

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with HENRY YOSHITAKE

Interviewed

By

Tai Hirosumi

On May 19, 1994

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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: HENRY YOSHITAKE

INTERVIEWER: Tai Hirosumi

DATE: May 19, 1994

LOCATION: Montebello, California

PROJECT: Japanese American

TH: This is an interview with Henry Yoshitake by Tai Hirosumi for the Japanese American Project for the oral history program at California State University, Fullerton. The interview is being held at Mr. Yoshitake's home in Montebello, California. The time of the interview is approximately 8:22 a.m. on May 19, 1994, which is Thursday. The first question I'll ask is about your parents. Can I have their background, their names, when and where they were born? I guess the brief history; when they got married, their experience—where they born here in the United States?

HY: My parents were both born in Japan. My father was born in 1895 in Japan, came to the United States in 1910 at the age of fifteen to work on the railroad. He went to Denver, Colorado, and he stayed at the YMCA in Denver. His father was here, previously, but the father went home. So, he stayed in the YMCA and worked to earn a living. And while he was there, he learned a lot of English, and he loved the United States. He went back to Japan in 1921 to get married. My mother was also born in Japan and was born in 1906, married at the age of fifteen and came to the United States to live here. They lived in Los Angeles. They ran a clothing store, and they were very fortunate in that they made the money to be able to buy a house, cash. And since the first generation people could not own a home, could not own property, they put the house in my name. This was 1931. I was six years old, and so the house was put in my name. We lived in Los Angeles, and I was born in 1925 and went to school in Los Angeles.

TH: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

HY: I have two brothers and a younger sister.

TH: Can I get their names?

- HY: Okay, I'm the oldest in the family, second was George Yoshitake, third my younger brother James Yoshitake, and my little sister was Lily Yoshitake.
- TH: Since you said your parents—your father went to Japan and married your mother. Did he know her already?
- HY: No, it was a picture—the family had picked her out, and so when he went back, it was waiting. But, there is a story attached to all of that. You know, it is very common in those days for the families to get together and to arrange a marriage.
- TH: So, how was her experience here?
- HY: She came to the United States, of course, at fifteen years old. She only knew Japanese. So, my father had a business, and my mother stayed home and raised the family. And it was just the normal family life until, of course, the war broke out.
- TH: How was your experience before the war?
- HY: Before the war, I was—I had a lot of Mexican friends, some Jewish friends, Armenians friends; of course, Japanese friends, too. We had to go to Japanese school to learn Japanese so we can speak and converse with our parents. We lived in East Los Angeles where we had a mixture of Mexicans, Armenians, and Jewish people. We traded a lot of goodies around the house, so we made sushi and things like this and take it to our friend's house. They would bring burritos and things over. We had, I would say, a very normal upbringing. Attended grammar school, junior high school, and high school in the East Los Angeles area, and, when I went to high school, I played varsity baseball at Roosevelt High School. And I was involved with the scouting program and was in the scouting program over five years.
- TH: Can you elaborate in the scouting program? How did that affect you as a child growing up?
- HY: Oh, well, we were, of course, in the scouting program makes you very aware of your country. And the loyalty to your country, and that was stressed very strongly to us. And so, when wartime came, we thought nothing of—we felt like it was our duty to do our share.
- TH: Did that loyalty go with the camps? How were your feelings toward the camps as a child?
- HY: I think after the war started, before the camps opened up, I had a friend of mine who was a doctor, and he invited me to a couple JACL meetings. And this went on for maybe a month or so. And they are two main points that I remember from these meetings. Number one that our parents, who were Issei, were declared enemy aliens, and, as such, it was our responsibility to protect them. If we raised Cain, they could do anything with our parents. They could shoot them in the streets if they wanted to

do that, so it was up to the Nisei to protect our parents. Number two, when the opportunity comes, the Nisei is going to have to go out and prove that we are loyal to the United States, that they had also declared us as enemy aliens, non-aliens. So, this is what I felt. That number one, Issei could not take care of themselves because they were declared enemy aliens. So, it was up to the Nisei to protect them by obeying the laws and making sure they knew what was going on. And if the opportunity comes up, that we can show that we are loyal, that we have to jump at it. That was a two-bit responsibility that were placed on our shoulders.

TH: So, it was kind of like a—were you kind of in-between the two?

HY: No. I would say no. I would say it was very clear. It was very clear that—of course, we love our parents. We understand that they are aliens, and declared enemy aliens, the FBI or the Army could come in, and, if they see them doing something wrong or something, they could shoot them in the streets. So, I think all of us realized that we had to take care of our parents. It was up to us.

TH: How was the pre-war community? How was that before the evacuation and the war?

[00:09:54]

HY: Pre-war Japanese American community was basically around First Street, San Pedro, in that area. And mostly farmers on Saturday night would come into town and do the shopping. My parents would go down there and buy Japanese food and things such as that. Or we had trucks that had vegetables, fish that would come to the house to buy from them. I would say that the Japanese American community here in Los Angeles was still small, but we mingled quite a bit with the other races. Like last year, we had a high school reunion. We had Armenian, we had Mexican, we had Jewish people, Russians, you name it.

TH: What types of organizations did they have for the JA community?

HY: Before the war, we could not join any non-Japanese basketball league, baseball league, things like this, so we had to form our own. We had JAUs, we had Golden Bird, we had other little clubs that gave us an opportunity to play something that we wanted to play, but we could not play with Caucasians. In high school, that was different, of course, because if you were good enough you could jump in and play varsity or Bs or whatever you can.

TH: You said you were in Boy Scouts before the war broke out?

HY: Yes.

TH: How old were you when you joined?

HY: I was eleven years old when I joined.

TH: How many years was this before the war broke out?

HY: It was 1936. I joined right after they came back from the Washington D.C. tour. That was in 1935.

TH: That was the tour they took instead of going to the Jamboree?

HY: Right. Well, they went to Jamboree, but they had to call it off because of some kind of epidemic or something like this.

TH: And from the time of the bombing of Pearl Harbor to the actual evacuation, what was your family's reactions? And how were the conditions prior to the war?

HY: All Japanese families—of course, I can't talk for *all* the families, but most of the friends that I go to see, the parents were all first generation Issei. And they all have pictures of their brothers and sisters back in Japan, and many of them had the picture of Hitohito, the emperor, and maybe President Roosevelt's picture also. But, December seventh, I remember coming home, and my father had picked me up at the church. He came home, and the first thing he started to do was, he started to take down all these pictures. And he started burning them. And so I burned pictures—and all photo albums, went through there, took out all the pictures of brothers and sisters, and I burned them. And anything that pointed toward Japan, they destroyed. My dad told me that he heard that the FBI is rounding up some of his friends. People that were, maybe, Buddhist ministers. People that were influence in the Japanese American community, they were picking up. So, that went on most of the day. We just stayed indoors. My mother and father would not let us out, and so they just stayed indoors.

TH: After they bombed Pearl Harbor, how long did it take for the orders for the evacuation to begin?

