

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with SAKAE ISHIHARA

Interviewed

By

Tim Carpenter

On November 28, 1995

OH 2425

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

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

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: SAKAE ISHIHARA
INTERVIEWER: Tim Carpenter
DATE: November 28, 1995
LOCATION: Monterey Park, California
PROJECT: Japanese American

- TC: This is an interview with Sakae Ishihara by Tim Carpenter for the Cal State Fullerton history project. The interview is being conducted today, November 28 at here in Monterey Park at Sak's home. This is our second effort on our tape. We just dawned forty-five minutes without recording anything, so we are going to pick it up again and weave into our conversation some of the stuff we missed. Sak, I apologize for the snafu here this morning and for what we didn't get on tape. If we could just cover, for the purpose of transcribing, your family again, your three brothers and two sisters and your mother and father, the spelling of their names and where they fell in your family?
- SI: Okay, the oldest is Sam. The full name is Sam Shimpei, S-h-i-m-p-e-i. And my brother below me is Roy Yoneo, Y-o-n-e-o. And then, my youngest brother is Henry Norio, N-o-r-i-o. And then, I have two sisters, Tokiko, T-o-k-i-k-o, and Mitsuko, M-i-t-s-u-k-o.
- TC: And then, your mother and father's name?
- SI: My mother's name was Ei, E-i, and my dad's name is—oh, my god.
- TC: I stumped you on your sister last time, and now I'm going to stump you on your dad!
- SI: (long pause) He went by the name of Henry, but his Japanese name was Toshi Yuki, T-o-s-h-i Y-u-k-i. Let me check that. I gotta [get] my brother to check that.
- TC: It's okay. Questions get harder.
- SI: Oh, my god. It used to be he was known as Toshi, but—you see, my youngest brother was named after my dad because of Henry. It is interesting how he picked the name. My father picked it because he was an admirer of Henry Ford.

TC: Isn't that interesting. [recording paused] Okay, the technology is now with us.

SI: Then my mother passed away in 1934 in an automobile accident, and I was thirteen years old at the time. So really, my father raised us, except for the fact that my older brother was eight years older than I. We sort of looked at him for advice and guidance because he was closer to us in a sense that he went to school here and graduated high school and that had a more cultural kinship, rather than my father who, to me, was a foreigner in the sense of mannerism and so forth and so on. Well, that's the family.

TC: And your father—we talked earlier a little bit about the seed business he owned.

SI: Oh, yeah. My father was in the seed business, and he had started that in 1930—wait (long pause)—1920. Just before the start of the Depression. I would say about 1928. Between '26 and '28, he started the seed business. And my older brother, who was supposed to go to college after the graduation in 1932, had to go into the business because a friend of ours whom my father had adopted like his older son had committed suicide in Sacramento. He went to visit his girlfriend, who lived in Sacramento, and she refused his hand in marriage so he took his own life, which left my dad with—so my older brother who was ready to go to Rutlands University had to cancel and start working. And that was the sad part because the man who had committed suicide was like a real older brother to us, because he treated us—you know, my father had adopted him—not adopted him, but had taken him as a son.

TC: Wow.

SI: Anyway, I was still young but he treated me [like a younger brother]. We looked up to him. Basically, he had both the old culture with him, because he was born in Japan. But also, he was young enough that he had acquired the American culture along the way, so he was like a bridge.

TC: Now you said your father immigrated in 1913, 1914? When did you say he came over?

SI: Well, actually, he jumped ship. I didn't know this until—in fact, I was in college when I found out that my dad—I think he was working his way in the ship, and he jumped ship in San Francisco. I think it was in San Francisco he jumped ship. So, he was an illegal immigrant, really. He came like what many of the people are doing now. I mean, not many but a number of people. He jumped ship and established permanent residence. And that's when he called my mother over. The wide difference between the age of my older brother and myself is the consequence of that.

TC: And this is, again, 1913, 1914 when your father jumped ship, around that time?

- SI: I would say so, because my brother is, what, eight years younger, which means I was born in 1921. He was born in 1913. So, it must have been in '14 or '15 that he came over.
- TC: How many of your brothers and sisters are alive today?
- SI: There was an older sister that was born, but I think she was stillborn in Japan. That was the firstborn, older than my older brother.
- TC: Sam.
- SI: Yeah. But, as far as the others, well, we are all alive and in pretty good health.
- TC: Have you remained close with your family throughout the years?
- SI: Yeah. My sister makes it a point to try to get together once or twice a year.
- TC: As we get into our interview, we are going to talk lot about your progressive growth and so forth. Do you share that with any of your brothers and sisters, any of your political—
- SI: Well, my youngest sister was involved with me, Misko, and her husband during the Wallace campaign. But, those were the only two, but they weren't in it too deeply, just on the fringe. Just on the fact that I was in there, they became interested.
- TC: So, it was more personal for you?
- SI: Yeah.
- TC: So, your progressive influence, then, as we talked earlier, began to date a little back in high school at in Gardena High School.
- SI: Right.
- TC: We talked about Mr. Myer and Mr. Thompson, your two teachers.
- SI: Geyer.
- TC: Geyer. What were their names again?
- SI: Lee Geyer, G-e-y-e-r.
- TC: Okay, and then the other teacher was—
- SI: Mr. Thomas, Walter Smith—

TC: Walter Smith Thomas. And Geyer, who was your governmental history teacher, later ran for Congress.

SI: He became a Congressman.

TC: Let's talk a little bit about them, their influences on you.

SI: Well, that was the beginning of my inkling of what, in terms of politics—because the teacher that became the Congressman, got involved in the grassroots movement, in the sense of handing out pamphlets, handing out—

TC: So, you just went out there and did it? You went and knocked on doors?

SI: Right, right. And then, my good friend who was really active—in fact, he was appointed to go to West Point, but he couldn't pass the physical because his teeth were out of line. (chuckles)

TC: Only in the military.

[00:10:00]

SI: Yeah. He and I, we were the same age when we were involved. Anyway, the biggest influence was this guy Thomas. He became a class advisor and was my advisor, and I think the last two years in high school really—

TC: What was your graduating class year of high school?

SI: Summer of 1939.

TC: Thirty-nine. So, a lot going on in 1939?

SI: Um-hm.

TC: And what you said earlier with Mr. Thomas, some of the books you remember reading—

SI: Those classes, I remember distinctly those classes. I can't remember the title. He had a trilogy.

TC: What were the contents of these books?

SI: About the America. It was from a liberal standpoint.

TC: This is '39, so I'm wondering is it a Socialist or Communist bent, some of these books?

SI: I think it was Socialist.

TC: Okay. And then, other Socialist you read—you talked earlier—

SI: Okay, like Thomas, I believe, he was a like a Socialist Democrat. He was really, what do you call? Like a Communist. I think he was more of a social Democrat. I think he was disappointed when he found out I joined the Communist Party.

TC: See, we call it more of a progressive, versus a radical. What were some of the other books you remember reading at that time?

SI: Upton Sinclair.

TC: *The Jungle*.

SI: Yeah.

TC: Do you remember any Norman Thomas? Were you reading of the Socialist stuff at that time in high school?

SI: Yeah, I read some of his stuff, but then what happened was, in high school, I became involved with the Young Democrats because of my connections with Geyer and the Democratic Party. There happened to be a Nisei Young Democrats Club in Boyle Heights, and some of the older Nisei, older than I, had set up this during the recall of [Franklin L.] Shaw, mayor of Los Angeles. They had a corrupt police chief, a guy name Horrall—anyway, the big fight in the city of Los Angeles politics in terms of getting rid of the mayor and getting this police chief out, you know.

TC: So, at fifteen, sixteen, you're already active in the Nisei Progressives?

SI: Right.

TC: Or Nisei Democrats.

SI: It was the Japanese American Democratic—Nisei Democratic Club—I can't remember now. But, it was established in Boyle Heights among the young Japanese American, and they were older people. They were five, six, seven years older than I was.

TC: All Nisei?

SI: All Nisei. And one of the leaders was Mollie Mittwer.

TC: Mollie?

- SI: Mittwer. Oyama was her maiden name, but she was married to a guy named Mittwer, and the family was involved. Wesley Oyama—(phone rings)
- TC: Want to get that real quick?
- SI: Sure.
- [recording paused]
- TC: You said the Nisei Democratic Club—
- SI: Oh, yeah, the Japanese American Democratic Club was involved in the election of mayor [Fletcher] Bowron. So, he was the, what do you call it? The reform candidate, Mayor Bowron. And they were instrumental in getting them elected. Well, of course, there was a whole coalition, but that's how I got involved in politics, per se.
- TC: You're fifteen, sixteen at this time.
- SI: Let's see, 1936, '37, about '37, '38, so about sixteen, seventeen.
- TC: And these Nisei that are active in this Democratic Club, they are a minority within the total Japanese American population.
- SI: Oh, yeah.
- TC: Issei aren't even voting, won't vote till the fifties. The Nisei are not very active, and, if they are active, are they active in the Democratic Party?
- SI: They were—well, it's like a fringe movement, but they were active in the Democratic Party, these people.
- TC: Were there Nisei comparable? Were they active in the Republican Party at this time as well?
- SI: Yeah, there were—there were people fighting within the Japanese community. They were fighting guys like John Aiso, one of the first Nisei judges, staunch Republican, and he became head of the language school in Minnesota.
- TC: Were the majority then with the Republicans, the minority with the Democrats? Or was it about 50/50?
- SI: Well, because of the evacuation—this is talking later—because of the evacuation and the roots of the Executive Order—
- TC: Most of them became Republicans! But, at these time, prior to—

- SI: Most of them are conservative. I would say more conservative. In fact, I went to meet with John Aiso, the main speaker, and he had represented—he was an attorney already, and he represented the Manchurian Tobacco Company, which is a Japanese holding company to exploit Manchuria. And he was the legal voice in the States for them. So, we had a big—I can't remember what the meeting was, but he was one of the speakers. And this Japanese American Club went there en masse expose this guy for what he was; a spokesperson for the Japanese imperialist.
- TC: I bet there was a real row at that meeting.
- SI: Yeah, it was really wild. But, the point was, because we were left wingers—just like today—
- TC: A minority within a minority.
- SI: Right. But, it was an interesting conversation, especially when Aiso, you know—so, Aiso, I've always considered an SOB. Well, the fact that he graduated from Hollywood High School as a valedictorian and then so forth. And they had this, what do you call it? Public speaking debate society, and he wasn't accepted—and he won locally, but he wasn't accepted to go to the national because he was Japanese. Even though he was a brilliant guy, he was denied a place in the debating society because he was Japanese. So, you know, it didn't matter how much you tried, how good you were, it had nothing to do with the color. So, I can understand why, now, when looking at it, why he had to take a job for the Japanese company. He couldn't get a job as an attorney with an American firm. I mean, a white firm. And I could understand, because after the war, I ran across a guy when I was in business. He spoke perfect Japanese, and he was an older man. He was an engineer; aircraft engineer. He went to school here, got his degree in aircraft engineering, and couldn't get a job. They wouldn't even talk to him. Went to Japan, got a job with Mitsubishi Industry as an aircraft engineer and helped design the Japanese Zero. So, you say, "Well, god damn, how can you do that?" Right? The point is, his land of birth would not give him an opportunity to do what he was skilled to do. So, when Aiso was on stage, I hated his guts. But, when you think about what he had to go through life, in terms of what you are trying to do. You can understand it now. You know, I'm much more mellow in that sense.
- TC: It happens over time.
- SI: Yeah.
- TC: What do you think, Sak, was going on inside of you that in high school you were open for Geyer and for Thomas to give you—
- SI: I wanted to find out what made everything tick. I was curious to find out why. Why this way? What not this way? You know? I think Thomas had the biggest influence

in terms of opening my eyes. He wouldn't say, "Well, you gotta think this way." Read, read, read, find out for yourself.

