 years as Director of Admissions and Registrar, Director and Dean of Continued Education of Community Services and Counselor, and coordinated a few programs such as GED high school completion programs and tutorial services. Prior to that, I spent one year as a junior high counselor and six years as a teacher of mathematics at the junior high school and high school levels.

*What about now?*

Presently, after I retired, I started to work in the area of international business serving as a consultant developing trade opportunities.



*When the President signed Executive Order 9066 resulting in the removal of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast, can you describe your experience during that period?*

Well, I was seven going on eight at that time. As a child you don't pay too much attention to world or national events. I do know that when the war started, my father worked in the sawmill. Also, he owned a hotel business, which my mother operated, here in Tacoma. Shortly after the war started, my father was taken by the FBI to Montana. That left the rest of the family here. It was a time of uncertainty. In our family my oldest brother was 17 at that time. My mother spoke very limited English. Still she was able to run a hotel. We had to get rid of everything. Prior to actually knowing when we're leaving, from the poster in Tacoma, I use to have one but I loaned it to someone and haven't seen it since, it was May 10, 1942 when the posters went up. The people from Tacoma had to leave May 17 and May 18.

*So you're a Nisei?*

Yes, I'm a Nisei<sup>1</sup>.

*When you left Tacoma, what assembly center and camp did you end up in?*

We went to Pinedale, CA which is right outside of Fresno. So we boarded the train at Union Station in Tacoma and went to California. The only thing I remember about the train ride is that it was a long train ride and we were limited when we go visit other cars. There were MPs around.

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1 - The first generation of ethnic Japanese born in the United States. (Source B)

*You don't happen to know why this area was sent to Pinedale?*

No, I really don't know. Camp Harmony, as they called Puyallup fairgrounds, might have been overcrowded because all the people from Fife, Puyallup, Sumner, Seattle and Alaska went to Puyallup and the people from Auburn, Kent and Tacoma went to California - Pinedale.

*Do you recall the government using force to round up the people?*

No.

*Not at all?*

No.

*They just cooperated when they were given the orders to evacuate?*

Yes. I think people will have to understand the mentality of our parents. First of all, the Niseis were not old enough to take leadership roles. There were a few Niseis but not all Niseis were -- the age group. Secondly, as soon as the war started, all of the Issei<sup>2</sup> leaders were rounded up. So it left a leadership void in that area. The other thing is that our parents, because they all came prior to the Exclusion Act in 1924<sup>3</sup>, were raised in the Meiji era which was very obedient to the government. So they were living in the United States and [when] the United States government said you have to move, you did what they told you to do. For our family, there was no other choice. My father was gone.

<sup>2</sup> - First generation immigrants. (Source B)

<sup>3</sup> - Immigration Act of 1924 (also called the Oriental/Japanese Exclusion Act) denies immigration into the United States while permitting limited quotas of European immigrants. (Source A)

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*Do you have any details of camp life?*

I remember going to school. I remember playing. I remember in Pinedale it was very hot. Remember, we left here in May. Going from the Northwest to central California was very hot and we were there during the summer months. We weren't used to the heat. I remember we're always looking for a place to play where there was water available. In most cases it was mud puddles or whatever. I remember doing that.

*Fresno is in the interior of California and very hot.*

I think it gets over 100 degrees.

*I don't know if you experienced it or not but there was a loyalty question.*

No, those were for people 18 or older. These were question numbers 17<sup>4</sup> and 18<sup>4</sup>. The question was not loyalty but in terms of what they would do. These were citizens . . . (inaudible) . . . who had to fill that out [and those that answered "NO" to both questions], you might have some people, in other words, considered them as "No-No" boys.

*It obviously didn't affect you. It didn't affect your family?*

My oldest brother. He was 18 at that time.

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4 - Questions were #27 and #28. Question #27 said "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?" Question #28 said "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?" (Source B)

*And any dissension on that in the family?*

Not in my family except my cousin. One of my cousins remained in Tule Lake. After we left Pinedale, we went to Tule Lake, CA. Tule Lake in 1943 became a segregated camp. It was a camp like the "No-No" boys or the people that were considered more loyal to Japan than United States. So all those other people, just like our family, were sent to other camps. From Tule Lake our family and one of my uncles went to Minidoka, ID. I have another uncle that went to Topaz, UT. So our family was starting to break up. The other thing was that my cousin who was raised in Japan and considered a Kibei<sup>5</sup>, stayed and then eventually was sent to Japan from camp.

*Tule Lake was a place where your family, in particular, was split up because they were sent to other camps from there.*

My uncle did. My uncle lived in Auburn and the other uncle lived in Tacoma. Because Auburn and Tacoma went to the same camp we were all together in Tule Lake. But my other uncle from Tacoma, he and his family was shipped to Topaz, UT. And my uncle from Auburn and our family went to Minidoka.

*So how long were you there?*

Our family left May 18, 1942 from Tacoma, and my mother, younger sister and I left Minidoka on May 17, 1945 -- 3 years.

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<sup>5</sup> - Those who returned to Japan as children for education. (Source B)

*From my understanding, the government evacuated the Japanese people because of the interest of the nation's security. From your recollection, do you believe that the Japanese people actually believed that?*

No.

*They did not believe it but they still went along because of the way they were brought up - they were obedient?*

Right - obedience and no leadership to oppose it. A few people opposed it -- you take the Korematsu case, Gordon Hirabayashi from Auburn, and the Yasui case. Individuals -- but there was no organized group.