HY: Probably the first indication that we would be evacuated came in, probably, in the latter part of February after the Executive Order was signed by President Roosevelt, the order put out by the Army saying that we would like to have the Japanese American community move away from the coast and move inland. So, my dad said some of the friends are talking about moving but no one had any friends anywhere so they stayed. And then, probably, in March, a month after that, then the order came out that all Japanese in the West Coast will be evacuated.

TH: How did you and your family find out?

HY: Well, the American newspaper, the radio. We were able to keep radios. It just that if you had short wave radios, you had to take it to the police department and have it cut off. We had to turn in cameras. We had to turn in any guns. We had to turn in any Japanese swords, daggers, things like this we had to turn them into the police department.

TH: Were you worried about the evacuation? Did you know where they were going to take you and how they were going to proceed in evacuating the whole Japanese American community?

HY: No, we had no idea where we were going. All they said were posters from telephone posts in the neighborhood saying that certain area bounded by certain streets were to report within so many days with the only things that you can carry. Bring your own bedding, your toilet essentials, and things like this to a certain point, by a certain day. And usually that was, maybe, five or six days from the time that it said on the date. So, they give you five to six days to clean up. But, even before then, a lot of people were coming around the house asking if we wanted to sell some things. And, of course, after the notices came out, then a whole drove of people came out and wanted to buy this piece of furniture, that piece of furniture. They want to buy the car. We had a car that was about, maybe, a year, two years old, and we sold that for \$50 and a grand piano for \$50. And a guy even wanted to buy the house because there was a California Alien Land Law which stated that any person that wasn't eligible for American citizenship could not own property. Of course, that meant the Japanese parents because they were prohibited from becoming citizens. But, the house was in my name, and they came around and wanted to buy the house. And my dad and I said, whatever we sell, we will never sell the house. And I said, "Yeah, because someday we will come back, and when we do, we'll need the house." So we hung on. We rented the house to a family that was going to church in the neighborhood for \$10 a month. Basically, so that he won't move, so that he'd stay there.

TH: How old were you at the time?

HY: I was seventeen.

TH: Seventeen.

HY: Yes.

TH: During the actual evacuation when you did have to leave your house, were you taken to an assembly center?

HY: I was taken to an assembly center in Santa Anita. They put us in the stables, smelly, and there's no privacy because the tops are all open. You can hear people talking way on the other end, snoring, or whatever. There was absolutely no privacy, at all. And they asked if you want to work in the mess hall, if you wanted to make camouflage nets? I said, no. I brought a bunch of books with me. I want to study. I had a friend of mine who was in the Boys Scouts, also—he was a UCLA student—so we used to go up in the grandstand at Santa Anita, we used to get boys our age, and he used to teach class. I was intending to go to college. I was a senior already. I intended to go to college, so my dad said that I should take my books with me. So I took calculus, trigonometry, geometry books, history books, things like this. Our family was fortunate because we had two boys, fairly big, that could carry things, and

my little sister was so small. Because many families that all they had was just babies. And when they say, You can only take what you can carry, well, all you could carry was a baby and some diapers and things. That's all they were carrying.

[00:21:18]

TH: At the assembly center, you could not move from there? You could only do activities within—

HY: Well, they assigned you to a mess hall, and then, of course, they had communal bathrooms. Of course, they had barb wired fence all the way around.

TH: Okay, so you couldn't leave?

HY: You couldn't leave, no. They had MPs and armored cars guarding the gates and usually a space, barb wire fence, and another barb wire fence. If you had any visitors, you have to talk five feet away.

TH: So, how long where you in there?

HY: We were in Santa Anita for four months.

TH: Four months?

HY: Yeah. Then they put us on a train, didn't tell us where we going, and, of course, it was pretty crowded. There was not a Pullman type where they had beds. You just slept on a bench, on the seats, and we travelled for, I believe, five days. I remember they wouldn't let us off the train until we got to one place. They let us off, but they said, Stay near the train. The MPs would be out there and we would come out and take a stretch. And we saw a bunch of people at the railroad station. And they kept walking toward us, walking toward us. And I remember I asked, "Hey, where are we?" "Oh, you guys could speak English?" I said, "Yeah, we are Japanese Americans that are being evacuated from the West Coast, and they didn't tell us where we are. Where are we?" "Oh, you are in Louisiana." So, that's the first time we knew where we were because every time another train was coming, they would pull us off the mainline, and we'd wait. And here goes a freight car going by with tanks and things like this going to West Coast, and we were going the other way. And the MPs would come through, Okay guys, pull down the shades. And so, we look out and maybe see an air field or some town that we would be going through. So, we didn't know where we were going and the people outside didn't know where we were going either. But ah, and these people in Louisiana said, "Oh, we didn't know that. We thought you were POWs or something." I said, "No, we are being evacuated from the West Coast." And then, about another half a day, we travelled and finally got off and we said, "Where are we?" This is Arkansas. And so we were placed in a camp at Rohwer, which is the furthest eastern camp in all relocation camps. We were five miles from the Mississippi River.

TH: How did they determine where you guys were sent?

HY: That I don't know. But, East Los Angeles had the biggest congregation of Japanese in the West Coast. And so they chopped up the whole East L.A. area; this group belonged to this camp—how they determined, I don't know. In East L.A., most of the friends that I knew, all went to about five different camps.

TH: Once you got to the camp, did you have a lot of family, friends? Did you have friends that—

HY: Yeah, we had some friends, and the block that we were in, was mostly people from East Los Angeles. The next block was people from Norwalk. The other side of them, a lot of them were from San Jose. San Jose, Lodi, Stockton, all these farming communities, they were in our camp. When we got there, they were still working on some of these barracks. They were still making them.

TH: You were in Boy Scouts up until the evacuation?

HY: Yes.

TH: Did the Boy Scouts have any part in actually evacuating?

HY: No.

TH: Did they do anything to—say in class, they had drum and bugle corps. Did they—

HY: That broke up.

TH: Oh, okay.

HY: Nakosa who was in charge of drum and bugle, he took all the equipment when he to Heart Mountain. So, many of the boys that were in the troop, actually ended up in Heart Mountain, so they began the _____ (inaudible) at Heart Mountain.

TH: Once you got to Arkansas, it was called Rohwer? What was the camp?

HY: The name of it? Rohwer, R-o-h-w-e-r.

TH: How were your and your family's reactions once you got to the camp?

HY: Well, I don't look on the camps as the most traumatic time. I think the—right after the war [started] and being evacuated was the time. My father had a store, and when they found out he had to evacuate, he just sold all he could and soon as he could. But, he also had to sell the stuff in the house. So he just, maybe a day or so he stayed at the store trying to sell this stuff, but he finally just closed the door. And he had to come home and try to sell some of this stuff at the house. My dad, he knew English

enough to converse with non-Japanese people, Caucasians, and I used to go down there and help him at his store once in a while in the summertime. He was always pretty jovial and liked to talk to Caucasians, but he was pretty mad at the time of the evacuation and all of this stuff. When we got to camp, he was a pretty quiet man after that. I think it was really traumatic for him.

TH: How did your mother take it?