[00:20:05]

TC: So, he really gave you the guidance.

SI: The guidance.

TC: And, again, none of your brothers and sisters or your father really shared any of this with you?

SI: No. Okay, my father served in a Japanese Army in the cavalry, the horseman. And it's an interesting, as an anecdote, at home he had a picture of him with his military picture on as a soldier. He had it enlarged.

TC: He was proud of it.

SI: He was proud of the fact that he was Japanese. And when I realized that when I was kid, the prince of Japan had visited the U.S., he went to Gardena to get back on this ship in San Pedro. He had to go down Western Avenue. And all the Japanese school kids, had to come out, and we sat, and my dad was there and a good friend, who happened to be a doctor was there. And the doctor was a reserve officer in the Japanese Imperial Army. My dad was just a regular G.I., right, but he still had that military presence. So, when the prince came by on a motorcade, and all the kids were told, "You got to bow." My old man saluted, the car stopped, and came to talk to him. The prince realized he was a soldier. And then, his good friend, the doctor, he was a major or captain in the reserves, and he was in uniform. He's a doctor in Gardena. That's when I realized that my old man was—I was maybe ten years old. Then the picture meant more to me then. I realized what he was. So, when the war started, I came home from school—it started December seventh, and I took a break. That picture was gone.

TC: Wow.

SI: It's too bad, but I mean, that's who he was. And then, this doctor, December seventh, they FBI picked him up, and he was taken to jail. I think it was a county jail.

TC: So, he was part of the initial round-up.

SI: But, the point is, his wife was a Nisei, an older Nisei woman who was raised in Oakland. And you know, she took him poison because he asked for it to commit suicide in jail.

TC: At the camp?

SI: No, in jail.

TC: Back to the round-up, where the jail is, and that's where he took it.

SI: But see, on December seventh, they picked up more people. Like the fishermen in Terminal Island were picked up that day, Sunday morning. December seventh, the FBI had a list of all the people, the potentials.

TC: Sue remembers one of the people that also had a big impact on her at that time was one of her Japanese teachers. She went to public school and afterwards went to Japanese school, and he was rounded-up at the initial round-up. She later found out he was a Communist. Do you remember any of your schoolteachers rounded-up during this time? You know the fishermen, you know your doctor friend, but do you know of any of the schoolteachers that were being rounded-up at that time?

SI: No.

TC: Okay. Before we get too far into December seventh, Gardena High School graduating class of 1939, and then went on to Davis for cultural school. We talked about it earlier, and let's talk a little bit about that. This is going to be leaving home for the first time, going north to Davis. And why Davis? What was your major there? What were you going to study?

SI: Well, plant physiology or genetics. I hadn't decided. Basically, in the—what do you call? The first two years don't make too much difference. You got to take, uh—

TC: Your general ed.

SI: Right, you got to take your botany, you got to take your zoology, what else was there? Bacteriology. You got to take all of those courses before you can specialize anyway, so it was a general course of agriculture basically. And then, I passed plant physiology. Or botany basically.

TC: And that started in '40? Your first semester in Davis was in 1940?

SI: No, the first semester was 19—no, '40, right.

TC: So then, the following year, December seventh. What do you remember about December seventh being at Davis, away from home?

SI: Like I mentioned, I was living in a private home, just for the room, and it was off campus. On December seventh, this roommate and I were going out into town about half a mile away to have breakfast. And walking down the street, the residential area of Davis, people working the yard were giving us strange looks, both of us. And so I turned to my friend to say, "Hey, George, are we dressed funny or something?" He said, "No, I don't think so." But, we were walking down the street. People were

working on their yards. We didn't realize what had taken place until we got to the restaurant. And the restaurant owner, who happens to be Chinese, invited us back into the kitchen to listen to the radio. That's when we realized that Pearl Harbor had taken place. And then, in the afternoon, there was an assembly at the school. And at that time, Cal Davis had a student body between 1,200 and 1,500. The dean of the school by the name of Dean Ryerson, R-y-e-r-s-o-n, called the assembly, and the first thing he mentioned was the fact that there are a number of Japanese American students at Davis and that they are American citizens, they have rights that we all enjoy, and that he didn't want to hear of any incidents taking place against the Japanese students, either in town or on campus. If any of the students that were involved in such incident were brought to attention, they would be expelled and not again admitted to any University of California campus, and that put any kind of protest that the students might have had in mind to rest. He really stuck to his—and he was very helpful in getting another student and I to stay until we were able to finish that semester before we left the campus.

TC: Again, there were 1,500 students, roughly, at this point of time on campus? And of those, how many are Japanese American?

SI: I would say under a hundred students.

TC: And the letter, that we unfortunately we lost on our first go-round, talk a little bit about that. Whose signature did you find on the letter?

SI: Oh! Because of the fact that the relocation for Yolo County, which Davis is located in, the date that they had set for relocation of Japanese Americans was before the semester ending at Davis, there were two students, myself and another student from Nevada that wanted to stay until the end of the semester. We asked the dean for some help, and because of his relationship with Milton Eisenhower—they were classmates, I think, at the University of Kansas. He wrote to him and, of course, Milton Eisenhower was the first head of the War Relocation Authority who had the authority to either delay or execute the program, which the government had decided. He sent a letter to Dean Ryerson to give to both myself and to this other student, to allow us to finish school and to travel through a restricted area for me to get to Salt Lake, and for him to get to Winnemucca, Nevada.

TC: And your purpose of getting to Salt Lake, as we said earlier, your family had voluntarily left Gardena and had gone to Salt Lake so that they didn't have to go to one of the camps.

[00:30:04]

SI: That's right. Except for my older brother, who stayed behind to finish taking care of the closing of the business.

TC: And unfortunately, Sam got caught up, and he ended up in Arkansas.

- SI: Yeah, he ended up in Rohwer, Utah. R-o-h-w-e-r, I think it is.
- TC: Is that Utah or Arkansas?
- SI: Arkansas, sorry.
- TC: And now, we talked earlier, and if can just recap so we get it on the tape, your movement, now, beginning from Salt Lake, and your efforts to try to get to get enlisted in the military and then ultimately what happen to you in regards to the military?
- SI: After I got to Salt Lake, I worked for a while in construction and then in the nursery business. And then, when the ban on Japanese American being inducted into the Army was lifted, specifically for the organization of 442nd Regimental Combat Team—it was lifted for specific reasons of taking volunteers. They weren't drafted into the 442. When that was lifted, I volunteered for the language of the military intelligence. And after taking their test, I was accepted, and I was to be sent to Minnesota where the school was now transferred from procedural to Camp Savage, Minnesota.
- TC: An interesting turn on your way to Minnesota.
- SI: So, when I was told to report, I reported to Fort Douglas, Utah, and the people didn't know that there was such thing as a military intelligence school to send me to. All they knew was to send me to the Regimental Combat Training Team in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. So, I was sent to Mississippi, where they realized they sent me to the wrong camp, wrong location, and it took a while for them to get the paper processed, so that I can get to Minneapolis school.
- TC: Well, it's the military, Sak. It wasn't _____ (inaudible). So, finally, you made it back up to Minnesota, got your training, and you—
- SI: After finishing school in Minnesota, I was sent to Camp Blanding in Florida for my Army Basic training, and when I finished that, was sent back to Minneapolis. And Camp Savage, at that time, in the meantime, was being moved to Fort Snelling, a permanent Army Base in Minneapolis. And from there, there were twenty of us assigned, which is two teams of a team made-up of ten people. We were transferred to the Army Air Corps. And then we had to take training for Army Air Corps language, so we were sent back down to Orlando, Florida, for training in Japanese language, but in the military and Japanese language so we could understand aircraft, like aileron, wing flap, and so on. So, we spent our training then there, and then were shipped overseas. Our first land was Hollandia, New Guinea
- TC: So, all of this is going to be in the Pacific?
- SI: Pacific.

TC: This is all Japanese Americans? These units of ten that you described are all Japanese Americans?

SI: Right.

TC: All Nisei.

SI: All Nisei.

TC: All Nisei trained then for the purposes of decoding and interrogating prisoners or for developing our own—

SI: Well, actually, we were sent there to interrogate prisoners of war that were captured and interrogate them. If they were Air Force personnel, to interrogate them in their capacity of Air Force pilots or mechanics and then to gain information on their technology and so forth.

TC: And we touched on this a little bit earlier, but, if we can again just a little bit, at this time, as a Japanese American, your brother Sam is at a camp in Arkansas. You're getting wind, now, of the no-no movement at Tule Lake and at Heart Mountain, and the oppositions that is going on within the camps. At the same time, the 442nd is being formed and is fighting. Talk a little bit about your feelings as a Japanese American with all of these things swirling around you, and with your progressive leanings beginning to develop now, starting in high school. What did you think of the no-no movement? And what about you being in the military at this point in time?

SI: Well, my feeling was that the no-no movement in the camp was completely wrong. At the time, I felt that, Look, there's a war effort going on, and there is still a struggle on whether we are going to win this thing or whether we were going to be defeated and get overpowered by the Nazis and the Japanese military. And I felt that the overall picture, even with all the discrimination and that hardships that the Nisei and Japanese and the U.S. was feeling, the overall picture is much more important and had priority over any personal grievance that we might have against the U.S. government. And I felt that strongly that our primary mission was to win this war, and then we could fight for our rights, gain, whatever. And I think it worked out where my thinking was correct, rather than the no-no people who were willing to give in or to disrupt the war effort. And I think that was entirely wrong. But, I wasn't in camp, so I don't know what my feeling might have been if I was in camp. I don't think it would have changed, because there was a liberal movement *in camp* that were fighting these no-no people and they were getting beaten up by some of the right wing elements that were in camp and were being chastised for being traitors to the Japanese people. But, I think there was a greater issue, and they were right in terms of their fighting. Some of them might have been killed if it weren't for the fact that they were whisked out of camp.