*But this is what the message they spread across the country that it was for the security of the nation that we must evacuate and intern the Japanese people.*

You get two stories. One is like that. My response to that would be in Hawaii there were as many Japanese living in Hawaii at the time as there were in the West Coast of the United States. In Hawaii this is more of a jumping off point for the military to go to the Pacific. But yet, they did not remove the Japanese people from Hawaii. It would have really devastated the economy of Hawaii. Some of these people were working at Scofield Base or some of the so called military installation. The other thing is, interestingly enough, they were still, in some cases, drafting Japanese Americans into the service at that time. When the war started, in Tacoma, I know of three families that because of the draft, they were drafted into the service February 10, 1942 -- nine days prior to the signing of Executive Order 9066 -- because they were required by law. In 1942 at Tule Lake the

military was also recruiting Niseis for military intelligence. A number of young men from Tacoma joined. A couple of them are still living in Tacoma who went to battle in the Pacific. In Tacoma, we also lost a member of our Temple, on the invasion of Okinawa, serving in the U.S. Army. So they talk about disruption, military concerns and yet there were a lot of things going on. The other thing is there was one family, who happened to be our neighbor and now live in Seattle, that did not leave Tacoma the same time as we did. As far as I know, they probably was the only family left in Tacoma when everyone else left because the Mrs. was expecting a baby and she couldn't travel. In fact, I was talking to her just recently and I asked "When did they tell you you had to leave?" The woman said, they stayed for weeks after the baby was born. The baby was born in June so they were here at least a month after everyone else left. The interesting thing is that they kind of got lonesome so they had to ask the military when they can go to camp. It's kind of an interesting story.

The other thing people would say is that they were protecting the Japanese people from the masses in case of harrassment and things like that. Tacoma was very fortunate that the Mayor of Tacoma, Harry P. Cain,<sup>6</sup> spoke against the evacuation. He was, as far as I know, the only public official on the West Coast, Mayor of a major city, to publicly oppose the evacuation. In 1978 he happened to be back here visiting Tacoma and the Japanese community then honored him with a dinner for his support. The interesting thing is that people who lived in Spokane did not go to camp. Fewer numbers seem like they would be in more danger than a large population of people but people living in Chicago, Detroit or the East Coast, and there are many military installation on the East Coast I'm sure, weren't rounded up. So there was no danger from the military standpoint and protection was not needed. When

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6 - Source E, p.78. Harry P. Cain was a conservative Republican Mayor of Tacoma, WA who insisted that guilt was individual, not collective. He argued that local authorities could differentiate between the loyal and the disloyal.

you look at the fences in camp, if you want to keep someone out of your yard or some property, you'll find that the fence goes up vertically but then at the top the barbed wire sticks out away from you to the outside. But in camp, it came in to keep us from going out.<sup>7</sup>

*Do you recall there being a community meeting when the orders were given to evacuate?*

No, because I was too young.

*Because your father was gone and that would make a big difference. Was he gone during the whole period?*

He joined us in camp in Tule Lake. He was gone about eight months, I believe.

*As prisoners share a special relationship because of their isolation from the rest of society, did you have similar feelings with other internees?*

Not necessarily during that time. As children, we seem to adjust much, much better than older people do - our parents. After the war I grew up in Eastern Oregon. We did not come back to Tacoma. When I went to the University of Washington, many of the Seattle people were at Minidoka and so a lot of my classmates and people I played with lived in Seattle. So it brought back a bond that we were in camp together. So it was after the fact and not during camp.

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<sup>7</sup> - On page 33, he states that "discrimination" was the reason for internment of the Japanese people.

*You did not return to Tacoma. Where did you settle?*

Ontario, OR and the reason we went to Oregon is that, as I mentioned earlier, my parents had a hotel. We left that hotel in care of a friend. We owned the business, not the building. I don't know how many Japanese people could own that large property, if they had to, but in our case, because of the 1921 Alien Land Law in the State of Washington, aliens couldn't own property in the state of Washington until 1964 or 1966<sup>8</sup>. I can't remember the exact date. So we didn't own the property. We asked someone to take care of the hotel but he didn't do it. So we didn't have a business to come back to. In camp, my father was a plumber and he received \$19.00 a month. Sure they gave us free room and board, so called free, but clothing for six kids and my father and mother - eight people in the family, I mean, it takes money to clothe. Being kids we liked to go to the canteen. Mess hall food wasn't enough for us. We had to have snacks. We had no money to restore our business. My father having been raised in Auburn knew a little about farming. We had a family friend in Ontario, OR so we went to work on a farm in Ontario, OR. The kids anyways didn't know the difference between the weed and the plant. So it was quite an experience for us.

*So you pretty much grew up there?*

I went to junior high and high school, then I came to Seattle. My older brothers and sisters didn't spend as much time there. In fact, I have two brothers and two sisters in Seattle. My oldest brother and I settled in Tacoma. My oldest brother is deceased.

*You came back here to go to the University of Washington after high school?*

Yes.

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8 - Washington State's anti-alien land law was not repealed until November 8, 1966. (Source H)



*Did you just come by yourself?*

My oldest brother lived in Tacoma at the time working for the City of Tacoma. My oldest sister lived in Seattle. So I decided to go to the University of Washington.

*Did your parents ever resettle back to Tacoma?*

A few years after we went to Ontario my father started to farm by himself. So he farmed as long as he could. Because he was also ill, he gave up the farm and moved up to Tacoma. He and my mother are both deceased now.

*Can you describe the situation after the war?*

My father and older sister left Minidoka first to work on the farm. My older brother, at that time, was going to Washington State College over in Pullman. He worked after he got out of high school. The family didn't have any money but he left camp right after he got out of high school, went to work on a farm in Pocatello, ID and saved enough money to go to college. So he was no longer at home. My father and older sister left voluntarily earlier because my sister was already out of high school. Then my two older brothers, large family -- high school got out so they went to the farm together to Ontario. And then elementary school -- we got out later than the high school people in camp so then my mother, my younger sister and I left camp together and went to Ontario by train.