HY: Well, my mother was busy trying to keep all the kids together. You know, I had younger brothers and a little sister. Her time was spent trying to keep us out of the way and keep stuff together, but I helped my dad sell all the stuff. And my mother, I found out it was really traumatic for her, too. It was really a hard period. They had come through the Depression, and they had come through all this discrimination, and then to all of a sudden, lose everything. You could just imagine how you would feel. And the Issei, they usually kept it pretty tight. But, later on, when my dad died, I had a real good talk with my mother, and she told me, basically, how traumatic it was for him, especially, losing his store and this other stuff in the house.

[00:30:36]

TH: You said, different communities from the West Coast went to Arkansas. You were from East L.A. so a lot of members from East L.A. were in the same block?

HY: In our block, yes.

TH: Was each block basically—everybody that lived there was from the same community as they were from the West Coast?

HY: Well, see, East Los Angeles probably had the largest community of Japanese Americans. And, like I said, when they chopped it up, I don't know how they divided who goes where because we had people in our block that lived two, three blocks away. And then, people lived three, two blocks this way went to a different camp. But people that lived two miles away, were also in the same camp, same block, so I don't how they came about it, whether it was a lottery or what. I just have no idea because I had some good friends that lived north two blocks away, and they went to Manzanar. My wife lived about a mile away. They sent her to Poston. People literally two blocks away from her went to Heart Mountain, so there is no way of determining who and where.

TH: So, you had friends within the camps?

HY: I had friends before—

TH: That went to the same camp?

HY: Yes, uh-huh.

TH: Okay. So, your experience—you were seventeen when you went in?

HY: Uh-huh.

TH: So how was that for the whole time you were in the camp?

HY: Well, before I went to camp I was preparing to go to college. A lot of people were laughing because you go to college—I had guys that are UCLA grads. We had one kid that was from Cal Tech, and he was working at the food stand. And so, we laughed. But, I would talk to them, and I was determined to go to college. So, most of my focus in camp was preparing to go to college. I was a senior. And no one was leaving camp, then. Okay? I said, “Hey, I’m not going to spend the rest of my life in here.” So I was preparing myself for college. This is why I took all my books to camp with me. And the latter part of ’42 or early part ’43, the Army came in with some questionnaires, and everybody over the age of sixteen was required to take it. There were just questions about how many people in your family and much schooling do you have and things like this. But, a couple of questions that hit, basically, about would you go to combat if you were ordered to go? Or if you didn’t go to combat and you were able to leave camp, would you in no way hamper the war effort? In other words, it was a loyalty question.

TH: That’s questions twenty-seven and twenty-eight?

HY: Yeah. Oh, there was some big discussions about that. We had guys that would get up and say, They throw us in here, and they are asking questions like this? There was quite a bit of discussions on that. But, my dad and I discussed it and said, “Hey, if you don’t go to war, you’re going to have to stay here. I’m going to stay here. I’m not going to _____ (inaudible).” My dad agreed, and so my mother, myself, and my dad, all three of us answered yes-yes.

TH: How did your brothers and sister answer?

HY: They were still young.

TH: They were too young?

HY: They were what, twelve and ten or something, so, to them evacuation and going to camp was not a big deal to them.

TH: When you and your parents said yes-yes to those two questions, was it hard for your parents to actually say—

HY: No, no. In fact, we discussed it, but my dad had no qualms about it. Hey, we are staying in the United States, and we are happy here. We are American citizens, and it’s the right thing to do. So, I answered yes-yes. I finished high school in camp, and I applied for different colleges. I told them, “I don’t have any money. We lost

everything, so you're going to have to find me a job there so I can pay for my tuition. I'll come up there and find another job to pay for my room and board. But, you've got to have a job, at least, waiting for you so I could feel established." And the University of Michigan, they accepted me. But they said, Well, we can't guarantee you a job. Just come, there's always jobs. "Well, I can't leave camp unless—I have to have a job waiting for me."

TH: Oh, so if you had a job waiting already, you can leave camp?

HY: Yeah. So, there was another school in Cleveland, Ohio, a community school that said, Okay, I got the job reserved for you. So, I was able to leave camp. They gave me \$25 and a one-way ticket to Cleveland, Ohio, and that's how I went. I went to school. I was working on the weekends. Weekdays I was working after school. I paid for my tuition and working on the weekends for room and board. And then, after about, oh, a few months, I got a letter from a friend of mine saying that the Army is in camp asking for volunteers to join the all-Japanese American Army unit, and he's going to go. So, I remember I talked to my dean. I said, "These are my good friends that are going in the Army. I wanted to join, and I'm leaning that way." He said, "Well, I understand your feeling, but you had a hard time getting in school, getting out of camp to begin with. Why don't you stay in school, because you will probably be taken anyways later on." And sure enough, in the four month, I was in the Army already.

TH: Before I get into the 442nd, how long were you in the camps before you went to college?

HY: In Santa Anita, I was there for four months. In Rowher, I was there about seven or eight months.

TH: Do you know of any organizations that were within the camp?

HY: In camp?

TH: Um-hm.

HY: No, there really was no organization to speak of. Schools were going, a lot of sports programs. I remember in the beginning, we used to have, at each block, Christmas parties and things like this for the kids. Then later on I remember coming back and they would have dances, they had movies and stuff like this. Later it became a lot looser. Things were pretty tight at the very beginning. Later on, I was talking to an officer that was stationed at the Pentagon, and he said that when they got overwhelming yes-yes, then they decided to loosen up the camps as much as possible.

[00:40:20]

TH: Was that just your camp?

HY: No.

TH: Every camp?

HY: They were amazed at the response of the people. You figure most of them would say, heck with the United States if they treat us this way. But there were a lot of people that were educated in Japan, my age, and young age that were sent back to Japan to study and just came back right before the war started. They were raising a lot of ruckus. They were the Kibei.

TH: Oh. So, what was your attitude toward the draft resisters?

HY: I knew nothing about them at that time. In other words, they were talking about this, but they weren't talking about resisting the draft or anything. I was already in the Army by then, anyway. In fact, when I was in the Army, there was a really good friend of mine saying they're being sent to Tule Lake. His parents had insisted that they sign it no-no and that he was being evacuated to Tule Lake because they had signed it no-no. They wouldn't let them out of camp. But, I wanted to leave camp, and so my dad and my mother, we all signed the yes-yes. And as soon as I was able to leave, then I left.

TH: So, you really didn't have any—

HY: I really don't know of any organizations in camp, no.

TH: Oh, okay. So, you really didn't have a feeling toward the people that actually resisted?

HY: No, no, no. Like I said, when the opportunity came that we can do something to show our loyalty, we had to jump at it.

TH: Oh, okay.

HY: With that in mind, I know I had to go, so I went, no question about it.

TH: How long were you in school before you went into the 442nd?

HY: About six months.

TH: Okay, so this happened almost within a year-and-a-half of you going to camp?