- TC: Now define a little bit for us our political terms. What would it mean to be a rightist in the camps? If you were to describe somebody as being *right* in the camp and you were to describe somebody being *left* in the camp, how would you describe?
- SI: Oh, I think the Progressive Movement in the camp wanted to help the war effort, regardless of their own personal indignities and so forth. And the, so-called no-no group, were the ones saying, “We don’t have any rights. We should disrupt the war as much as possible or to create problems to disrupt this drive for unity and the war effort.” It didn’t carry on any physical threat. It was the right threatening people if they didn’t fall in line with it. And, of course, people were beaten-up. Some of them were threatened with their lives and so forth.
- TC: And given the elements within the camp, you’ve got the left and the right and you also got the Japanese American Citizen League folks who were very much under attack within the camps as well so there was a lot going on.
- SI: Yeah, even to the middle road and to the left were really attacked, because the middle road, like the JACL, would say, Hey, look this is the situation. We are in camp. Let’s make the best of it and also, to help the war effort, ask the people to volunteer for the 442 and the language school. And they were attacked for that.
- TC: And weren’t a lot of attacks from the left to the JACL, also, they were being a little too cooperative at that point of time?
- SI: Well, yeah, the reaction to the right considered that the JACL was being too cooperative with the government in terms of getting people to volunteer. Basically, they were trying to disrupt the recruitment of soldiers for the combat team, the Regimental Combat Team and also the language group.
- [00:40:03]
- TC: So, there’s a lot going on in the camps. The progressive part of the camp is, again, the minority?
- SI: I would say—well, yeah, I think so, but I think the majority of the people, even though they were not neutral, you know, the idea of, well, this is the situation. Live with it. You know? But, the right wingers, the young males, the young guys, they had some nationalistic feelings, basically, was what it was. Most of them were called Kibei. They had some education in Japan. And also, the older Niseis that really had a tough time in this country, but they felt so alienated, then the hell with it attitude.
- TC: Did you later have this discussion with the leadership about the no-no movement?
- SI: Um-hm.

TC: So, you had that discussion. Now, we're in the Pacific. You're doing your military work. Where were you on August 6, 1945? Do you remember that day?

SI: August sixth?

TC: Nineteen forty-five.

SI: Oh, I was in an Army base. I was assigned to the Far East Air Force, and we were stationed in Fort Stotsenburg—I can't remember if that's correct—in Manila. It was a U.S. Army Base, which was destroyed during the war, but the Army Air Corps had taken it over as a headquarters. I was in the headquarters in S-2, which was the intelligence section. And I happened to be watching a movie when August sixth—that night, on a loud speaker they called me to report to headquarters right away. I reported, and they said, You are going up to Okinawa. I said, "What for?" They said, You're going to be assigned to the U.S. Navy to do—oh, no, wait. August sixth? Okay, August sixth, when I was watching the movie, they told me to report to headquarters. When I reported to headquarters, they told me I'm going to Taiwan. The following morning—it is Formosa now—because there is a prisoner of war camp there that is holding some remnants of the Bataan March survivors, and I'm to act as interpreter and the guide, whatever and was to fly the following morning, from Manila with the C-47—anyways, Douglas Aircraft, two-engine plane—to bring them back, the more seriously ill to the general hospital in Manila. I said, "Fine." So, the next day, we fly from Formosa into Taipei, _____ (inaudible), where the camp is located. We land on the field, and as we land, we see a Zero being warmed up to take off. And the pilot is refusing the order of the commanding officer who was on the ground. I talked to him and he said, "This guy is crazy. He's going to take off and strafe you guys." So, the pilot radios to an aircraft carrier off the coast of Taiwan, and it happen to be an Australian Navy aircraft carrier. And two British spitfires take off, and they come flying over the field. One comes down to ground level, and buzzes the field. So, I tell him, "If he starts taking off, he's going to be shot. So, I suggest that you tell him to just cut his engines?" Fortunately, he obeyed, cause he realized it's useless because a plane taking off is a dead duck. I mean, you have no maneuverability. So anyway, the one plane is flying overhead making circles. The other one is treetop level buzzing the field. Finally, the Japanese pilot cuts his engine and he gets out and he's crying that he can't die for his emperor. Meantime, the Australian pilot, he lands when he sees that everything is okay, comes over to us and says, "How are you doing, you bloody blokes?" And he's standing on the pilot seat waving to us. We say, "Everything is okay." So, he takes off—

TC: Not to worry.

SI: He takes off, joins his mate up in the air, and the two of them buzz the field, and we hear over the radio, "If you need any more help, just give us a call." I didn't realize at the time, that there was an Australian aircraft carrier off the coast. They came in so soon. Otherwise, we would have been dead ducks. Anyway, we were able to negotiate with the Japanese, in terms of releasing the war prisoners. They know

because they were wired. And then, there's a plane that comes in with a green emblem on it, which is part of the agreement of the peace. Any plane flying now does not have a red rising sun, but the green, which means that they are peace mission. They land, and they tell the commanding officer of the camp that the prisoners—and in fact, the American prisoners have taken over the camp. They are running the camp, now. But, in the meantime, by the time we negotiate how we are going to get the prisoners of war into the—the sick ones into the plane, it's already dark. So, we can't take off because there are no lights on the field and it's quite a flight back to Manila. So, the pilot suggested that we stay. And the commanding officer of the Japanese force said, "Well, we take you into the town. You stay in a hotel." The pilot said, "No way are we going to leave this plane alone. We are going to sleep under the plane wing and keep a watch." This is the treaty not signed. They just agreed to the surrender. There's no peace treaty or anything signed yet.

[recording paused]

TC: We are continuing our interview with Sak on November 28. And Sak, we are here at your home, and it's now five after twelve. And we do have the tape running correctly. We are talking about August sixth, the bombing of Hiroshima. What is going on that day?

SI: August sixth. Wait a minute. That was a bomb, wasn't it? That was a bomb. I'm sorry.

TC: So, the story—

SI: Let me go back a little bit. August sixth, the bombing of Hiroshima, I was working in the intelligence section—this is early in the morning—and I got the radio on because my job, at that time, was with the S-2 section of the intelligence section of the Far East Air Force command. My job, during those months, was to write a newspaper or new report of the bombing action that was taking place the day before, and the mission that was proposed for that day to the general, General George Kenney. It's like a morning briefing that he got every morning from us on what had happened the day before and what was to take place that day. And it was in written form, and we had to give him that report at his breakfast. So, we worked all night on the reports that was coming in from the squadrons and bomb groups and writing it up and giving it to the general. My job was to take that newsletter to the general before his breakfast, and he read it during his breakfast. In August, we were listening to the radio report, and we hear from the Japanese news—I was listening from reports from Japan—and the mention of *genshi bakudan* [atom bomb]. I turned around, and I say, "What the hell is that?" I've never heard that term, *genshi bakudan*. I go to my dictionary, and I try to think, "Oh, my god, it has got to be some kind of atom." And the colonel said, "Yeah, an atom bomb." I said, "What?"

[00:50:26]

TC: So, you had no idea—

SI: I had no concept—

TC: Being in military, you had no idea—

SI: Even in intelligence, I wasn't aware that there was such a thing. Well, the general knew because when I first gave it to him, he said, "Yeah, thank you."

TC: Now, in Japanese, how do you spell that term?

SI: Genshi is the—it's an atom, atom bomb.

TC: And how do you spell that? For transcribing purposes.

SI: (laughs)

TC: Here's a piece of paper. You want to spell that here? Do you have it in your book? Because that's a great term, I want to make sure I get that right. So, that was the first time you even heard the term?

SI: That was the first time I ever heard the term. Let's see, *genshi*. (long pause) *Genshi, genshi*, it's basically a foundation for the lowest or the highest level. (reads out loud from a Japanese dictionary) *Genshi, genshi*—(mumbles)

TC: And how do you spell that?

SI: G-e-n and then s-h-i. It should be *genshi*—that's what's throwing me.

TC: When you were monitoring the Japanese radio, when you heard the term—

SI: Yeah.

TC: Was it panic? When the voice came over, was it in a panic way or was it kind of in a sober way?

SI: In a sober way. I had to ask one of the—in fact, the guy that was in charge of the team. He's an older guy, so I went to him and said, "What the heck is this word." He said, "Atomic." (continues looking for term in the dictionary) *Genshi, genshi, genshi*.

TC: Was that part of your day, to monitor the Japanese radio like that?

SI: Yeah, we would turn it on. Pretty much we would hear some of the propaganda and stuff. Because, in terms of what was happening in Japan, we wanted to know in

- terms of moral and so forth because they would say, such and such bombed in Japan, and we wanted to make sure.
- TC: Was there a lot of counter intelligence going on?
- SI: Oh, yeah.
- TC: They knew you were monitoring the radio so in turn they would also backchannel you the other way? So a lot of that game going back and forth?
- SI: Anyway.
- TC: Let me get back to the transcript. Gen—
- SI: Gen, G-e-n, *genshi*.
- TC: So, you're here this term, the general dismisses you, you go back to your men and say, "What's going on here? What does this mean?"
- SI: Right. Then the one in Nagasaki dropped two days later. And then, the Japanese agreed to surrender terms sometime within a week, I think.
- TC: And that was the story we ended on, on the other side of the tape.
- SI: That was the story—the day after the thing was agreed upon we had to get those—because of the point of MacArthur's attitude about the Bataan Marches, right? He wanted to make sure that was a top priority of taking care of these guys.
- TC: Get them back.
- SI: Yeah, get them back. Anyway, so I'm at this air base, and by the time the agreement is made—because we had to get transportation, you know. The camp was quite a ways from the airfield, and I had to requisition trucks and so forth because they were on stretchers, this guys. So, we finally make the arrangements, and we agreed that the following morning—because it's dark now. So, we spend the night there wondering if we are going to get attacked or not, and the only guy who has a weapon is a pilot. He's got a .45. (laughs) And it's an unarmed cargo plane. You know, it's got two engines, but that's it. There's no guns, nothing. I don't have a gun. You're wide open. So, it was kind of scary. Half of us were sleeping, trying to sleep, the other half keeping an eye for any strange noise.
- Anyway, morning comes, we finally get the stretchers onto the ship, and we are ready to take off. And the ship is loaded—because there's only one of us there; one ship. And beside the pilot and the co-pilot, and myself, there's a doctor that's onboard that came with us. And then there is prisoner of war doctor who took the Bataan March with the rest of them. What is interesting, when he gets on the ship, he look at me, he takes a double-take, wonders what the heck I'm doing on the ship.

Anyways, he doesn't say anything. Once we got in the plane, the pilot says, "Everybody that is able, come forward to the cabin as close as you can to me." It's a short runway, and it's a fighter plane airfield. They don't need a long runway. And we are in a cargo plane, and we are loaded. So, I turned to the pilot and I said, "Look, you think you can get us out?" He said, "Well, I'm going to try." I said, "Oh, my."