*Did you find it difficult to adjust into society after the war?*

Not really. Ontario has a large Japanese-American population. Also Ontario was good to the Japanese Americans. Many Japanese people went to Ontario and worked on a farm. My sixth, seventh and eighth grade was a one-room school house. One row is sixth grade, next row is seventh grade and next row is eighth. Each year we just moved from one row to another. Very small school. I think there were eleven of us. Of the eleven people nine of us were Japanese. So we use to take Japanese food after New Year's or any holiday to school. It was easy to adjust from that standpoint.

*What about the teachers? Were they Japanese or Caucasian?*

Caucasian teachers.

*Did you have any incidents with them?*

No, because 60% of the whole school was Japanese, that is, elementary school.

*So the people in Ontario were not evacuated?*

No. There weren't that many Japanese people prior to the war -- [they were] farmers. There were so few when the evacuation came.

*Then an increase in Japanese population occurred after the war?*

Right, or during the war.

*They didn't have any problems?*

No, not in Ontario to the best of my knowledge.

*In school when you had to study about the war, did you have any discussions about the internment?*

No, not at all. That's the reason after I returned to Tacoma, I tried to go out to the various schools to talk about the experience, just from the standpoint of the Constitution and [how the] check and balance of our government failed. Usually the legislative or judicial branches of the government check and balance, but it didn't happen in our case.

*You didn't study it while you were going to junior high school and high school.*

No, we all knew that we went to camp.

*But it was not discussed in class in depth.*

No.

*So when did you pick it up?*

My interest in civil rights really started when I went into the army. Let me back up. As a child growing up in Tacoma, I went to the Buddhist Temple as long as I can remember. My older brothers and sisters brought me here<sup>9</sup> when I was three or four years old. I didn't have any Caucasian friends

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<sup>9</sup> - Note: Interview was at the Tacoma Buddhist Temple.

because we lived right downtown. Most Japanese families couldn't own a home away from their business. So we had a hotel and I lived in the hotel. That way you didn't have to have two places. Downtown Tacoma, on the block I lived on, there were five Japanese families within one block living in their apartment above their business or whatever. But the Caucasian people that had businesses, their homes were elsewhere so we never mingled with their children. When I first went to Central school, then we were integrated, but after school let out we went to Japanese language school and back with our group. Because our parents were from Japan, they did not socialize with non-Japanese. All our social activities were surrounded by Japanese. So I can't even remember any Caucasian friends or people as classmates either in the first, second or third grade in Central school.

Even in Ontario where I said they accepted the Japanese, not everyone is going to accept the Japanese because of the war situation. Generally, we were accepted but the Japanese pretty much stuck to themselves. It's not like today where you would have interracial relationship. Participating in sports and student government, we mingled. In school, yes. Outside of school, very little socializing with non-Japanese. When I went to the University of Washington I lived in the all Japanese-American co-op house called "Synkoa." When I was in the army I became interested in civil rights, more so when I was in Alabama. I was fortunate to play a little basketball for the post team so we traveled from one post to another. There was a number of blacks on our team. We're in uniform, we take an army bus and we travel in Georgia and Alabama. When we have to stop for lunch or dinner somewhere, I was considered as a white person. I would go with the non-blacks, (in those days, they said colored) the non-colored. They [the blacks] would drop us off at a restaurant then the blacks would have to go to the black part of town.

*What year was this?*

1956-57. So they're eating over there. Two of the people [I knew], one was from Seattle and one was from Cleveland, OH. It really made me think about civil rights, the injustice, then brought back my own thinking about our camp days and I became very interested in that. My interest started then. You could hear about it, you could read it in the newspaper, but until you experience it, you don't really know, or personally, I didn't really think about it.

*You were an adult at the time you became interested in what happened to you?*

Right. I was 22 years old.

*After the war, the Japanese-Americans were given some compensation. What was that all about?*

1948<sup>10</sup>, I think it was. That was for losses of property in businesses. For example, my father owned a business. We lost the business because we were removed from the area. They paid 10 cents on a dollar but you have to show proof. There was no way we could show proof on the value of our hotel in 1942. Only thing we had to show was what my father paid for the business in 1923 or 24 when he bought the business. I think my father got about \$1,000. And on top of that the lawyers got their share. So by the time the family got their money there wasn't much.

<sup>10</sup> - July 2, 1948, Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act. The Act allows evacuees to file claims, if proof is available, against the U. S. Government. Only a small portion of the claims were allowed, about ten cents for each proven dollar lost. (Source A)

*So this is mainly for property losses.*

Right. So not everyone got this money. So that is for damages which is different than what the redress was all about.

*Can you explain your involvement in the Redress?*

The redress activity really started in Seattle. There were a couple people in Seattle who were very active with this concept. I think it started around 1969 or 68. I don't remember the exact date. And so they asked if I could introduce them to Congressman Norm Dicks<sup>11</sup> who I happened to know at that time. So we set up a meeting. One of the interesting thing was that they were approaching redress from the standpoint of constitutional rights that we were deprived of and I felt very strongly about that. So that's the reason I started to get interested in the redress process. At the beginning there were a number of people in the Japanese community that were worried about backlash, "don't rock the boat." I don't know if you are familiar with Bill Hosokawa's book, "Nisei, the Quiet American." That title is very typical of the Nisei, "the Quiet American." I'm a Nisei but for some reason I came from a different mold. There was some concern. Because of the war record and hard work, by then Japanese-Americans were beginning to feel economic stability. Whether you're rich or poor, the Constitution of the United States should protect all people. So I really felt our liberties were deprived. There were things that they did that did not truly reflect the Constitution of the United States and we are all Americans. And we felt very strongly. In 1968 when they had the

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<sup>11</sup> - Representative Norman D. Dicks (D), Sixth District, was elected into office 1976. During the period 1968-73, he was Legislative Assistant in the Office of U. S. Senator Warren G. Magnuson. (Source C)

Democratic National Convention in Chicago, there was a riot. They arrested a number of people. They were held in jail overnight or a few days. As I recall, each one of those people received \$10,000 for their constitutional rights deprived. Here I spent three years, 1,000 days or more, behind barbed wire fence.