HY: Oh, yeah. By then, my dad had left camp, and he was working up in Detroit. And my mother, two brothers, and sister were back in camp. As soon as our basic training ended, I went home to visit them to say that I'm going overseas, and with mother—

TH: How did they react when you decided—

- HY: Well, the Issei never showed their emotions, never showed their feelings. I remember, very somberly, she told me to take care of myself and no taking chances and things like this. Of course, at our age, in one ear, out the other. We were going to do a job and that was about it.
- TH: You were in Boy Scouts—say if you weren't in Boy Scouts, will your loyalty toward the United States still be the same? Or did actually being in Boy Scouts help?
- HY: I think it helped.
- TH: Really?
- HY: Yeah. Because I had no problem—in fact, I was patrol leader so taking orders, drilling the guys, working with guys, I had no problems. And we had _____ (inaudible) that was teaching us, when you get up in front, you're there to kill him, or he's going to kill you. One or the other. So, of course, you're trained for that purpose. And, of course, all of us knew what discrimination was. We had to live with it. And, like I said—I was talking to a couple of people and I said, "Hey, this is our chance to really show that we are loyal. We are Americans. We haven't been to Japan." And so, I think, that we are going to have to show that we are loyal. It's the opportunity that we have been waiting for.
- TH: Did most of the boys in your camp basically feel the same way?
- HY: Oh, yeah, I think they were. They were all eager to go. I didn't hear of any them, "Boy, you might get killed." We you now that.
- TH: Do you know of any—well, in the other camps they had Boy Scouts. Do you know of any other boys that went to war that were in Boy Scouts? Or did any of them resist?
- HY: The way I saw it was unique. I would say of the boys that were in this kind of program, from the time _____ (inaudible) started to World War II, it was only about a ten year period. And of the Scouts that were in, I would say that, probably, 30 percent went into the service. I know of none of them that signed no-no. I don't know of any of them that signed no-no or resisted the draft. In fact, there were about seven or eight that we went in the 442.
- TH: Oh, that was in Boy Scouts?
- HY: Yeah. And, once we got together and found out there was about equal an amount of number that went to MIS.
- [recording paused]
- TH: We were talking about—

HY: Scouts that went to the service. Like I said, there were none that I know that resisted draft or said no-no.

TH: So, how about within your camp, did you know anybody that resisted?

HY: No. Like I said, right after the loyalty questionnaire, it was probably four months I was already out. I graduated and I had applied and I got the permit to leave camp to go to school. And so I was one of the first to leave from our block.

TH: Did a lot of boys do that?

HY: Not that many. The first batch that left camp was no more than ten people.

TH: Was this every camp? Did they allow people to go to school?

HY: Every camp allowed people to go to work or to go to school, but usually, this was after the loyalty questionnaire. Before that, no one left camp. It was pretty tight. MPs were pretty stringent. But after that, they loosened up.

TH: How long were you in the military for?

HY: About two-and-a-half years.

TH: Okay, so when you got out of the military, did you come back to the camp?

[00:49:46]

HY: No, by then my parents were already home. In fact, when you go overseas, you give the power of attorney to someone so he could sign for your or request different things on your behalf. I knew that, so I turned over the power of attorney to my dad. I remember, probably, '45, they called me off the line, and they said that the Red Cross is here and want to talk to you. I said, "Oh, is it about my parents? What happened?" They said, well, my father has been writing to the people that were renting my house that he was going to leave camp, that it was time to close camp, and he wanted to come home and stay in the house. And I said, "Well, I gave him the power of attorney, and he could order those people out." But, the Red Cross said, "Well, we just want you to know what is going on." And the Army was there, he said, "Don't worry, we'll take care of it." So, I went back to the line and the next thing I knew my parents were back home. That's all I knew. And then, after I came home, I went out in the neighborhood talking to my neighbors, and one lady said, "Do you know why your parents came back in the house? I said, "No, why?" She said, "Well, one day, the truck full of MPs came to the house with rifles and bayonets, and they forced the people out of the house." I said, "The Army came and forced them out?" "Yeah." Because when the Army said they'd take care of it, that's what they meant. My parents never told me that—well, of course, they were probably not there. But, they

- were on their way home, and so the Army wanted these people out of the house when my parents came home.
- TH: So, I guess the military, when you were in there, really helped out?
- HY: Well, it sure did help me out. Of course, I didn't know anything about it. It just that this lady told me how they got the people out of the house. (laughs) The Army kicked us out of the house, and then the Army brought us back into the house.
- TH: How were your feelings before, during, while you were in the Army, and after?
- HY: When we were in the Army, we had no problems, discrimination or racial problems. We had none of that. In fact, it was just the opposite. Overseas they treated us like royalty, really. The Caucasian troops were real good to us. They would always let people in uniform get on the train or _____ (inaudible) first. So, here they would hold back the Caucasians and let us in first on the train or something. So, there was really no discrimination, per se. Of course, when I was going to school, there were forms of discrimination.
- TH: Were you the only Japanese American going?
- HY: No. There were, probably, about six of us. There was some discrimination at work. When I was going to school, I was living on campus, and there was a barber just around the corner. I remember I went in there once, and I was sitting down waiting to get a haircut. And the guy came over and said, "Oh, you're Japanese aren't you?" I said, "Yes." "Well, I don't know how to cut your hair, but there is a Japanese barber down the street. You better go see him." So, "Okay, thank you." I thought nothing of it. Then later on, he'd see me walking with other kids at school. So, one day he's was at the door, said, "Hey, I learned how to cut the Japanese boys hair, so, if you need anything, come in." I said, "Oh, maybe the first time was discrimination."
- TH: But there was a Japanese barber?
- HY: Yeah.
- TH: Was he your age, or was he older?
- HY: No, about my same age. Well, he was already working as a barber, and he had opened up his shop. But, I remember one time I was at work and going home, and me and this other guy we sat on the sidewalk waiting for the bus. And this guy came by and says, "Well, Jap, aren't you get out of the way so I can walk through?" There's a wide, big, ole sidewalk behind us. I said, "You're welcome to the rest of the sidewalk." And we didn't move. He just mumbled—another man said, "What did the guy say?" "Well, he just wanted us to move off the sidewalk so he could move on." "Oh, please don't mind him because he just got a telegram that he lost his son in the Pacific. So, knowing this kind of helped.

- TH: While you were going to school, was there a lot of, would you say, more discrimination than people actually—like that person—
- HY: No, in school, I had no problem with the students. In fact, I played baseball with the class, and we used to go bowling with the guys in the same class and had no problems. In fact, we had a girl in our class, and at lunchtime, we used to have a jukebox, and we would start dancing and stuff. So, it was normal.
- TH: So, you could only go to school in the Central, East Coast? Or could you have gone—
- HY: Yeah. This included Ohio.
- TH: You couldn't go—
- HY: To California? No. The camps had a list of schools that would accept Japanese Americans. And, of course, a lot of schools you couldn't get into. They didn't want us. So, we used to pick out the schools that you want to go to and hopefully be accepted and what not. Most of the guys I went to school with, they didn't have any money. They were all working trying to pay for their tuition.
- TH: I guess you were hardly at _____ (inaudible) camps, but how were your parents, brothers, and sister—
- HY: Of course, my brothers, they've started to change their feelings, but up until now, they always said, Well, we had a great time in camp. It was like a picnic. You know, there was no responsibility. You didn't have to worry about going to the store to buy food for your parents. The school is there. We could play baseball whenever we wanted to, basketball, football, and there is no responsibility. The younger people, most of them that I talked to, had a lot. But, as far as my parents go, before the war, our parents, their group, the Issei, were very strict on us, on the Nisei. In fact, if you were misbehaving, somebody'd come over and, "Hey you, don't do that," even though he didn't know you. I remember my dad used to tell me, "When you leave the house, you are no longer a Yoshitake boy. You're Japanese boy. When people see you doing something bad, they don't say, Oh, look at the Yoshitake boy. They say, Look at that Japanese boy." So you perform the whole name of the Japanese community. So, that was always engrained in us, and all the Japanese Issei made sure that we didn't misbehave. And then, when the war broke out, a lot of the leaders were picked up by the FBI. And a lot of the Issei that went to camp, they lost everything so they were very quiet. They were very docile. The Issei were not like the Issei before the war. So, although they didn't say anything, you could have a feeling that they had lost their—well, their future. Everything that they had dreamed about, dreamed for, it was lost.