[01:00:03]

TC: Just what I needed to hear. (laughs)

SI: Anyway, he runs-up the engine, and he puts it in full power, with his breaks on, and it's is squealing. And it's moving slowly, but he is not going to release it until it's full power. Finally, he releases and we make it off, and make it to Manila. That is a story in itself. Anyway, in the meantime, on the flight from Manila, the Army doctor, the captain—and you could tell he's from the old period that would use camping gear, because the way that he uses his insignia on his uniform, he still had the old uniform on. And the way the insignia was put on to the collar—not on the shoulder—you realize that this guy has been out of touch. But, he's curious about me. Finally, he opens up, and he asked me, "You're Japanese?" I said, "Yeah." So, he gets to asking about where I was born, my education. _____ (inaudible). "Yeah. (laughs) Except I look like I'm a Japanese." He said, "Yeah, but I'm really glad to see." I said, "I'm really glad to see you captain. You're going to have a nice welcome." He said, "Yeah, it's about time." You know, it was really sad, in a way, to see the prisoners of war—they are kept from all the information. He doesn't know what the hell is going on.

TC: How long was he down there?

SI: He was there—well, 1941, December—no, they were—they got the Bataan March in January so it's '42 to the end of '45. Forty-five in August. Two, three years.

TC: Three years.

SI: Over three years. And then some of the sick ones were in really bad shape. But I was so busy in that period, because right after that I'm called in again, and they send me to Okinawa to join the Navy taskforce. Oh, by then—the middle of August—

TC: The formal surrender still has not taken place yet.

SI: No, the formal surrender has not taken place yet but to make sure that they agree to the conditions of the surrender the islands between Okinawa and Japan are fortified because they know the Americans are going to come up from Okinawa to Kyushu [Japan] toward the mainland, you know, to make the landing. So, all the islands from Okinawa north—they would call Amami-Oshima Chain is fortified by the Navy to stop or hinder, disrupt the invasion fleet. So, we had to make sure that all the anti-aircraft guns and installations are dismantled. So, that's what I'm sent out to do

with a company of Marines, two destroyers, and the landing ship filled with the Marines and equipment. So, we go off, and I'm assigned to the Navy now. We go and we get to, Amami-Oshima, which is one of the biggest islands between Japan and Okinawa, and there is a Naval installation there in charge the navy. And then the city, Amami-Shi, which is Amami city of Amami-Oshima, it's in a little cove. To the south of it there's another island maybe three or four miles wide, and there's a channel in there, like a safe cove. We go in there, and the landing ship goes down to the beach, opens-up the front, and we get on the Jeep. We go into this town, which is a fishing village. It must have been, oh, maybe 10,000 people. It's on a hillside and not a mountain. The mountain comes right down to the ocean and the flat area is the city and nobody—women and children—it's no one in sight. We would go through the town—my god. And then, there's an Air Force captain with me that he is in charge of his group, which is me. (chuckles)

TC: Keeping an eye on you.

SI: He said, "What's going on over here?" I said, "I don't know. There's nobody here." Just the Navy personnel was there, the Navy officer—anyway, our mission is there is an AA [anti-aircraft] gun on top of the hill. We have to see that that thing is dismantled. So, this Marine sergeant and I have to go up with this Japanese Navy guy to locate the walk to the gun, to make sure it's disarmed. Well, this Japanese Navy guy wants to show the Americans that he's in top shape. He trots up that damn thing. This Marine sergeant, he's not going to take it. He trots with him. And I'm behind—(chuckles)—"Guys!" And the sergeant says, "Come on! You can't let this son of a bitch"—you know, in English, to me he said, "—son of a bitch beat us." I said, "Yeah, I know what you're trying to do. I'll keep up, just keep going."

TC: I'll be there.

SI: (laughs) We get to the top, and the AA gun is dismantled. From the breach, the head, you close the thing when you put your shell in and you close it. That's all removed, but the gun is intact. So, the Marine has _____ (inaudible) grenade with him, so he pulls it and puts it in the breach. That melts the metal. Well, now you can't use it, regardless if you get that head back in there. So, that's what we had to do. We made sure that this is destroyed. So, on the way down—this is after several miles of damn climbing, right. I tell him, I says, "How did you get that thing up?" The path is about this wide. "We carried it on our backs. Piecemeal." You know, any guns, there not a small thing. It's like a cannon. Piecemeal up that damn hill. You know, in wartime, you do things that you just can't do. Anyway, what the interesting thing is, we get back, and the Marine sergeant has a camera with him because he wants physical proof, evidence that this is being done. So, he has to get back onto the destroyer, and this Japanese Navy guy is with us. We climb up that ladder, but the equipment has to be pulled up by ropes, cameras, and so forth. So, the first thing is the film case that he's taken, right. So, the Japanese man says, "Oh, let me do it for you." He ties the knot. The Sailor up there is pulling it up. Halfway there—

TC: Accidentally fell.

SI: I mean, he did it on purpose. The Marine sergeant was ready to kill this Japanese guy. So, he's bowing, saying, "I'm sorry," tying a knot. And I said, "You son of a bitch," in Japanese. "You did that on purpose." And I tell this other guy, "This guy"—he said, "Yeah, I'm going to kill this guy." (laughs) "Wait a minute. Take it easy." So, you know, they still—

TC: Till the end.

SI: Till the end—

TC: The defiance.

SI: You know, he's a Navy officer in the Japanese Imperial Navy, and he's going to do everything to sabotage what we were trying to do, right? So, I told him, "You pull that shit again, I'm going to let him kill you."

TC: I'm trying to make myself clear. (chuckles)

SI: And it didn't bother him. He is going to die for the emperor, right? So, it was scary in the sense that we could walk in, and there was nobody. But the next day, the following morning, the captain called me. He said, "Come look." We get on the deck of the ship and we look up, and down the hill, women and children—

TC: Coming out.

[01:09:46]

SI: Coming out. You know, so finally I get to one of the—I don't know if he's the mayor—but he's some big honcho. I says, "How come you ran away?" He says, "We were told that the Americans were barbarians. They kill children, rape women." Right? I said, "No, look at me. I'm Japanese like you, but I was born in America," so on, so on, "And I'm here to see that everything is okay." He said, "Yeah, when they told us there was a Japanese with the Americans, we realized they couldn't hurt us." And then the Sailors and the Marines, you know, they're like kids. They are playing with them in the sand, you know. By the time we were leaving, my god, they wanted to come with us. And then, the amazing thing I saw there was because of the Naval base, in one of the coves, hundreds of speedboats just lines up. I said, "What the heck is that?" And some of the Sailors, once they got into bay, you know, they had nothing to do, just to make sure that everything was okay and that we were protected. So, they were taking those boats and having races with them. But, the amazing thing was that when the boats started power, they would go a stern to get up. Like this.

TC: Almost straight up.

SI: The front end was empty, there was an open space in the front, in the bow. And I wondered what the heck was going on. I finally asked him, and he said, "That's where we were going to put the bombs." And they were suicide boats. You see, as the American fleet was coming up Japan, an invasion fleet, they had to have transports, right, to transport the troops. These were suicide boats, loaded with torpedoes bombs to smash it. They were small. You are talking about from here to there—the length—it's a speedboat. They could outmaneuver anything that they were shooting. Sure, most of them would get hit and destroyed, but some of them would get through. And some of them hit the strike force and sink them with troops aboard the ship. There were hundreds of them. It's amazing. I saw this whole cove just filled with this. And that was their mission; that was our mission.

TC: To the end, they were ready. Now, with the formal surrender—

SI: Then what happened was when we were there a typhoon came, and we were delayed in our mission for about three days because we were in a typhoon that hit that area. The typhoon destroyed all the supplies in Okinawa that was going to be used for the invasion of Japan. So, in a way, that surrender came just in time, because had the Japanese known after that, they may not have surrendered because of the fact that they knew that the Americans had enough supplies to invade Japan. But, when I got back to Okinawa, tankers and ships were on the beach. The typhoon blew them like toys. Anyway, that's beside the point. So, we still hadn't finished because Amami-Oshima, the southern end of the island changed. There were a few other islands. And one of the islands I landed on was a small village. No military presence at all.

TC: No guns?

SI: Not bigger than maybe four acres of land. But, it was a fishing village, and the only communication they got was maybe twice a year from the mainland of Japan, mail and so forth. Other than that, they had no connection. And those people, when we were getting on shore, they came to greet us. There was no military presence, so they weren't afraid of the Americans. And the reason we were there, there was a report that a Navy ship—I mean, Navy plane making a raid to Japan, coming back, one of the plane developed engine problem. And the guy and the pilot had to parachute, bailout out of the ship. The remaining pilots that saw it, said that there was a parachute that opened up and saw the guy go down at this location, which was this island. So, the Navy wanted to know if the people on the island had seen, and what had happen to the pilot. So, I talk to a couple of people there, and they said, No, no, I didn't know anything about it. We were basing it on an observation of another pilot. He could have got it wrong, you know.

TC: Sure.

SI: So, I didn't think anything of it. I made the report, and we got back on ship. We lost one duck, landing craft. It's like a Jeep—bigger than a Jeep—that it would go on water and land. Because this is coral, and we had two of them to land. I was on one.

The other one hit the coral and started to sink. They lost it. We were able to rescue the guy, but it was a treacherous island. I don't know why we ever went. When they told me what the reason was—and then villagers were very friendly. They have a hot spring there. They said, Why don't you guys enjoy the hot spring? I said, "No, we got work to do." You know, we got to get back. So, when we got back, they wanted to come with us, back on the ship. The kids, especially, wanted to get on the ship. And this one old lady I talked to, she says, "No." All right, so we just took off. And the interesting part of this is that about two years ago, I'd seen an article on the *L.A. Times*—

TC: Two years ago in like '92 or '93? Oh, okay.

SI: The article was saying that there is this woman is on her deathbed, but she wants the American family, Sailor's family, that landed there—that he was injured, but that he died from his injuries—to know that she gave him, not a Christian burial but burial services and that he's buried on that island. And then, she mentioned the fact that right after the war, there was an interpreter there, and I told him that nothing had happen and she wants to apologize.

TC: And you found it on the paper?

SI: I found it in the paper. I should have cut it up. I said, "My god, it was true. The guy landed."

TC: Isn't that amazing?

SI: It's amazing.

TC: Is that then your last reconnaissance, your last mission, or are you back—

SI: No, then—what the heck was it? Then we finished that—I finished that mission.
[recording paused]

TC: So, now we're in late August or early September of '45.

SI: Right. I get back to Okinawa. I see the devastation of the typhoon. Then the surrender is in September. But, between the times of August—we were island hopping and checking all these other installations. Anyway, by the time I get back to my headquarters in Manila, my group has gone up to Tokyo.

TC: This is your team of ten interpreters?

[01:19:00]

SI: Well, what happened was, when the war ended in Europe, they began discharging service personnel by a point system. In other words, overseas, you got two points a

month. Two points every month that you served overseas. If you're in the States, you only got one point per month. I was the only mainlander within this group of twenty guys that were there. No, there's another guy there. There was one guy from Oakland, and myself, we were the only two mainland people there. The rest were from Hawaii. They came to the language school in Minnesota. We graduated together, trained together, so forth. Anyways, those guys, when they came to the States from Hawaii, for every month they served they got two points in the States because this is overseas from Hawaii. (chuckles) For us, this guy from Oakland and myself, we only got one point for the time we served. That's the military.