*They started this redress program and you just jumped right into it?*

Yes, and as part of the JACL, Japanese American Citizens League.

*And you're a part of that?*

Yes. In 1964 I was president of the local chapter -- Puyallup Valley JACL, and again president, I think, 1980. I was president two terms. The first time I was interested in the alien land law -- repeal of the alien land law in the State of Washington. We went to the voters three times. No opposition but yet the first two times we lost.<sup>12</sup>

*Is this through the JACL that you became active in the Redress?*

Yes.

*Are you still active?*

Yes. I'm secretary of the local chapter right now.

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<sup>12</sup> - Washington State's anti-alien land law was not repealed until November 8, 1966. (Source H)

*Do you believe that pretty much got the redress moving?*

I think the JACL has enough national recognition. You have to go through Congress for this. If you take a look at the population, the population of Japanese Americans in each state is very small [compared] to the rest of the community. For a congressman to listen to you, you have to have some backing. The national organization was a good backing. Also, it was very helpful to have people like Senator Inouye, Senator Matsunaga, Congressmen Mineta and Matsui. Also there were other people who were helpful -- Congressman Barney Franks of Massachusetts is the person that at the end of all this got the bill out of committee.

*Can you briefly tell me what the JACL is?*

The Japanese American Citizens League is an organization that works for civil rights basically for the Japanese Americans. It has grown to a point where we are concerned about not only ourselves but other people. I think one thing people have to realize is that discrimination in this country is still going on. It's probably more underground than it is up front so there are cases that come up periodically. I was chairman at the National Committee for Discrimination for the National JACL one year. I used to get reports on what's happening in Detroit. I was involved with a case for the "Tonight" show. They were using terms such as "Japs" which is derogatory. I remember talking to producers of the "Tonight" show. At that time Japanese automobile industry was on the move and American automobile industry was going downhill. In Detroit, if you were a Japanese and driving a Japanese made car, you could find your window broken. Things like that. Or you find ads in papers or magazines where they try to show people in kamikaze planes attacking United States economy.

*So the JACL oversees a lot of this that goes on and deals with it?*

That's right.



*Is there any other organization that chipped in to the redress movement with the JACL?*

I can't tell you about other communities. Tacoma is a small community. So both churches were active (Tacoma Methodist and Tacoma Buddhist Temple). JACL members come from both churches, Tacoma Methodist Church and Tacoma Buddhist Temple. We have other organizations, Nikkei Jin Kai, Japanese Community Service organization. Some people belong to all three. Like myself, I belong to JACL, Tacoma Buddhist Temple and Japanese Community Services. So we get all these organizations working together in Tacoma. I think this works in other areas.

*What about non-Japanese groups? Have they been involved?*

Not at the local level as much as national. But at the local level, I spoke to Quakers, I spoke to the Unitarian Church about the situation. I go around speaking to groups, past friends who belong to different organizations, or I make a presentation. I talk to the Rotary clubs and some other people refer me to other organizations. From that standpoint they invited us to speak. In terms of monetary contribution, nothing.

*Did this have an impact on Congress in the passing of the bill, with these various groups?*

I think the biggest impact was the hearings held by the Commission.<sup>13</sup>

*That was on the internees?*

That was the report that they published and I think that would probably have the biggest impact.

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13 - The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians held 20 days of hearings in cities across the country, particularly on the West Coast, hearing testimony from more than 750 witnesses between July and December 1981. (Source B)

*The redress offered a letter of apology to the internees and also offered \$20,000 to each person. Can you tell me why an apology alone was not enough?*

In the United States, an apology really has very little meaning. In our society, we think in terms of monetary punishment. So if you just had words, you really do not have any impact. \$20,000 per person doesn't have much of an impact but when you say \$1.2<sup>14</sup> billion, you want to make sure that it doesn't happen again. I'm not saying that it's not going to happen again to the people of Japanese ancestry but it could happen to some other group. Up to 1972, until the Internal Security Act was repealed, the United States government was maintaining camps. Title II of the Internal Security Act that was passed in 1952 was the McCarran Act which allowed them to set up camps. It's interesting that when we went to camp there was no such provision. But in 1952, provisions were made. Ironically, there was a rider on the bill that allowed our parents, the Issei, to become naturalized citizens. But no one paid much attention so the Nisei in the Japanese community was so worked up into getting the naturalized citizens bill passed that they didn't pay attention to the other process. So that in 1972 Gerald Ford signed the repeal.<sup>15</sup>

*So the money is necessary?*

Yes. I think it is always very important to have monetary amount, in our society, anyways.