[01:00:36]

TH: I guess before the war, the Issei had organizations?

HY: Yes.

TH: Did they follow into the camp?

HY: No, no. There was none of this in camp.

TH: So, most of the organizations within the camp were for the younger generation or the Nisei? More recreational?

HY: Not, really. More like clubs. You know how young kids call themselves the Jacks or something like this, or the girls were the Marynettes or something like that. We would have dances or something like this, but it was mostly social. There were no Issei clubs; they were all Nisei clubs.

TH: So, basically, your parents just stayed together? Did they interact with other Issei?

HY: Oh, yeah. They interacted over the wash basin and they would talk about it and things like this. But, I wasn't in camp when we were overseas. I don't know nothing about the camp, but I remember a good friend of mine got piece of shrapnel in his belly. I knew that his parents would get a telegram, so I wrote a letter saying that, hey, he's all right. He got wounded, but he'll be okay. I could just imagine parents getting telegrams, and I thought, Wow, that must be pretty frightening. So, I wrote about two or three letters to people in camp that I know their son got hit. I didn't want them to worry, so I thought that maybe a little word would calm them down because I would talk to other people that were in camp, Oh, boy, telegrams would come in pretty regularly.

TH: Did most of the boys your age in your camp go?

HY: No. Quite a bit went, but I don't know what percentage. Boys that were younger than me, of course, probably didn't go. Boys that were only sixteen, seventeen didn't go. But, if didn't go the 442, they might have gone to the MIS, Military Intelligence Service because I know a quite a bit of them—[audio cuts out] In fact, I lived by there so we used to go.

TH: Oh. Was there church in the camp? Did your parents go to church?

HY: Yes, there was churches in camp, both Christian and Buddhist churches in camp.

TH: Were your parents Buddhist and then they converted to that or were they already—

HY: Everybody that came from Japan were Buddhist. But, my mother told me that they started going to a Christian church when I had an older sister that got real sick. The *bonsō* from the Buddhist church never came but the Christian minister used to come

- and visit. And so, with that, when my sister got really sick, they used to come more often. They used to bring some food over and try to help because we were just a couple doors from the church. And then my sister passed away, and so, the reverend came over and took care of everything. And after that, we started going to Christian church. My parents started going, too. I would probably say, from Japan, they were probably, Buddhist—but then, my mother and father never talked about going to Buddhist church.
- TH: Because I know a lot of Issei—or actually the Nisei because I guess the Caucasians put the stigma that if you're Buddhist, you're loyal to Japan. I know that's why a lot of them converted.
- HY: Yeah, they could distinguish when you join your religion.
- TH: I was wondering if that's why.
- HY: That I don't know. Well, one thing is that Shinto is emperor worshiping or something like that?
- TH: I think.
- HY: So, I don't know how the Caucasians would look at the Buddhist religion as being Japanese. All I know is we were not.
- TH: A lot of Buddhist ministers were taken away, too, weren't they?
- HY: Yes.
- TH: Were the Christians taken away?
- HY: Not that I know, but I've heard of stories were this man used to go up and down the state trying to collect money for a trip to Japan. He was picked up by the FBI, but later they found out that he was a Christian minister trying to pick up funds for a Christian church in Japan. So, I think with that they release him out later on. They thought he was just trying to raise money for something in Japan.
- TH: Do you know anybody that was taken away by the FBI?
- HY: I didn't know of anybody, but I've heard a lot of my friends whose parents were taken.
- TH: Did they ever know what happened to them?
- HY: Oh, yeah. Like my wife's uncle was picked up. He was president of a *kenjinkai*. You know what a ken is in Japan? It's like a state. People from that state came to the United States, they said they would get together and called it *kenjinkai*. It's like a

club, like a social club, and he was the president. So, he was picked up, was taken to Montana, and, after a couple of years, he finally came to relocation and stayed with family. But many of them, fisherman—I didn't know any personally, but after I would talk to their sons and daughters. I would hear these stories about their parents from being picked up by the FBI. But, personally, I didn't know of anybody that was picked up by the FBI.

TH: You said after the war, you came back to your house.

HY: Yes.

TH: How was the experience for your parents actually going back? From the point they knew they were able to go back, how did they prepare for that?

HY: Of course, my parents never told me. All I know is that they had requested the Red Cross to help them get these people out of the house, so they could come back. And the Red Cross contacted me, and the Army said, Don't worry, we'll take care it. So, that's the last I heard about it. I really don't know other than they did make it back. I don't even know how they did make it back, took a train or bus or what, but they came back. My brothers and sister started school right away. My father started working in a paint company, and my mother stayed home, so this continuation of before the war, except that my dad didn't have a business anymore.

[01:10:05]

TH: Did he ever have another one?

HY: No. Then he went into gardening, and then he died about 1960 about fifteen years after he got back. So, he died a young man.

TH: How was the community? Was it the same as before the war?

HY: My parents told me that when they got back a lot of places wouldn't let them shop or anything. So, a lot of places were just like before, but by the time I got home, I saw none of that. They said that there was lot of signs in stores, that No Japs and things like this. But by the time I got home, it was all gone. I saw none of that.

TH: How long after they got out, were you in the military?

HY: I came home in 1946—

TH: Oh, and they got released in 1945?

HY: Yeah.

TH: Oh.

HY: Yeah, so they'd been back for probably six months to eight months before I got home.

TH: I guess I'm asking how were the communities from the other camps? Did they come back to that same community? You know how you said East L.A. had a Japanese American community?

HY: I would say that most of the people that were from that one area came back to the area. Of course, the vast majority of people did not own their own homes. Before the war, the parents could not own property, and how many people could buy a home cash? See? So most of the people came back and stayed at hostels or maybe one family would rent a house and let two or three other family's stay with them or something like this. I would say the first few years, it's probably pretty hard on a lot of families. In fact, all the families that were there. My wife's family—she had one older brother, and then, of course, a younger sister and a younger brother. And then, one brother was in the MIS in Japan. So, the father was working, the older brother was working, and then the brother in Japan was sending money home. They were pooling their money to be able to buy a home. I think after they came home from camp they didn't have time to complain about being mistreated. They were too busy trying to eek out a living. And they all proved to themselves being able to buy a house. Now, the Nisei were getting a little older, so now, if they worked they could get credit and buy a house. Whereas before the war a lot of Nisei was still too young and couldn't get any credit so they had to buy by cash. It had to be by cash. I've heard quite a bit about this where the family's pooled their money to buy a house, pooled their money to buy another house later on.