Anyway, when the European war ended, the point system was put in so that the guys that served the longest and overseas got out first, which makes sense, and is logical so it's fair for everyone. So, what happened was, we're still on Manila because the war in Japan is still going on. Instead of the military asking for exemption, because of the need for the language people, he said, "Okay, you guys have enough points to go home." So, they sent all of the Hawaiian people home. They had enough points of the two point system that they were working. Of course, they got two points for being overseas like we did, like I did. In New Guinea and the Philippines, you got two points per month. Anyway, because of the fact that they spent over a year in the States, instead of having twelve points, they had twenty-four points. Right? I don't know at what point they were letting them go, the highest point, but they got to go home.

TC: A little bit more work for you guys, right?

SI: So, just two of us left in the Air Corps in the language division. The war ends, tremendous amount of work. So, I was running ragged. I was being assigned to the 20th Air Force, which is in Okinawa. Then I was assigned to the Navy, (chuckles) temporary duty. By the time I get back to my own headquarters, my unit, the S-2 unit, of Far East Air Force had established headquarters in Tokyo. So, now, I go back, I get to Tokyo, but I'm there—the surrender is in September—I think the first part of September. I can't remember. So, I'm about a week or ten days late. I get to Tokyo, and I'm assigned to this one captain, and I say, "Well, what's the job duty?" He says, "Well,"—oh, in the meantime—this is going back some. But the point was, they wanted language people with the Air Force, so they could translate equipment and documents captured on planes because we were knowledgeable in the Japanese language of the Air Corps personnel. But the overall intelligence responsibility was GHQ with MacArthur's headquarters, where the major Japanese language translation was taking place. It was known as military intelligence service run by a colonel, a full colonel who ran the operation for MacArthur. Now, in order for him to make a one star, you got to have so many people under you. So, he wanted control of the military intelligence people that was with the Air Corps. Well, the Air Corps was part of the Army at that time. It wasn't an Air Force, a separate unit.

TC: Per se.

SI: Per se. Okay, I was still in the Army, U.S. Army but part of the Air Corps. They did a branch of the Army. In order for him to get a one-star, he had to have more people, and he wanted to control over the Air Corps intelligence. Not the Air Corps, just the Air Corps intelligence. And the general of the Air Corps as a three-star general, he said, “No way you’re going to have control over my intelligence.” My S-2, who is a brigadier, has control over the S-2. Not MIS, not this colonel. Because the S-2 guy was a one-star general, my boss. So, there’s that political fighting. But the bad part was, when an area is control or taking back, the Army is the guys who go in and control the area, right? They take an airfield. It’s not the Air Corps guys that take the airfield. It’s the military, the first Calvary, or the division that is fighting it. Right? Because the ground troops, they had to take the ground. So, what happened was, the order was not to let the air corps intelligence in there. We were kept off of our job—doing our job because the guy—I mean, it’s the politics. You know, they figured, if the Air Corps wants the information, they have to come to us. They might not know how to translate the damn thing, but they didn’t care. You know, you see all the politics going on and you say, “What the hell are we fighting?”

The same thing happened in New Guinea. This is going back again. MacArthur had his wife and son with him, and he came in from Australia to New Guinea to Philippines. He always had his family with him. Now, New Guinea is a jungle, hot, sticky, rains every day. The dirt turns to mud, and an hour later it’s turned back to dust again. And in the jungle, worse. Anyway, at Hollandia, where his headquarters was at, where we were stationed, there’s a mountain—like the San Gabriel Mountains—high enough that it gets cooler up there, right. So, he had a company of engineers build a road to the top of that mountain, before he builds a house, so his wife and children, his son, could live in comfort. This is in the middle of the war, now. This is in 1943, ’44. So, the captain that is in charge of this company of engineers gets so pissed off, he tells everybody, “This son of a bitch shouldn’t be the general. We are fighting a war for our lives, and he’s willing to spend a company of engineering equipment to build a road for himself and his wife. A bunch of bullshit.” You know, he got transferred the next day to the front.

TC: He was gone.

SI: He’s gone. In wartime, a general has life and death _____ (inaudible).

TC: What do you think these experiences would later play in your progressive development, Sak?

SI: In Japan?

TC: Yeah, these war experiences when you got back to the States. How would they play themselves—

SI: Another interesting thing is—okay, when the war ended, Japan had to pay reparations to Philippines. Not only Philippines but China, so forth, so on. And there was a newspaper guy that worked for *Stars and Stripes* by the name Ruben—

TC: *Stars and Strips* is a military newspaper?

SI: This is a military paper. *Stars and Strips* of the Pacific edition. He was a columnist, and he happened to be a communist from New York. The University of Japan, Todai University, Imperial University had an atom smasher. You know, they are working on atoms like everybody else.

TC: Sure.

SI: Right? They had an atom smasher in the school. Now, at that time, U.S. didn't want anyone else to have the atom bomb because once they figure the secret, they could build the atom bomb, right? Same thing is happening, in terms of, Iran and so forth. Any, so he wrote an article—no, this is after it happened. So, when occupation troops took Japan, they immediately went to the Imperial University, took the atom smasher and dumped it in the bay of Yokohama. Cause they didn't want Japan to have an atom smasher. Okay, so Ruben learned about it. He wrote a column saying that what the hell is wrong with us? Why can't we use that? Because the Japanese were part of building a University of Manila, because the University of Manila was smashed to the ground by the Japanese. As part of the rebuilding process of the University of Manila, in their chemistry or physics department—

TC: Peaceful atoms.

SI: Right, that kind of thing. MacArthur saw it, calls him in, this guy Ruben, into his office. You know, you don't call a sergeant. A general doesn't deal with sergeants, right? Calls him into the office and says, "You're through." Next day shipped him right back to Okinawa.

[01:30:06]

TC: Period.

SI: Period.

TC: These kinds of instances, what kind of impact did they have on you?

SI: Well, it was funny. In the meantime, during the time I was in Manila, in the Philippines, a friend of mine—I met him in New Guinea, and he happened to be a Communist. He knew friends from New York and so forth. And in Manila, we had a little cell _____ (inaudible) going. We used to meet maybe once a month: majors, captains, lieutenants, and a few left wing enlisted men like myself.

TC: Is this ten, fifteen, twenty? How many of them were there?

SI: I would say maybe ten at the most.

TC: So, it was very covert?

SI: Yeah—no, it wasn't covert, but _____ (inaudible). They must have been aware of it. I'll give you an idea of how they must have been aware of it. Anyway, we had this small gathering, like a discussion group. We would discuss world events and so forth. In fact, a major was from New York. Anyway, I can't remember all their names. There was at the most ten. This is within the Far East Air Force Headquarters the major worked for. I can't remember. I was the only one in intelligence. But, there was no secret in terms of trying to disrupt. We were more of getting the war over with, right? We wanted to help and how we could help. But, in the meantime, we were having these discussions about world events and so forth. It was more like a sewing circle. You get with the guys with same ideas. Anyway, the reason I think they were quite aware of it was, once I got to Japan, I got in touch with the Communist Party of Japan. They were still in prison, and they didn't get released when the occupation troops got in. MacArthur didn't want to do that. By the time I got there, and about a week later, they finally released all the Communist leaders that were imprisoned by the Japanese government. Political prisoners were supposed to be released when the war ended. But no, not MacArthur. He kept them.

TC: Is this dozens or hundreds?

SI: I would say, maybe fifty or a hundred. Women, children—well, most of the key guys were still kept. Like Sano—no, not Sano. Shega, he was the editor of the *Red Flag*. He was the editor. And Nosaka—not Nosaka. God dammit, what was it? The chairman? He was in Okinawa, he was the chairman of the Communist Party, and he was put in a cell. He knew when the war was coming to an end because they were treated him better. He was in a cell that was next to the ocean. High tide, his cell would have water three feet deep. Really torture. I mean, years of it. And this guy, Katayama's wife was also involved in it. Anyway, they came out. So, I used to visit them. They established a headquarters in the western part of Tokyo. So, this captain I'm working for, when he first came to me, he said, "Well, not much you can do. Just put in the time. Whatever you want to do. By the way," he says, "here's the key to my Jeep. You can have the Jeep." So, I had a use of a Jeep—and I'm only a sergeant—to roam Tokyo, and I used to use that to go to the Communist Party headquarters during the day. I'm supposed to be working; I'm over there.

TC: I think it's safe to say a lot of your progressive roots are taking shape in Japan near the end of the war.

SI: More or less, in terms of what these guys went through. And somebody that believed it. They were willing to give their life to the idea. Anyway, one day, I'm at the Communist Party headquarters, and it's a two-story building. The chairman and the editor of the paper were on the second floor. When you look out the window, you can see the front where the street is. One day I was talking to them, discussing things—

[recording paused]

- TC: We are continuing our interview with Sak. It's still November 28, and it is five minutes to one. We are very excited. We got the tape rolling now. And Sak, you were just talking about going to the Communist Party office in Southern Tokyo and looking over the banister.
- SI: Yeah, and there happened to be a lieutenant checking my Jeep and taking the number down. I said, "Oh, oh. Must be from the CIC," the Counterintelligence Corps because they were keeping an eye on those guys. I mean, sure they are free and democracy is going to be established and so forth. Well, so, I said, "They must be aware—" that the Jeep is registered to someone or given to someone. But, it's registered. So I said, "Oh." Nothing came of it, but I'm quite sure that we were under surveillance.
- TC: The dossier was beginning.
- SI: Yeah.
- TC: And then, the interesting thing was, when I got to Tokyo, the general in charge of S-2 came—because under him, maybe fifty people working for him doing the intelligence gathering, compiling information, and writing the newsletter, so forth. Well, that ended when the war ended. The general doesn't need the newsletter of what the hell happened yesterday, what is going to happen tomorrow, or the bombing raid, so we broke up. But still, the S-2 section remained—I mean, the intelligence section. So, he gathers us around. "Now," he says, "Our job is not reporting war or figuring out the intelligence of the enemy. We are getting ready for the next one." So I looked at him and said—thinking to myself, What the hell are you talking about? We just finished the war.
- TC: I'm going home.
- SI: Yeah, and now I want to go home. He says, "Get ready for the next big one. You know the enemy is the Soviet Union." They were already planning a war with the Soviet Union, and the Russian troops were in Tokyo with the occupation force. But, he was warning us to be careful. Our enemy now is the Soviet Union. Period. We are going to fight them. Period. This guy is a West Point general.
- TC: And what were you thinking?
- SI: Oh, my god, all these guys think about is fighting and their ideological strength goes right down, you know—in fact, in April when Roosevelt died, same thing. I was listening to the radio, the U.S. came. And within our group, the major was in immediate charge of the operation. And there was a captain and lieutenant and then a second lieutenant. Nice guy, real nice guy. The second lieutenant was a real nice guy. He was a Jewish guy from Brooklyn, New York. And I kept wondering, I

asked, “How come they promote everyone else but you?” He said, “Don’t you know?” I said, “No, why?” “Cause I’m a Jew.” I says, “Well.” And he was right. Oh, good example was that morning when Roosevelt died, everybody office, the major, all the guys were just really—and then we had a WAC [Women’s Army Corps] lieutenant, nice woman. Anyway, they were all sick. You know, really—

[01:40:04]

TC: Emotionally sick.