<sup>14</sup> - Actual amount was \$1.25 billion. (Source F)

<sup>15</sup> - In regards to this section about the Internal Security Act, clarification is necessary. First of all, Title II of the Internal Security, or McCarran, Act was enacted on September 22, 1950, not 1952. It provided for detention camps. This Act was also known as the Emergency Detention Act of 1950. (Source D) The act that allowed alien Japanese to become naturalized citizens was called the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Naturalization Act and was passed on June 27, 1952. It also cancelled the 1924 Japanese Exclusion Act. (Source A) The Emergency Detention Act of 1950 was amended on September 25, 1971. (Source I) At that time, Richard Nixon was President (from 1/20/69 to 8/9/74 when he resigned). Following Richard Nixon was Gerald Ford (8/9/74 to 1/20/77). (Source J) Gerald Ford issued Proclamation No. 2714 on February 19, 1976 which terminated Executive Order 9066. (Source K)

*Because of the Civil Liberties Act do you think that race relations would improve or is this more of an ethical resolution?*

I don't think its in terms of race relations. I think its more in terms of constitutional rights of people be preserved. That's what the redress was all about is that it was not a race relation situation but to show the country that the civil liberties of certain group of people were deprived because of the color of their skin and for no other reason and without due process.

*What I was driving at is that even though the Constitution have these rights for all American citizens, sometimes being a different race or ethnic group sort of clouds the meaning of rights and that people have a tendency to look at the Japanese people as an ethnic group who got this money but -- they were the enemy during the war.*

Yes. I was listening to the radio last night on one of these talk shows coming home and someone talked about the so-called "Japs" receiving this money. This was just last night, April 18. But you can't stop that. You'll find letters to the editor periodically. Last fall, October, there was a sign on a Japanese restaurant in Puyallup when the first redress money was given out "go back to your own country" type of thing. So it still happens. But it also happened before we got the redress money anyways. People misunderstand the question of who we were. The constitutional rights of American citizens were deprived.

*What you heard in the news just recently, if that is shared by some people, did the word about the redress not get out to the public in a meaningful way?*

People still don't understand we were not the enemy. We were Americans. Interesting thing is that when I used to talk to some groups, some said, here in the State of Washington, I lost a brother or a relative fighting in the Pacific killed by the "Japs". I say I really cannot take

responsibility for what another country does. What you're telling me then is that I know five families in Fife where their sons were killed in World War II in France so should their families hate the Italians or Germans? It's the same concept that we cannot hold the Italian Americans and German Americans responsible for what was done in their parents', or some cases a couple generations away, country. Until you share this type of thing it doesn't sink in to them. They still think that [because] we're ethnically Japanese that we are citizens of Japan. I get people asking me when did you come to this country. I tell them 1934, the year I was born.

*Do you feel there should be more education out there to let the people know that this Civil Liberties Act is about rights and not about a cross of rights and race?*

I think we need to have more education about who Japanese Americans are and their rights deprived or taken away. As far as I know, when the war broke out some people who were registered with the selective service were classified as 4-C. 4-C is classification given to aliens. Some of our Niseis were reclassified by the Selective Service Board as 4-C. [This was the] first act of taking away a citizenship of Americans without due process. Those Selective Service [people] didn't know what they were doing. The other reason I go out and get involved with community activities is I think its very important for the community to understand who we are. If there was better understanding, if they know who we are, then I don't think the evacuation would have happened. But evacuation doesn't happen overnight. I also like to tell people in the State of Washington, anyways, it goes back to 1885 when they ran the Chinese out of Tacoma. In San Francisco, the Yellow Peril<sup>16</sup>, the "Gentlemen's Agreement"<sup>17</sup> where the Yellow Peril was the placing of Japanese into segregated schools in San Francisco<sup>18</sup> . . . . Then they came to an agreement there. The "Gentlemen's Agreement" was to curtail

16 - Term used to stir both fear and hatred toward Asians. (Source B)

17 - In the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907-1908, the Japanese government agreed to stop issuing laborers passports to the continental U.S. but passports could be issued to laborers who had already been to the U.S. and "to the parents, wives and children of laborers already resident there." (Source E)

18 - On October 11, 1906, the San Francisco School Board removed Japanese students to the one existing school for Chinese. To put the problem in perspective, only 93 Japanese students, 25 born in the United States, were then in the 23 San Francisco public schools. (Source B)

the immigration of Japanese to the United States to reduce the number. Then 1924 came and the executive order exclusion act, where no more immigrants from the Far East [could emigrate]. But before that, 1921 was the Asian Land Law in the State of Washington. So these things were building up. Then people couldn't find jobs. This was the type of things going on before World War II. Even after the war, there were some difficulty in finding jobs for Japanese Americans.

*What I'm gathering from what you're saying is that the government didn't help out by segregating schools, different kinds of immigrant laws and land laws, so instead of helping to relieve the situation, they enhanced it. I understand that one of the problems was the assimilation of the Japanese people into American culture. Do you believe that to be true?*

Yes. Again, go back to history. I think that is true of any ethnic group first generation that comes to this country. The Italians stuck together. In Tacoma, they were right up here on K Street. If you go to the east side, the Polish people stuck together. The first generation always go to the area where they have people that speak the same language. Look at the Japanese community. Most of the restaurants owned by the Japanese were from the same "ken" or province in Japan. Recently, they had a little book about the Japanese history of Auburn - four pioneers, three of them I know. One was my grandfather, the other two people were friends of my family. They all came from the same area of Japan. So there is a tendency of people to come over because they know someone somewhere. Just like after the war, we went to Ontario because my father said he knew someone there. Because of the language you cannot assimilate and compounded by the discrimination, they were not accepted socially anywhere.

*This redress bill is going to provide for some public education?*

Yes. They really haven't resolved the guidelines on that yet.

*But that's coming in the future?*

Yes.

*I believe that it also mentioned about the government discouraging similar human rights violations in the future. Do you know how they propose to do something like that?*

No.