TH: How old were you when you came back?

HY: About twenty-two, I think.

TH: So, what did you do once you got back?

HY: Then I was undecided what I was going to do. The funny thing is, I was in school in Cleveland in engineer college. I was only there for about six or seven months, and then I told them that I have to leave and go to the Army. And when I came to Los Angeles, but the very next day, I got the telegram saying, *Welcome home. Now, you're eligible to come back to school, and finish up your education.* But I wasn't ready to go back. I had just come home; I had just spent all my time overseas. I was undecided what I was going to do, and so I didn't want to make that decision going back to school. So, a friend of mine said, "Let's go to UCLA." I said, "Well, I'm still undecided what I'm going to do, so I'm just going to, maybe, hang around and work a little bit and get my feeling." And then, I read an article about something new that's coming out, and that was television. Why did they call it television? This was 1946, see? And that struck me because when I was in eighth grade, I was in a boys league, and I had to set up a program for the boys in the school. And so, I contacted GE, and I made contact there with a new program there that they were working on,

and that was television. Now this was when I was in the eighth grade. So, I made contact, and they brought this stuff to school. They showed the kids in school this new gadget called the television. It was a big wheel that kept turning. Anyway, so when I got back and saw that word television, it took me back to when I was in eighth grade. So, I said, "Hey, that sounds interesting." My dad said, "No, that's radio. You can't make a living out of it." Anyway, I went to that school. I asked to be shown around and see what television was. They had studios and things like this. That intrigued me so, I signed up, and I was in television all these years.

TH: Oh, really?

HY: Yeah.

TH: Oh, so what did you do?

HY: Well, I was basically sales and service, selling televisions and repaired broken ones.

TH: I guess I kind of asked this already, but did a lot of your friends come back to the same community to where you were living before the war?

HY: I would say the vast majority came back to the original. There were a lot of people back east, Chicago, New Jersey, that they left camp, went there, and they are still there. Why they don't want to come back, I don't know. It's been so long, I could just imagine some people they probably lost so much that they don't want to come back. I talked to quite a few people, especially Issei, that they don't want to talk about pre-war. I guess they lost so much that it's just too big a burden to speak about it.

TH: So, did your parents feel the same?

HY: No, my parents came back. My parents didn't do too much talking about pre-war. I got quite a bit out of my mother after my dad died, and she told me especially about the evacuation. More than the camps; camp was after the fact. You know? When you lose everything, after that, what do you got? So, you're in camp, big deal. So, it was the evacuation that really tore up my parents. I'm sure every other Issei, too.

[01:20:16]

TH: You were in the Army, so I guess your loyalty was very high toward the United States?

HY: Oh, yeah.

TH: Was it ever tried because of the evacuation?

HY: No, no, I felt thought that at least in camp my parents were fairly safe. And after we were in camp, then the next thing was, hey, it's an opportunity to do something, and I'm glad that so many boys could take advantage of that.

TH: So, when you reflect back on it now, your views have not changed at all?

HY: No, it has not changed a bit. I've talked to quite a bit of resisters. I've talked to people that are no-no. The no-no people are very quiet about it. Maybe they are ashamed that they did it, but it was their decision. I have to respect it. With the resisters, they say they did it under the constitution. It's unconstitutional to draft them from a camp. I said, "What if we all did that? What if we all refused to go into the service?" You think that our kids would have the opportunity that they have today? I would have to say no. I respect the decisions that they made, but they also have to understand that sometimes fighting for principle has got to be secondary. There is something more important than fighting for principle. And that's the way I feel then; I still feel that way.

TH: You probably heard of Frank Emi?

HY: Oh, yeah, he's a good friend of mine.

TH: Because he was a draft resister, right?

HY: Yeah.

TH: How did you feel? He's a good friend, but how do you feel—

HY: When I say good friend, I've known him for about five or six years. I did not know him at that particular time. But ah, him and I have gone on panels to speak and would go out to dinner after. And I tell Frank, "I respect your decision of what you did, but what did it do for Japanese American community? It didn't do a damn thing. That's my position. So, you're right, don't draft me. Let my parents free first. But I say, what the hell did it do for the Japanese American community? It's a bigger picture." Of course, you can say anything, but I feel that way. And yet, I can sit and talk to him.

TH: Was that everybody's view that was in the 442nd, or were some toward the resister side but they went to war anyway?

HY: If there were any that felt as Frank Emi did, I didn't know of them. Most of them, of course, didn't want to be shot u, but we got a job to do. When I first went overseas, I was shoved into the 100th Battalion. This was older boys. They were already in combat six, nine months before we got there. And I had a platoon sergeant, he sat us down, he said, "I'm going to tell you guys something. We better go home, we got to go home with stories. We're going to go home KIA [killed in action]. Some of us are going to get killed. But, we have to go home, but we have to go home with poked

- hearts.” And that’s all we were there for, the whole future of the Japanese American community. I said, “Wow.” I’m not thinking that bigly, but that’s the way he talked. So, you look at the 100th Battalion. They are only a small group, yet you had United States senator come out of there. You got a lot of state senators, state legislators, you got attorneys, doctors, and all came from a small group. Because every time I would sit down with them, they would say, when we go home, This is what we are going to do. Here we are going to attack a town tomorrow, and they are talking about what we are going to do when we go home.
- TH: Kept the optimistic view.
- HY: From the time I joined them, you put \$2 a month into a piggy. You know what that was for?
- TH: No.
- HY: When they go home to Hawaii, they want to build a hall were we can all meet together.
- TH: So, did that ever happen?
- HY: Yeah. When they finally got home, had \$52,000 dollars. They got a piece of property in Hawaii that was worth about 5 million dollars, now.
- TH: Really? Do you ever go back?
- HY: Yeah. Oh, yes. Every time we go there, we go there. But ah, their thinking was in the future. They’re looking at the small picture and compared to resisters who only talk about themselves—constitutionally, they were correct, but I say, “Hey, what did it do for the Japanese American community?” That’s all I say; it’s simple.
- TH: I guess I’ll go back to your history as a child. I want to talk about Boy Scouts and how that progressed through the camps.
- HY: I think the most important thing I got out of scouting was the leadership training. I became platoon sergeant. I had about forty guys under me. As soon as I went in, they made me machine runner. I had an assistant gunner. I had about four ammo carriers. I became squad leader and platoon sergeant, and I had about forty guys under me. But ah, I was never scared of organizing the boys into _____ (inaudible). Hey, my job is to stay alive here. And many times, they teach you in the Army; when you’re through with the gun, you cock it, you release the ammunition, you do this, and you let the tripod off, grab your gun and we move. Hey, you don’t have that much time! So, I would say, “Hey, see that rock over there? We are going to move over there. When I count to three, you guys yank that ammo, and I’m going to grab that gun and move.” I’d say, “One, two, three.” *Pow!* We moved! You did not

have time to break this and that. No way. You're no good dead, so we must stay alive. We're going to move, so when I say go, we go!

TH: So, I guess the Bot Scout motto, Be prepared, was that always in your mind?