SI: Emotionally sick, saddened that Roosevelt had died. The fucking general, this one-star general comes walking in with two bottles of whiskey. He says, “Join me in a celebration,” to this whole group of maybe fifty people. We look at each other and say, “What—” My thing was, “What the hell is this guy—a president dies, and he says, ‘Let’s celebrate?’” The same guy said that we were fighting the Soviet Union. And as a major, he was a really quiet guy, but he was sick. He said, “Don’t listen to that bastard.”

TC: As Japanese American, what do you think of Roosevelt? Did you think of internment camps or anything at that time, or was it just as a fallen leader of the United States?

SI: Well, I figured, you know, sure, he’s a politician, but he saved this country in 1932 by saving the capitalist system by what he did, closing the banks, right? Stopping the hemorrhaging. He saved the system, and those guys are out to kill him yet. He saved the system of capitalism when he did that, but the wealthy capitalist were ready to hang him, right. They were for Hoover. They were saved by Roosevelt’s policy but were still willing to assassinate him or whatever is necessary to get rid of him because of his socialist system, you know, social security, taking the people off—giving them WPA [Works Progress Administration]. One of the biggest examples of how he saved this country.

TC: Sure. But, as a young man, as a Japanese American, you really weren’t at that point in time, blaming him for the camps or anything?

TC: Oh, no. I figured, look, I can understand the political climate that existed. Oh, I didn’t agree with him, and I didn’t like it, personally, but I could see his total picture in terms of the world, in terms of what this country shots for, and what these guys, nuts like Togo and Hitler and Mussolini stood for and what they wanted from this world to make this world into. I understood that and what he was fighting for. Even Churchill, he was actually an SOB, but the point was that’s the system that they are working with. It’s better than what Togo, Hitler, Mussolini could offer you.

TC: Now, wasn’t that opinion in the minority of the Nisei at that point of time?

SI: I think so. In a way, right, because I still fought the Nisei. And like the JACL, they’re so narrow in their concept. And this is our problem with our politics today.

- It's so narrow. You know, like Gingrich or Dole appealing to the worst elements, not thinking in terms of the hope of the future, of the bright side of what this could be and what it is.
- TC: So, your fight, as a young man, are fighting the JACL who are cooperating to put people into the camps and those who are also fighting the camps at the same time. You are in the middle of that crossfire that is going on.
- SI: Yeah.
- TC: You're a real minority in this point in time.
- SI: I'm still a minority. (chuckles)
- TC: It hasn't changed, has it?
- SI: No.
- TC: Now, with the ending of the war, you're discharged in late '45, early '46?
- SI: Discharged in '46.
- TC: So, let's trace now a little bit if we can. Sak, you returned back to the States now. The Japanese American community is spread-out throughout the country. The camps have been broken down. A hundred thousand Japanese are making their way back to California, but, at the same time, are being spread out. It's 1946. You've had this incredible war experience. Your progressive roots have really sprouted now. I mean, you have all this experience with the Communist Party in Japan. You experienced the discussion groups with your friends in the military that are pro-Soviet at this point in time, and all starts again with your high school upbringing. You return in '46. What do you do? Where do you go?
- SI: (laughs) Good question. Well, when I left Japan, the chairman, Tokuda, Chairman Tokuda.
- TC: Of?
- SI: He was the political prisoner—he was the first chairman of the Communist Party after the war. Real, nice, gentle man. Man, I never saw—with all his experience, I said, “My god, how could he be so gentle?” With kids, with women—I mean, he was almost like God-like.
- TC: Tokoto?
- SI: Tokuda.

TC: How do you spell that?

SI: T-o-k-u-d-a. Tokuda! Anyway, when I left, I saw him, and he said, “Take a message to the Communist Party of the United States. Best wishes and that _____ (inaudible) struggle to _____ (inaudible) democratic world. So, I had to get in touch with—I wasn’t a member of the Communist Party.

TC: Pretty profound moment for you in your life to have this kind of exchange with a leader.

SI: Yeah. And so, I get back, and I don’t know how to get in touch with the Communist Party. Jesus Christ, I’m not a member. So, there’s this friend of mine, you know, that I met in New Guinea. He said, “Go see so and so, and he’ll get in touch.”

TC: Do you remember this friend’s name from New Guinea?

SI: Steve _____ (inaudible). He’s passed away.

TC: So, Steve said, “This is the path?”

SI: Yeah. Anyway, so I get discharged in Salt Lake City because that’s where my home was at the time, and I decide, well, I’ll come to California. At the same time, this friend of mine who was in high school involved in the Geyer campaign—

TC: Your high school buddy?

SI: Yeah. This sergeant, he comes to Salt Lake with me. I said, “Hey, I’ve got to find a place to stay in Southern California.” He said, “Well, stay with me”—at his mother’s house. I said, “Okay.”

TC: And what was his name again? I’m sorry.

SI: My friend Adam.

TC: Adams.

SI: Adam, with no S. Anyway, so I get here, and I get in touch with this friend that Steve has recommended. He lived in L.A. So, I come up here and associate with him, and he gets me in touch with the chairman of the Communist Party in Los Angeles. I give the message and that’s it, you know. Then one of the New York people, from the Communist Party on the central committee is visiting L.A., and I meet him. And I convey the message. And then, I make a point with him, I said, “You know, the Communist Party in the Second World War, when the war started, agreed to the relocation program—I mean, of taking people off of the streets into camps. The party itself, and I think there was a mistake, in retrospect, that you should have stood-up for the rights, you know, civil rights. We were American.” He said, “Yeah, I’ll take it

- back to the Central Committee.” They never said a word, never said there was a mistake, never. Because, see, now that I know what the Communist Party was, now that I knew that there was control by Moscow’s money. Right?
- TC: Sure.
- SI: In terms of what they were doing, the Soviet Union was fighting for its life.
- TC: And survival.
- SI: And survival, right! So, anything to help the Soviet Union was their primary—let me see. Sure, they are Americans, but at the time, their priorities was *first* the salvation or the existence of the Soviet Union.
- [01:50:04]
- TC: Above all else.
- SI: Yeah, above all. Which I found out later with Czechoslovakia—
- TC: Hungary.
- SI: Hungary, you know. That’s when my disillusionment came. The point is, looking at it now, you can understand why they never acknowledge the fact that they made a mistake.
- TC: Did you remain—well, we are going to talk about your activities—you then broke in the early sixties, late sixties? When did you break with the Communist Party yourself?
- SI: I think that Czechoslovakia and Hungary cooled me off completely, and I just drifted away.
- TC: So, from ’46 through early the early sixties you remained fairly active?
- SI: Yeah, and I think I was called before the committee—House Un-American Activities Committee [HUAC] with Walters of Pennsylvania. Representative Walter, he chaired the committee here in Los Angeles.
- TC: Conducted the hearing out here.
- SI: Representative Walter, that’s right.
- TC: And when was that, Sak? Early fifties or mid-fifties?
- SI: It must have been mid-fifties.

TC: And did you plead the Fifth for the most part?

SI: Fortunately—what happened at that hearing was, when I got the summons, I was working as a printer. It must have been mid-fifties. I was working in a print shop. I was a line and type operator. The foreman comes in and says, “The FBI is here and want to talk to you.” I go up there, and he says, “Here’s a summons.”

TC: Have a nice day.

SI: Right in front of the foreman. The foreman is a real conservative SOB. Anyway, I look at it, and I remember the union. Now, I’m a full-fledged international-type of union member, right. And so was this foreman. I look at it and I says, “I’m summoned, right?” Cause that’s never happened. So, I go get an attorney. So, first thing I do, I call Frank Chuman. He became or was the president of JACL.

TC: He’s going to be your Congressional candidate.

SI: Huh?

TC: He’s the Congressional candidate. Doesn’t he ultimately run for Congress in the Roybal race?

SI: No, no.

TC: Okay. I thought he was a candidate that ran in the primary.

SI: He’s an attorney, active in the JACL. He became president of the JACL at one period in time. Anyway, so I say—and he’s a member of the Young Democrats. We have a Nisei Young Democrats set-up again. And he’s also a member; I’m a member. So I go up to him, make an appointment, and go up to see him. You know, when I showed him that, he gets off his chair and walks out of the room.

TC: That was the end of that.

SI: Scared shitless.

TC: Thanks, Frank. (laughs) So, did you end up going to the ACLU? Or where did you go?

SI: Yeah, so I was active in the Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, which was considered a left wing movement, you know, Communist dominate. I go there, and they say, Why don’t you get [A.L.] Wirin who is part of the ACLU? So, I go into his office, he says, “Yeah, ain’t no big deal.” I said, “No, it’s not a big deal, but still I got to have an attorney.” He said, “You’re right. You know, you take the Fifth. All they want is information from you to get somebody else.”

TC: Snitch on somebody else.

SI: Yeah. So anyway, the hearing comes, and it's in the afternoon. Well, it drags on, you know, these damn things because they have people just lined-up like an assembly line to testify. So, I wait and wait and wait. And all of the other guys are already—and then the—and it's interesting, I find out why these guys wanted to do it within a certain period of time. Newspaper. Newspapers published, printed a tonight. The *Herald Express* was an evening paper, so they had to get the news at a certain time, right?

TC: Sure.

SI: Otherwise, it doesn't get in the news and tomorrow is a day old. So, they get all the important people before, so it gets them into the news. You know, TV and the newspaper. Especially newspaper before the following day. Well, by the time they get to me, the deadline has passed for the newspaper, right? (chuckles) I didn't realize at the time. So, they call me in—and the first thing that this goddamn Walter says. He looks at my record, of course. He said, "Oh, you got a nice war record," so forth. And he says, "My good friend Frank Chuman." I says, "Yes, I know Frank." This is the guy that walked out. (chuckles) Anyway, so he asked me a few questions, and the information that they had on me is by an informant in the Communist Party. I didn't realize it at the time. I mean, I knew he was an informant, and thinking about it afterwards—we were involved in some committee at one time. He had a liquor store in the Echo Park area.

TC: This is the informant?

SI: The informant. I walk in one day from work—I walk in a print shop near there so I just happen to say hello to talk to him about something, and I see two guys in a suit. All of a sudden, they see me, and the break—

TC: Out the back door.

SI: No, they break away from him. I thought something was funny, but it didn't dawn on then that these guys were FBI guys getting information from him. And he was feeding them information because he was being paid. So, he was giving them information, oh, in left field. He had me at meetings I never knew about. (chuckles)

TC: So, he just fabricated?