*So that's coming up in the future?*

Right.

*On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your satisfaction of the Act, 10 being the most satisfied?*

I guess I would rate it 10. I didn't really think it was going to pass. Maybe I'm rating the Congress of the United States a rating of 10 for passing such a bill and for President Reagan for signing it. When I watched Reagan sign this -- I don't know if I told you this but I went to Washington D.C. and witnessed the signing -- I really couldn't describe my feeling but a kind of tingle went through my body.

*Can you talk about that a little bit more? I don't think that many people had the privilege of being there. Can you expand on that?*

I received a call from my son one day. My son said "Dad, the White House is trying to get a hold of you." So I said to my son, "Don't kid me!" Who would ever think that the White House was going to call me. And so he said, "No, President Reagan is going to sign the redress bill tomorrow and you're invited to witness it but you have to call at a certain time," I think it was 5:00, and this was already 2:00 in the afternoon. So I called this number and sure enough it was the White House. I'm not sure, I think it was public relations or community services or community relations type of office within the White House. But they needed your social security number for security check. Anytime you're in the room with the President of the United States I'm sure they check you out. Then I called my congressman, Norm Dicks, and he said "Are you coming?" I said "I don't know." I don't even have the airplane reservations yet. It's going to be the next day, less than 24 hours notice. So I said "I'm planning on it." I called the airline. I was able to get a midnight flight out of Sea-Tac what they call the "Red Eye" -- you go from here to Chicago, wait an hour or two in Chicago and you go to DC. So I called Norm Dick's office and they arranged for me to change my clothes in Norm's DC office because I didn't want to go [on the airplane] in a suit. But [in the meantime] the TNT, Tacoma News Tribune, contacted me [for an interview]. They heard I was going back there. I think Norm Dick's office must have notified them or someone did anyway. So I did the interview.

I went back to DC and it was an interesting trip. I left Seattle by myself. When I got to Chicago, I ran into a number of people from all over. They got the same word. A number of them were already here for the National JACL meeting. I didn't attend the national meeting so I wasn't there at that time. I got to talking to some other people I knew from other JACL's and we had to fly to DC at the same time. Then the first thing [that I did when we arrived] was to have Congressman Dick's office find out the exact schedule [of the ceremony]. My understanding was that they invited 125 Japanese Americans throughout the United States. But on such short notice, I think about 90 people showed up.

Congressman Norm Mineta invited about 60 of us for lunch. The ceremony was supposed to be held in the Rose Garden of the White House, however, that day was very hot in DC and so they moved it to the Executive Building which is right next door. So we went to the Executive Building after lunch and then had to go through all the security.

*What day was that?*

August 10, [1988]. So then after you got inside this auditorium, you sat where you wanted to. I think I sat about eight rows from the front. I have never seen so many TV cameras, all along the back. Then [there were] some introductory remarks, then the President walked in, he made some remarks, then signed the bill. Then he talked to someone from California since he is from California himself. He talked to one person. The whole ceremony while the President was there was maybe ten minutes. He's a very busy person and so it was ten minutes. Just the idea to see a good 10 years of work . . . The actual operation started before that but, I think it was in 1978<sup>19</sup> when they appointed the Commission. It was very gratifying to see all that. However, there were some problems after that. Even if you have a bill, the money doesn't go with the bill the way our government works. To get the money out, it has to go to appropriations. And finally, it was introduced into the Senate as an entitlement and so the money is there. Instead of ten years, the law says it has to be paid in ten years, they're paying it off in three years. And that was the work of actually Senator Matsunaga and Senator Inouye. They allocated \$500 million each time. They did it last time. The fiscal year starts October 1st. So the budget right now for the next fiscal year includes the \$500 million. Again, you'd have to wait until the budget is approved.

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19 - A campaign for redress began in the late 1960's. (Source G) However, on August 2, 1979 the JACL Redress Committee introduced a bill calling for appointing a commission to determine whether a wrong was committed. (Source G) On July 31, 1980 President Carter signed Public Law 96-317 authorizing a Presidential Commission on Wartime Relocation to determine the effects of the Japanese Americans evacuation during World War II. (Source A)



*So that was quite an experience.*

Yes. I went back and also got interviewed by a couple of TV stations, one from Japan. My Japanese is very limited but I managed to muddle through it.

*Was there anybody else from here that you recall that went to the same thing?*

Yes. Dr. Kanda from Sumner and I were the two from Tacoma. There were a few from Seattle.

*How do you feel about the treatment of the Japanese people during the war?*

I think it's unfortunate that we had to go into camp. The treatment in camp was nothing compared to what you read and hear about in other countries. However, you have to also remember that in other countries they were not citizens of that country -- they were held into prisons. So treatment [here] was more humane. But for many of us where we had to share one room with the whole family it was a new experience. Sure we had one room for four boys and my sisters had a separate room and my parents had a separate room when we had a hotel, but here we were all in one room. Eating in the mess hall or going to the restroom to another building was a new experience for many of us.

*Did your family get closer or did you end up fighting a lot because you were so close together?*

I don't think we changed in that respect. I think from a sociological standpoint I would say that in some families the family unit was deteriorating. Let me explain this. My father was very strict even though he was born in Japan and raised here. He was very strict. Basically, we ate as a family even in the mess hall. But I know that many times I wished that I could eat with my friends because sometimes my friends would eat by themselves and not with their families -- a bunch of guys would get together.

*Like at school?*

Right. At home you have a family unit and so you had more control. I think from a sociological standpoint that might have happened.