HY: Oh, yeah. Pre-war _____ (inaudible) had a lot of Army training, a lot of marching. If you were in the drum and bugle [corps], you had a lot of marching training. You had a lot of order giving. We had the responsibility to teach younger kids, and so it was automatic. It wasn't that I just had joined the Scouts. I'd been in five years, and, in fact, I was working on three merit badges when the war broke out. _____ (inaudible) We were going to leave if the war didn't come, but that's something else.

[01:30:40]

TH: So, were you in Boy Scouts at the onset of Koyasan formed?

HY: No.

TH: Oh, you weren't?

HY: No, it was about five, four years old; or five years old.

TH: There were other troops around, right? Other Japanese American troops?

HY: Yeah, there was a couple other troops around.

TH: How long were they around?

HY: But my dad had to a store downtown, so he knew about the Koyasan.

TH: Oh. How did that affect the boys in the community, the Boy Scouts?

HY: Well, it kept the boys busy. That's what you need. Of course, we went to Japanese school. We went to school. We, ah, of course, had scouting; scouting had all the meetings and preparations for camp that we had to go into. We went to a lot of parades, practice with the drum and bugle, so I would say we didn't have time to get in trouble. Of course, we didn't have television, then. We had the radio. We the rode shoe cart back and forth, no problem.

TH: You were in Boy Scouts, but were you in any other types of activities?

HY: Yeah, I was active in school. Especially in junior high, I was involved with the boys league, boys league vice president. And in high school I played the baseball.

TH: Did you get any scholarships to colleges?

HY: No. Pre-war they wouldn't have any scholarships around.

TH: Really? Oh.

HY: Usually, if your parents didn't have money, you didn't go to college. But, I always told my dad—because I was surrounded by UCLA, Cal Tech people, and I remember the guy going to Cal Tech was our patrol advisor. I remember afterwards we sit around and talk—you know, guys laugh at me because here I go to Caltech—one of the top schools in the nation—and I'm working at the Grand Central Market. That's the only kind of job I can get. In his graduation class, all the other students have maybe three job offers, but he didn't have any. So, he was working at Grand Central Market. Some people laugh at him. but that's all right. "See, someday, jobs will open up for us, and when they do, I'm going to be the first in line because I got my education." They're thinking ahead, and they are not small thinkers. And always, I've been surrounded by these guys, and so my goal is to go to college. When I was in high school here—when I graduated, even from camp, that's all I wanted to do. There was no such thing as scholarship then.

TH: I guess you guys had to work really hard.

HY: Oh, yeah.

TH: Yeah.

HY: Especially—

[recording paused]

TH: We'll just go on with your history.

HY: Sure.

TH: After all the evacuation, when did you settle down and decide to get married?

HY: Okay, when I came home, like I said, I was undecided what I wanted to do. I did get a telegram from the school that I was going to in Cleveland, Ohio, saying welcome home, and now I would be able to finish my education on the G.I. Bill. But, I really didn't know whether I wanted to go back there or go to school out here. A friend of mine said he was going to go to UCLA and, "Let's go." I said, "No, I'm not ready to decide what I want I want to do yet." In the meantime, I got into the TV business, and one day when I was going to school, I saw this girl going to work.

TH: Um-hm.

HY: And I started talking to her.

TH: This was during high school?

HY: No, no, she was going to work, and I was going to school. I started dating her, and eventually we got married. And we been married now, what? Forty-four years.

TH: What's your wife's name?

HY: Kazuko and have two sons and a daughter and have four grandkids. And they all seem to be happy. My older son married a Caucasian girl. My second boy married a Japanese girl, and my daughter married a Chinese/Taiwanese boy. So, we are all American. I raised my kids with no discrimination. Of course, maybe I was a disciplinarian growing up. I wanted to teach them certain values, such as, these are your limits, and you can do anything you want within those limits. But, once you step out, either I or the police or are something like that, are going to bring you back. As you grow older and you're wiser, these limits become broader and broader. And you grow up to have your own limits, and these are your values. And hopefully you can teach your kids, too. I think they're pretty normal kids. They like to have their fun. No problem with that. I like to have my fun.

In fact, I just got a letter from my daughter. She lives in Irvine. And she said, "I want you to tell me about—" her grandparents and about our lives before it too late. She wanted to save them for her kids, for her grandkids, and things like this. So, I'm trying to write down certain things and put it on tape, video and try to explain things to them, and basically _____ (inaudible). I think this is important. I'm involved with the 442 now, and I keep telling the guys, "Tell your kids, tell your grandkids about your wartime [experience]," because we only have about five more good years. Let's leave a lot to the future generation in those five years. I believe in that. I think that knowing where you come from or what's been done for you can make you a better and stronger person. Knowing what we went through in World War II, everybody went because they were patriotic. We went because we wanted to *prove* we were patriotic. It's a difference. And all of our officers knew this. They're *hakujin*, and they went all the way for us. And if anybody tried to call us Japs while we were over there, they fought hard for us. So, I think, they understood why we were doing. And we're trying to pass this along to you and the future generation so you feel like you're part of America because you *are* an American.

[01:40:47]

TH: We have roots now.

HY: We never had that feeling, but we want to give it to you guys. Because you belong here. You're American. No doors are closed to you, and if we can instill that in you, then we've done our job.

TH: I guess I'll close this with all the experiences you went through, loyalty, your experiences with your school activities, Boy Scouts, your sports, I guess they all influenced your life, but how did that—I guess that's more of a directed question, but

what lead you throughout your life? How did you live your life? What motivated you?

HY: I think I had a distinct focus in life. I knew what I wanted to do. Of course, I deviated many times that focus because certain circumstances came up. But I never look back and say, “Oh, I wish I did that. Oh, I wish I did that.” Because, hey, you didn’t do it, so you have to live by your decisions. You can’t go through life, gee, I wish this happened and that happened. I wish I wasn’t Japanese, because it’s endless. You can call it optimistic. I think I’m a very optimistic person. I believe that I try to work with people and bring out what is good in them. I trust people a lot. I think these are values I received from my dad because I helped in in the store many days, and he taught me about business. He taught me about how—he loved the United States, even he could not be a citizen—although he did become a citizen when he first opened it up in 2952. I remember that day when they finally said that he could become a citizen. And he said that he’s going to _____ (inaudible) night classes And I told him that I read where people that are over fifty years old, they could take it in their native language if they want to. They made an exception for the Japanese; they been here a long time. But, he said, “I want to take it in English.” And he didn’t ask me any questions. He just studied on his own and went and took the test in English and passed. Now, my mother she did not know enough English to take the test in English. She was under fifty years old, so she had to take the test in English. She went to night for about ten, twelve years just to learn enough to go take the exam in English, and she became a citizen also. So, those are probably the highlights of my father and mother after the war of finally becoming citizens and hanging that citizenship paper—

TH: They’re very proud of being American.

HY: Yes.