SI: Yeah, right, in order to get his pay. Anyway, I didn't realize it at that time until after the hearing and after some of the information that they were trying to convince me that that was what I was doing. It didn't dawn on me that this guy was an informant. Anyway, I took the Fifth. But it only lasted about ten, fifteen minutes, because they weren't interested in me. They were interested in someone else.

TC: They wanted you to lead them—

SI: Yeah, identify that this guy was at the meeting and so on, so on. So, I took the Fifth—I said, “Oh, my god, you got nothing. I’m not the big guy. I’m just a flunky.”

TC: Now, I want to back-up a little bit. After your friend Steve had given you the path, and you and Adam had hooked up and given the message in ’46 to the party, from ’47 to ’48, in ’48, you’re going to be one of the leaders in Los Angeles. Both Art and Sue had said that it was your placement in the newspaper—the meeting on the Wallace campaign—

SI: Um-hm.

TC: How did you end up with Wallace after you deliver the message, now, in ’46 to the party?

SI: Okay, now—well, within the Communist Party, we were discussing the question of how to involve minorities: blacks, Chicanos, and Asians in the political movement, right? And the third party, the Independent Progressive Party in California as they started, and then became the Progressive Party with Wallace. I find out later that Wallace was so pissed off with Roosevelt in terms of that he wasn’t the vice president and Truman was picked that he wanted to get back at the Democratic Party. This I didn’t know at the time. But he was a big name, the Vice President of the United States, former United States Vice President.

TC: Secretary of agriculture.

SI: Yeah, right. So, the Progressive Party decided to back him.

TC: So, it was a strategic decision at this point in time?

SI: Yeah.

TC: Recruitment, organizing tool—

SI: Organize groups to support the third party.

TC: For Art, he was so pissed off at Democrats and the Republicans, he would end-up with Wallace.

SI: Right.

TC: And then for Sue, it was more on the issue. It’s interesting, the cross section of folks that lined up.

SI: I had more pull in the—I was in the Communist Party by then, already, so I was more of a cynical—not cynical but the driving force, because, being a minority within a minority, it's tough. I mean, in terms of trying to—you know, people in the Japanese community and I think the hearing—oh, the hearing was afterwards. But, they knew I was active. I was going around passing out leaflets and speaking before meetings about the left wing movement, so forth and so on. So, they knew I was a guy they didn't want to get close to. You know? To be tinged. And then, the McCarthy era began and the Hollywood Ten thing happened, right? They didn't want to get involved with any left wing movement.

[02:00:53]

TC: In 1948, when you're organizing, Sak, and you were to call yourself a Nisei Progressive, how would you define a Nisei Progressive? What was your ideology at that point in time?

SI: Well, for one thing, during the Wallace campaign, we fought for reparations, by the way. We fought to get indemnities to the Japanese that were put in camp. We brought that up; we were one of the first whoever care about. The JACL wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole.

TC: It would be forty years later. So, that would be one of the primary issues at this time?

SI: It was one of the things to redemptify the people that were sent to camp, right? They lost their property, they lost their home, so forth. That somehow the government should recognize the mistake they made and to apologize, plus give them some compensation for the problems. Well, sure, it took place forty years later. The point is this is 1948 that we were moving for this. And, even the JACL, they didn't want to touch it. I thought maybe with that issue, we could get some of the JACL people interested in the Progressive Movement. No, no way, they wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pool. And then, ah, not during the Walter campaign, but when I was called during the committee, somehow, the JACL leadership found out. They sent me a letter that I was kicked out.

TC: Thanks for your support.

SI: Yeah, thanks.

TC: So, the reparation and the admitting of the mistake by the American government, that's one of the issues. What are some of the other issues that are driving you—

SI: Well, there was a big movement within the Progressive Movement, about the rights of minorities, blacks, specifically. The voting rights in the South, and even the question of a separate nation, that attitude—the idea of establishing a separate nation in the South with the Blacks. But then, they realized that a lot of the Blacks had moved out of the South with the war—with the industrial—but the question of equal

rights and voting rights was one of the big things that the progressives, especially Communist, were fighting for. As far as the Nisei, we thought basically the question of improving our lot in terms of—before the war, when you graduated college, it like that engineer *I* told you about. There were a number of those guys, older ones, that couldn't get a job. A friend of mine, he was only a couple of years older than I was, went to SC, got a law degree. He couldn't work. He went back to work for his dad in the vegetable stand. See? Things like that. And this guy was so bitter. And as a Japanese, it was almost perfect. He was born here, raised here. We went to school together. He was a couple of years older than I was. When I met him in the service, he should have been in the military intelligence service, you know, translating documents, because he was that well-groomed and trained. Right? No, he was just a flunky in what you call a permanent camp, taking care of the tents, taking care of the people that are working. You had to have some group doing all the dirty work, whether it be getting the food ready, so forth and so on. And I said, "How come you're not—" He said, "No, way. These bastards can eat their shit." And he's bitter till this day.

TC: Still. When you were talking about in '48, reaching out into the Japanese American community, in the civil rights, were you also advocating at that point in time for Issei voting rights as well?

SI: Yeah, but, in terms of that right and also in terms of—you see, they had what they called these cheat laws in the state of California, where aliens could not own land.

TC: Right.

SI: Right? That we wanted abolished, because it's discriminatory. Just pick the Japanese or the Asians? Right? Because, when my dad wanted to build a house, he couldn't build the house cause he couldn't buy the land so he had to get somebody to cover for him. And the same way when the business was established and so forth, he had to put it in my name, because I was the only native born, and my older brother couldn't be a citizen. He was born in Japan, educated in the United States, but the fact that he was born in Japan, he had no American citizenship rights.

TC: Would he be considered a Kibei?

SI: No, because a Kibei are the ones born here and then educated in Japan. He was born in Japan. He was an Issei, really.

TC: He was considered an Issei. When the Issei finally did get their voting rights in the fifties, did you and the Communist Party reach-out at that point in time to try to bring them into the party? Was there a recruitment effort within the Progressive Party?

SI: There were a number of Issei that were in the Communist Party.

TC: So, they are really a minority within the minority.

SI: Oh, yeah.

TC: So, there was, then, an effort to bring them in more so?

SI: Yeah, but see, again, the Japanese were very conservative. They didn't want to touch these guys. And most of the leadership of the Communist Party in the country, among the Japanese, were Okinawans, which is also a class difference in Japan, and they were the ones—because they were the subjugated people in Japan, right? The Okinawans. And therefore, they were more progressive or militant in their fight for their freedom with the Japanese government. Because the Japanese government took them as—I'll give you a good example of what happened. When I was in the service, I went to Okinawa—like I mentioned.

TC: Right.

SI: I was transferred. I went to a village in Naha, and I walked, and I wanted to find-out something. With me is another Nisei, but his parents came from Okinawa. And we go into this village, and I start talking Japanese to this woman. And you figure they understand Japanese. She shakes her head and talks to me in Okinawa dialect, which I can't understand.

TC: You can't translate.

SI: I can't translate. So, I turn to this guy namd Kanashiro who's with me, and so he says, "Let me handle it." So he talks to her; they talk in Okinawa. And tells me, he says—I said, "She speak perfect Japanese? Why won't she speak to me?" "You're Japanese." And I said, "Well, what? You mean she doesn't like me because I'm Japanese?" She says, "That's how these people have been treated by the Japan—by the Japanese." And he—Kanashiro and I—we're Asian with Japanese, but he spoke the Okinawa language. I said, "My god." And the lieutenant was with us. He turns to me and says, "What the hell is a matter with you?" I mean, he didn't say it in that way. "What's a matter with you? Can't you talk to her?" (chuckles) Then I explained to him. He says, "You mean there's discrimination here, too?" (laughs)

TC: It's universal.

SI: Yeah

TC: How big was the Communist Party in Japan, Sak? Was it ever bigger than 10 percent?

[02:10:00]

SI: No.

TC: Or 5 percent?

SI: No, no. You know, because the military police they _____ (inaudible). Really. And, you know, in Japan you move, you got to register. In those days, you can't make a move without registering your name in the local police station.

TC: The Communist Party of Japan was a really underground.

SI: Oh, man. You know, with that campaign _____ (inaudible) like MPs. They were the secret police of Japan, and they knew everything and everybody. And then, in Japan, you know, they still have this police station where one man stayed in a community because there's no street addresses and so forth. If you want to find something, you gotta ask somebody that is familiar. You gotta ask that guy—the policeman and he'd tell you what house and so forth. Anyway, before the war and under Togo's regime, they knew where everybody was and what he did and when he did it.

SI: I had a friend that was in the service with me, and I was reading the New York—what the hell—*PM Magazine*—a newspaper. It was a left-wing newspaper. It wasn't communist. A left wing newspaper put out by George _____ (inaudible), and I used to subscribe to it when I was in the service, you know. And one day, in Orlando, Florida, he was in the same language school—but he was in a different class so I didn't know him—and he was a Kibei. And he barely understood English. Anyway, we were in the same company of training at Basic training. And the sergeant would give an order for left turn, gave orders for right turn, and he'd be slow responding. And the sergeant would get after him because he would snap like that, right? It was a language thing. So, one day I went to him, and he says, "God, I'm having a hard time understanding English" he tells me in Japanese. I said, "Oh, you're Kibei?" He said, "Yeah." "Oh, okay." So, from then on I used to help him. He got a mean voice, because you could still sneak a sound in between the sergeants barking, right. And one day I was sitting out there on my break reading *PM Magazine*, he comes up to me, he says, "You take that?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "Why don't you pass it on to me." I said, "Sure." Then we are starting talking about politics. You know, *PM* was a progressive, left wing newspaper. It's a tabloid. Start talking, find out this guy, he's a communist. And I found out he is educated in Japan. He went through this damn police state attitude, so he left Japan because of it. And I said, "How come you joined?" He said, "Same reason you did."

TC: You found each other in the Communist Party.