*Because of the fact that you had to eat in big mess halls that could split up the family because you could eat with other people that normally in a home environment there was no one else there but your family.*

Correct. So that to me was more a control. The other control is that in camp there was more time for you to spend with your friends so you spend less time with your family. But this is retrospect on my part. I took a few "sosh" courses in college.

*I understand many people wanted to forget what had happened to them. Do you know why?*

No. As a whole, Japanese people don't speak up anyways until they're asked. Going back into the Meiji era, some think that when the government treat you in that manner, then you must have done something bad to be treated that way. Maybe there's a guilt feeling even though you didn't do anything. Just the idea you were punished by the government.

*Do you believe that many parents hid the truth of camp life from their children?*

I can't answer that. I know some of the Sanseis<sup>20</sup> tell me they never knew about camp. I met one Sansei who said she was born in camp but she didn't know that was a camp.

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<sup>20</sup> - Third generation Japanese American (Source B)

*So in essence it was hidden but you don't know why that occurred?*

Right. One thing about the philosophy of the Japanese is not to think about the past but think about today.

*Today is important, yesterday isn't.*

Right. But it's the experience that they have in their minds so they won't do it again but they don't have to tell people about it.

*Did you experience any personal hostility any period of time during or after camp for being a Japanese?*

*For instance, you know with the war with Iraq how a lot of Middle Eastern people were treated.*

I remember going to a town right across from Ontario called Peyette, ID when war was still going on. Another guy and I, we were eleven at that time, were refused service -- buying candy, or I was refused a haircut.

*This was after the war?*

When the war was going on but out of camp. Again, Ontario didn't have that many. Some other places had more "Jap" signs.

*How did you feel when you weren't served?*

Just stayed away. It's better for me to know about those places. But the thing that I personally feel is whether my education was deprived. I was in camp third, fourth and fifth grade. Then I went to a farming community for my sixth, seventh and eighth grade, one room, as I told you earlier. If I was in Tacoma, maybe my basic skills would have been better in English. In camp I find that, just peripheral research on this, I find how all my Nisei friends in my age bracket who were in their major part of their education where they learned basic skills, they didn't come out so good. I just compare myself with my older brothers who went off to college. They did better than I did.

*Because they were older, their basic skills were already established?*

Yes. My brother above me already finished the sixth grade here in Tacoma.

*Because your civil rights were violated and you are an American, but you are a Japanese, how do you feel about that? Do you think there is a distinction between being an American and being an American Japanese?*

I tell people I feel very fortunate that I am an American and yet I am ethnically Japanese. I have the best of two worlds. I have the Japanese culture handed down to me by my parents and I have the American way of life. I am able to blend the two together. So I feel I'm fortunate from that standpoint.

*Is that how you feel today?*

Yes.

*Is that how you always felt?*

Probably more in the last twenty years after I started teaching school -- after studying, reading and thinking.

*If you were a non-Japanese and during the war the government's propaganda against the Japanese people, which got them interned and swayed a lot of American people into thinking they were also the enemy in this country, could you be swayed by that type of propaganda?*

Surprisingly, when I got to talking to people, there's a large number of people (Caucasian) who didn't know about the situation. It was not the government's propaganda, more like other organizations -- like the Golden Gate<sup>21</sup> group or something like that in California. Auburn had "Let's Remember Pearl Harbor" group. These are the people that stirred up enough things for the government to react. So I think the propaganda came from there.

*So could you say that from talking to other Caucasians that they didn't know about this?*

They didn't do anything. We hear about it but until it affects us personally we don't do anything about it.

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21 - Four major anti-Japanese organizations in California: The Native Sons (and Native Daughters) of the Golden State, The American Legion, The California State Federation of Labor, California State Grange. (Source B)

*Do you see any changes in Japanese culture as a result of the war?*

Oh yes, or the way the Japanese Americans are living. I think you find the Japanese people are spread out over the United States more. I think Japanese people have increased their opportunities of jobs. All that because of the work of older Niseis. They were the forefront for opening up opportunities for the rest of us. My own family, for example, my oldest brother is a graduate from Yale in Engineering. He came to Tacoma, passed the Civil Service test and [was] given a job. A year later, the head of the department resigned and they asked my brother. This was an appointment job. So he was the first Japanese American to be appointed in the state of Washington to an appointed position. But they said "Yosh, we don't know how the community is going to react so you're going to be on probation a little longer than normal." In 1959 when I came to Tacoma to teach school, I think it was because of my brother [that] I was able to get a job. As far as I know if I'm not the first, I was the second Japanese American to be teaching in a classroom in Tacoma.

*And was that in 1959?*

Yes. When I went to Tacoma Community College, in this state anyways, I was the only minority in the statewide community college system that had to do with admissions and registrars work. I was the Director of Admissions and Registrars in Tacoma Community College. Because our president felt comfortable in hiring minorities, he hired me and I want to make sure people understand it that I did have the qualifications. He was looking for someone in admissions and counseling background. I have a masters in counseling. For the registrar's job, he was looking for someone that had computer background. In 1966, there were very few people [with both backgrounds]. I got my masters from the University of Puget Sound. I went to visit my old "prof" at the University of Washington in mathematics who happened to be head of the computer services. So there I learned about computers and I had the background. I think people who have the proper background get the opportunities. Back in the 40's and maybe early 50's you didn't find many Japanese Americans work in banks where they have to meet the public. That's the reason you find so many of them in engineering or sciences.

*The changes you're talking about is basically in opportunities.*

Yes, socially, that's up to each individual. For some reason when I think about my comfort zone, I'm more comfortable with Japanese friends that I grew up with. Maybe if I had a lot of Caucasian friends it would be different but I didn't so I feel comfortable with people I knew in grade school and junior high. Since then I've acquired a lot of friends in Tacoma but you think about it, when you have personal things to discuss, you go to people you knew years and years ago. That's my comfort zone.