TH: The camps didn’t do anything to—

HY: My dad never talked about the camps. My mother talked a little bit it because she used to be involved with Japanese dancing and used to take my sister. But, other than that, there was not that much talked about camp. Of course, what is there to talk about? You’re just locked in there and just have to do what they tell you. Of course, I don’t have enough knowledge of what went on in camp because I was only there for such a short time, but I talked to friends of mine that went to camp for the full three years. Of course, when they when in they were only, maybe, thirteen or fourteen years old, and when they came out they were, maybe, sixteen or seventeen. They had lost a lot of the so-called family values. There was no family life in camp. If a young kid wanted to go eat with his friend, that’s what he did, he went and ate with his friend. Or stayed out at night with girlfriend or at a club or whatever is and never came home. I regret the break up of the family in camps, but that was really due to the Issei’s losing power. I’ve always felt that. When I look back, I see a whole generation of people fell. They had dreams. Everybody has dreams, and the dreams

was taken away from them. It's just too bad we never had the wisdom to get some of that on tape and asked them some really deep questions. They would not say anything, and we didn't have the wisdom to ask them these questions. It's too bad. I was able to talk in depth with my mother, and it was a traumatic time, especially for my dad.

TH: Oh.

HY: Yeah. Although my dad never said.

TH: So, did he carry that burden?

HY: Well, it's just a lost dream.

TH: Oh.

HY: You dream about the future, and I think it was taken away from him. That's what happened. It's a shame. But, the Nisei, whenever they get together, if you listen to them very carefully, they always say, oh, before camp we did that. After camp, we did this. And we know what we're talking about, but the younger people, they say, What camp? What are you talking about? Before camp and after camp? There is a distinct period in life, a distinct period. Although it was fifty years ago, it was just like it was yesterday, and I think if you can grasp some of that feeling, you have something.

TH: Hopefully.

HY: Although it was a real short period in life, it was a very, very distinct period. That's what broke _____ (inaudible). Now, like my brothers, they were ten years old when they went to camp. "Oh, we had a ball." So, when the redress time came and they were eligible to get money, and I remember him saying, "I feel ashamed to go get it."

TH: Oh.

HY: "I didn't lose anything. I was fine." I say, "Hey, I understand how you feel but just look at it this way. Mama and Papa lost everything. They are not here to get the money. Why don't you go get it for them? Just say it's a present from them to you. Accept it and enjoy it because that's what Mama and Papa want you to do." So, it's kids that were two, three years old when they went to camp, they didn't lose anything. As long as they were with their parents, that was enough. So they have no idea of what their parents—

[01:50:53]

TH: Went through.

HY: Right. So, that's why I say, "Hey, don't feel ashamed. Go get it. It's like a present from your parents." They lost everything. They lost more than material things. They lost their dream. They lost hope. Now, the Issei were just coming out of the Depression when the war broke out. And now when the war ended, they were already too old to start—

TH: Oh, yeah.

HY: And they had lost so much that they were embarrassed to start over. And that's where I look back and I say, _____ (inaudible) I'm glad that the Nisei took over that leadership because I think in camp, there was no leadership. Issei were the bosses before the war. They lost it at the evacuation time. The Nisei were not ready to take over the camp. So, when they came out of camp, someone had to take over. The Issei were not leaders anymore. The Nisei were big enough to take over. That's part of our history; it's part of your history.

TH: Yeah.

HY: Yeah. A lot of these things are not written in the books. It's too bad.

TH: Hopefully, with this interview—

HY: Yeah. I feel like I have to pass it down. I tell the guys, "We have five more good years, and we got to do a lot of things in five years." That's why I work in the museum. I'm setting up speaker group with our 442 veterans that we could go to different groups. We still have invitation from different groups to talk to them. We go and make presentations, and we try to instill _____ (inaudible). We are not doing it for our ego; we're too old for that. We have nothing to gain by this except to instill in our younger generation what it means to be first class citizen. We can see what first class citizenship means because we were second class since the beginning.

TH: Yeah.

HY: We look back, we see a period we had nothing to a period where we have all the advantages. You got to take care of the advantages. Nobody is going to give it to you on a silver platter. You have to earn it. But it's there. Don't say that you can't do it. You know? I hate to preach like this. (chuckles)

TH: No, it's true. We are just using excuses if we say we don't have a chance.

HY: Yeah.

TH: We have all our opportunity there. It's wide open, like you said.

HY: You have the opportunity, take advantage of it.

TH: Yeah. Hopefully—I guess I knew somewhat of your experience and how the 442nd opened some doors, but I don't know, hopefully this interview sheds light for other people that you guys did a lot.

HY: Senator Spark Matsunaga was our buddy. And we have meetings here, someplace there in Hawaii, and, all of a sudden he pops in. He sits down with us, and he starts talking. Invariably, we will always get back to there are too many Caucasians out there know nothing. They don't know Japanese American from Japanese. And that's recognizable because they really don't know you. So, all the more we have to tell the story of what happened. That's our responsibility. When we were young our responsibility was to prove that we were in. I think we did that. Now we have to come back and tell the stories that happened. The funny thing is I remember overseas, when there was no fighting, we'd sit around like this, we'd be drinking and stuff, and we'd always be talking about what we're going to do when we go home. A lot of the guys were older than us, and that's all they talked about. First, we are going to take over the politics of Hawaii. We are going to make a Hawaii a state.

TH: Oh.

HY: Did you think that Hawaii would ever become a state in such a short time if it weren't for the 442? No way. That opened the door statehood. This redress time that we had, all the hearings that we had? We had guys come from Texas, how it is that we rescued, and they testified on our behalf. They didn't have to testify. They weren't doing it for us, but they are testifying for the whole Japanese American community. We had guys come and save our ass. _____ (inaudible) I went to all the hearings when they came to L.A., and there was a very powerful presentation. Not from the *nihonjin* but from the *hakujin*, and that made me feel good.

TH: Oh, yeah.

HY: And little by little, the story of what went on was coming out more. Once they understand, it's a dynamite story. It's a powerful story. It's not a Japanese American story. It's an American story.

TH: It's history.

HY: The younger generation has to take hold of it. Run with it. I'm trying to tell them, "You've got to leave it here for them. We owe it to them."

TH: Yeah.

HY: They're not second class citizens. They're first class citizens. Basically, I love talking to young people because many of them know about camps. Not from their parents, their parents won't tell them. One thing is the parents were young during the war, when they were in camp. If they were four, five years old, they know very little about it. I'm at the age where I saw what the Issei went through, and I was just old

enough to be able to feel—yes, I could have felt very angry like a lot of people did, but what would it do for the whole Japanese American community? If I didn't go to these meetings, before I went to camp, I might have thought differently. But, when they came out of that meeting saying that number one, we've got to protect our parents at all costs. They are really people without a country. People had every right to shoot them in the streets if they had to. It's up to us to protect them. Secondly, when the opportunity comes, we got to jump at it to prove that we are loyal, to prove that we are American. So, I think that with those two, and my background, I didn't have to have too much negative people trying to say other things. I know what I had to do. I don't know about you. So, I have no qualms about going into the Army. I had no qualms about what I was doing over there.

TH: I think that's what we should all think, more positive.

HY: Yeah. I hope you can put this into words. It's a powerful story. It's also an American story. And there's a lot of books on the market, of course. You could read a lot and get a lot of insight from a lot of these books. They are very good books.

TH: Okay. Thank you very much.

HY: Say hi to your dad!

END OF INTERVIEW