*In that respect, in talking about the younger generation who has assimilated well into American culture, do you think that a lot of the culture, the ethnic heritage, is gone because of assimilation into the American culture?*

I think a lot of it is being lost. For one, you lose it because you become further and further removed from the culture. Secondly, I find that there is an overemphasis of some individuals to be more American, whatever that means, and they want to cast away the past. They don't want to be associated with it. Then again, I go back to my thoughts that it's fortunate to have both.

*Do you think this loss that you're talking about being more so called "American" is because the younger generation is trying to assimilate more into the American culture as a result of the war, the fact that during the war and prior to the war the Japanese community was close knit and by blending into the American society they would not be so close knit?*

I think some people would feel that way, that they want to get away from their parent's friends and neighbors and that there's too much gossip and they want to get away from that. I think that's true in some cases. I think the other thing is that again, opportunities to meet other people have become greater, therefore, their opportunities are greater to [get] involve[d in] interracial relationships.

*What would you consider that the Japanese Americans lost more when they were interned?*

I think it is economically. I think it's the family unit. The reason I say economically is this. Most of the Isseis were in their 40's and 50's when the war broke out. When the war ended, they were in their late 40's and late 50's and that was just like picking up and redoing [what they did] when they were 20 years old. They just didn't have the energy. The Niseis had to pick up from that point and then they had to go through the whole cycle of their parents, of rebuilding. Our parents came with nothing. They built it up through the Depression and all that and then things started to get better in the late 30's and 40's. Then war came along. They lost everything. They were too old to really do an adequate job. So their children then had to do it. They were just doing it all over again. That's the reason I say economically. Family unit, as I was mentioning earlier, they spread the family all over the place and so you lose contact. Thirdly, I think, in some cases, we lost culture. I know my parents burned all the pictures they had of their brothers and sisters in Japan. The FBI was coming so they didn't know what they would do. I've never seen a picture of my grandfather. I recall the pictures but most of them were in Japanese kimonos (the women wore) and yukatas, the men wore. They didn't want to have any of those proofs around. It was scary.

*If someone came up to you and asked you, just give me a list of reasons why the Japanese were incarcerated. What would pop out of your mind?*

Discrimination.

*Heavy on discrimination?*

The FBI report showed there were no sabotage, nothing going on, from the government side.



*Looking back on this period of time, from the internment to the signing of the Act, what conclusions have you drawn?*

I would say that the American Constitution does work, contrary to what happened in '42. When the Redress was passed, it shows that, yes, due process is there.

*Today with Japan being economically powerful and many people call them our bankers, this has stirred a lot of racial tension toward the Japanese Americans. How do you feel about that?*

I think that goes back to about 1960 when the steel industry put a ban on Japanese steel. The thing is, number one, Japanese people [in Japan] sacrificed the first 15 years after the war, or 20 years, to be where they are today. Secondly, they don't have to spend as much money on military based on their gross national product but they can spend more internally. I think that, number three, it's changing now. I think they still hold education very high, priority wise. A family would, even today, spend money even though they may not have it. They would scrape and save money to help educate their children -- about 99%. These are some of the things I talk to people about Japanese companies. There is a move last year by the Japanese government, don't buy those showcase buildings like the Rockefeller Center. I think one thing the American people have to understand though is that if you want to compete in a world market, and this is a world market, they have to use quality work. Who are the buyers of these Japanese products that are making the Japanese rich? The American people! The other thing that people would have to understand is that the automobile companies make lots of noise about imports but General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, I think, they all own part of the big automobile industry in Japan. They own stock over there. I had an interesting experience and I like to tell people how I feel. One day I was riding down the freeway. I saw a local automobile company had a sign on their vehicle that said "Buy American." I called this company up. I said I saw a vehicle that said "Buy American" and they had dealer's plates and that's the reason I'm calling

you is "Is this your car?" They said "Yeh." I said "Is that a pick up." They said "Yeh." Then how come you have a sign that said "Buy American?"<sup>22</sup> It's interesting. You go down to the court and see all those vehicles -Dodge Colts made in Japan are coming in here, Chevrolet pick ups are coming in here.

*It's very difficult to be Japanese and hear a lot of Japanese bashing because you feel that it's directed toward you even though you're an American citizen. Do you feel the same sort of tension?*

Yes. I do from the standpoint that it's going to affect me. That's the reason I've been involved in the civil rights movement. "60 Minutes," a number of years ago, showed one segment of the unemployed electronic worker in Silicon Valley due to influx of electronics from Japan. The next segment, showed all the rich Japanese in Orange County. Kind of made it look like these guys are rich because . . . and these are Japanese Americans, they're Niseis. But the impression people are going to get . . . so I wrote to "60 Minutes" about that.

*Did you get a reply?*

No. I just wanted them to know they sent the wrong message.

*Do you think something like this (internment) could happen again?*

Ah-huh! Not necessarily to the Japanese. It would be very remote but it's a possibility. Just recently they were talking about rounding up the Iraqis.

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<sup>22</sup> - He is saying that the vehicle was made in Japan but the dealer advertises "Buy American."

*The bill is trying to deter this similar action again.*

So it's not going to happen like it did 50 years ago but it's a possibility.

*Today, this law is still being paid out. Fifty years from now this may be well forgotten and yet it could happen again. My last question is do you have anything you'd like to say?*

I think it is very important that we keep these types of historical events in front of people. As you mentioned earlier, they may forget 50 years from now. So there's movement to make sure that some of these things are in textbooks more and more.

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