SI: Yeah. So, after the war, he worked for the longshoreman's union in San Francisco. But, he's a single guy, real stubborn, but a nice guy and a drinker. Anyway, I got to know him well. And then, he was assigned—after the basic training we would go back—and he was assigned to the 20th Air Force in Hawaii, the big bombers. He went to radio school down in Florida also to interpret radio message from Japan. You know, you listen to the radio, and he writes down the information, how the moral is and so forth. He used to fly over Japan with B-29s, listening to the daily news reports of the Japanese radio, and he would translate it. That's how we found out the other

- information, the morale of the people, what was happening in Japan because you can't send agents to Japan. No way.
- TC: They'd be found.
- SI: They'd be a dead duck the first day. Anyway, this guy, well, I kept up with him. After the war we kept in touch. Well, he passed away. They found him—he was a single man—they found him in his hotel room, cause he didn't show-up to work for a couple of days. He must have had a heart attack. But, he was disowned by his family. I used to meet him all the time—especially at the funeral. When I go to the funeral, the family was sitting over there, and we are sitting over here. You know, it's really strange. And they didn't even acknowledge the fact that we were there.
- TC: Well, back to '48. The Wallace campaign ended. He didn't win. (laughs)
- SI: No, he didn't.
- TC: Art will go on and be active in the IPP. He would get active in the Progressive Party, itself, in '52, and work for Pat Brown's campaign. Did you, as well, remain active in the IPP?
- SI: Pardon?
- TC: Did you remain active in the IPP as well? Or did you stay more active in the Communist Party?
- SI: I became more active in the Communist Party, and what was happening during that period was also I was more active in the Committee for the Protection of Foreign Born, which was to protect people from being deported.
- SI: And now, some of these Issei people were being deported for their left wing movement.
- TC: Issei who were members of the Communist Party?
- SI: Some of them were, yeah. Some were not. Some of them were just progressives.
- TC: Okay.
- SI: But, they needed somebody to represent them before the immigration department, and so I got them involved in the committee. I became the spokesman in the Committee for the Protection of Foreign Born. But what really galled me—and this would gall you, too—there were about ten people that were involved in a deportation proceeding. Over half had volunteered to the U.S. State Department, government, right after the war broke-out, and they were sent to Japan on the orders of the State Department and the War Department to do what they call an economic and bomb survey team for

Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They were sent as representatives of the U.S. government to do the survey of the bomb damage and the economic effects, so forth, on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. They were government agents of the U.S. government, but they were non-citizens. Because the question of becoming citizens was denied them anyway, but they were sent from the U.S. government overseas—

TC: After the bombing.

SI: After the bombing to do the survey—and I met a number of them in Tokyo—somehow they got in touch with me through—because a couple of them were Communist members and so they got in touch with the Communist Party. They said there's a Nisei soldier that's involved in helping us, and that was me. So, somehow, they got in touch with me. They came up to me, and I see them in the Army uniform but they're Issei speaking. They could barely speak a few words of English, but they are more comfortable in speaking Japanese. So, I got to know them, and I met them afterwards here. After I got out, I got in touch with them. Anyway, they were charged for deportation on the basis that they entered the country illegally. When did they enter it? Nineteen forty-six through the Port of San Francisco coming back from Japan from doing their job. All right. They are coming back from the job they are doing for the U.S. government, through the Port of San Francisco, they land in U.S. But, they're still U.S. employees. Now, after they get out, the immigration department is in charge, and they enter the country illegally in San Francisco in 1946. Not the fact that they left—they came in this country maybe in 1919 or '18.

TC: And these are the people that we had to deport?

SI: And these are the people that they wanted to deport.

TC: And the argument the government gave, because they were a security risk, or just because—

SI: Because they progressives or left-wingers. Basically, they were targeted. And the government wouldn't do anything to protect them. Saying, "Look, they worked for us. We sent them over."

TC: And did they know they sent them over? Did they just stonewall it?

SI: The immigration department just completely—and that's what really got me so boiled-up in terms of the injustice, you know? To see some of these guys—I would go to the immigration department—the arrogance of the immigration department. Oh, I'd hate it.

[02:20:21]

TC: They set them up, I mean—

SI: It's a set-up.

TC: All the way through.

SI: All the way through. And they kept going through the legal procedures, the legal procedures—

TC: Did they ultimately win? These Issei?

SI: Hah?

TC: Did these Issei ultimately win—

SI: No.

TC: Or were they deported?

SI: Okay, the brother of Sen Katayama, who was the first chairman of the Communist Party in Japan, he was I would say in his seventies when they got him. We fought it, and we fought it. And he says, "Don't worry about it. I'm going to Japan to die." He took a voluntarily. There were a couple of them that did that. They were much older, and they didn't want to fight it. See, we kept raising money to hire attorneys, and we were giving the money to the Committee for the Protection of Foreign Born. We raised money for them, so they could get the attorneys. But, you know, the damn immigration department, you have a hearing, they postpone it. You have another hearing, they say, Well, we don't have the attorney ready. Postponed. But, it cost money. You've got to have an attorney there, but they don't tell you that until you get there at the immigration. They are real vicious bastards. I'd shoot them. Arrogant! They treat the immigrants like dirt. And I think the Chicanos are going through the same damn thing.

TC: It's their fight today.

SI: Anyway, I would say most of them—let me see, three or four left on voluntary. They volunteered to deport themselves. In other words, they'd just leave.

TC: Right.

SI: The others, they kept fighting. So, finally, the immigration department dropped it.

TC: Threw in the towel.

SI: It was a period of at least ten years. We spent money, had to raise money. Oh, man, I'll never forgive those immigration guys. Now, even when I went into the immigration department, they treat me like dirt. And I tell them, "You son of a

- bitch”—I didn’t say the term—“I’m an American citizen. Don’t treat me that way. And you shouldn’t be treating these people that way.” But they are arrogant assholes.
- TC: We talked earlier about what it meant to be a Nisei Progressive in ’48. What did it mean to be a Communist and a progressive in the fifties? [recording paused] Okay, we are back with Sak. It’s now twenty of two; we are still on November twenty-eighth. We are continuing in Monterey Park. Sak, I just asked you the question of what it meant now to be a member of the Communist Party and a progressive in the fifties versus being a Nisei Progressive in ’48. How has that definition changed for you? Or has it?
- SI: No, it really didn’t. I thought overall we were fighting for the same thing. I mean, you look at what the future could be.
- TC: Was there more in the fifties—as you began, do you remember more of an antiwar or ban the bomb within the Progressive Movement?
- SI: Yeah, we had the question of abandoning the bomb. And the McCarthy Era and the intimidation of the left wing progressives to try to dismantle the progressive period of the forties, fifties—forties especially. And then, when Roosevelt’s social programs had taken affect, like the WPA—my god, what the WPA did in terms, not only of jobs, but in terms of the arts, culture—really.
- TC: Stuff that is still with us today.
- SI: Yeah, that’s right. You know, we have today.
- TC: Who were the progressive voices in the fifties that you were listening to? Who were some of the people? The Los Angeles Communist Party had Dorothy Healey.
- SI: Yeah, Dorothy Healey.
- TC: Harry Britcher. Was Harry _____ (inaudible)?
- SI: No, I know who he is but—
- TC: Okay.
- SI: Mostly Dorothy Healey and, uh—basically, she was it. She was a spokesperson.
- TC: She was really the leader of the Los Angeles Communist Party.
- SI: Yeah, she ran it. This guy Norm Sparks—he was the chairman, but I didn’t talk too much—I mean, I talked to him but not much. Dorothy Healey and I would discuss—
- TC: Did you stay close to her throughout the fifties and sixties?

SI: Yeah.

TC: Have you talked to her since she moved to Washington?

SI: No, I haven't. I just went to her farewell party that she had here.

TC: At Stanley's Scheinbaum's house?

SI: No, this was an open public meeting at one of the hotels, I think.

TC: Oh. Were you at the party where she signed your book at Stanley Scheinbaum's house?

SI: No, I didn't.

TC: It would be ironic if we happened to be there at the same time. So, in the fifties, Dorothy Healey would be one of the voices?

SI: Yeah.

TC: Your activity began to wane, you said, in the late-fifties, early-sixties?

SI: Oh, and another guy, a black guy named Harry Pettis.

TC: Harry Pettis?

SI: Yeah.

TC: What about Paul Robeson? Did you ever see Paul Robeson when he was in town?

SI: Oh, yeah. Paul Robeson.

TC: In the fifties, in the late-fifties, early-sixties, you said your political involvement began to decline a little bit. You weren't as active as you were.

SSI: Yeah, then the question of Hungary.

TC: So, in the late sixties you're pretty disillusioned?

SI: Yeah.

TC: But, while you broke with the Communist Party, your progressive roots pretty much stayed intact during that time?

SI: Yeah, except the organization was broken-up and with all the infiltration of the left wing like the Communist Party, the Committee for the Protection of Foreign Born—

you know, the fight with the Japanese deportees was over with, and then the organization began to break-up, too, so there really was no organization that you could go to or lean to and get the direction.

TC: How did your politics play out then, in the seventies and the eighties?

SSI: Not much. I just sort of retired—not retired but—

TC: Step back a little bit?

SI: Stepped back. Just trying to keep up with what was happening by just reading, you know? Newspapers, articles, subscription to—

TC: Did you continue to vote?

SI: Yeah.

TC: And what about your brothers and sisters, their political involvement, did it ever—other than, you said, your sister in early '48—they really never—you were the renegade in the family.

SI: Yeah.

TC: Looking back on all this now, what are some of the things you remember about your progressive years? What are your memories?

SI: Well, I think there are bad periods, but I think they are basically good periods that open my eyes to see what society is and what the world is in a sense of how cruel it can be to people, of what it doesn't have to be. That is the thing that angers me. That it doesn't have to be this way. It could be much better, you know, much happier for most of the people.

TC: Do you have any regrets about your involvement in the movement?

SI: No.

TC: Proud of your involvement?

[02:30:00]

SI: Yeah, you know, it's sad that it didn't work out as well as I would like to, but it has moved. Especially in this country where you have—sure it may take years to decide that the wrong—look at the history of blacks, for instance, right? How it has changed. You know, I was in the South, in the military basic camp in Shelby. The blacks had to sit in the back of the bus in the military camp where these blacks were doing the same thing I was: fighting for the U.S.A. And they were told to sit—in

- fact, I realized that when I got on the bus at Camp Shelby, I got in the back. The damn bus driver wouldn't move, he said, "You gotta move." I said, "What for? This is empty."
- TC: We're in all of this together.
- SI: He said, "You gotta move. You're a white." I said, "I'm not white." I said, "I don't give a damn." He said, "You sit up here."
- TC: You think we've made a difference, the movement?
- SI: I think so. In some small way, it has. And the fact that it is not active now is a sad commentary.
- TC: A young person today, if they were to begin to read, what books would you recommend for them to read to understand the Progressive Movement and the history of the Progressive Movement? Are there any one or two books that come to mind?
- SI: Today's books?
- TC: Or even books that have played a part in your life, just books that you would recommend.
- SI: I would say the John Dos Passos is powerful. The average person can read that and get a tremendous amount of information, insight into what the hell this world of—that's what made him famous. I mean, John Dos Passos. Upton Sinclair's books, you know, some of his early books. Steinbeck's books.
- TC: You said earlier that you're sad the Progressive Movement isn't as strong as it once was today. Who are the voices today for the Progressive Movement?
- SI: I don't think there is any.
- TC: That's probably the saddest statement to make, that there isn't a spokesperson today.
- SI: Yeah. Well, look at the national picture. What political leader would you follow?
- TC: Well, in the Progressive Movement, it seems like it might be down to Ron Dellums and maybe Jesse Jackson.
- SI: Yeah, but they are segment—
- TC: Yeah, there's no broad voice. No, there isn't. Is there anything you want to talk about before I wrap up? Anything you wanted to say today that we haven't touched on?

SI: No. I still think the future is still bright. I think the young people are coming up. You see it in terms of what—sure there's a lot of negative things going on, but I think eventually, you'll see a few people like Gingrich, Graham—

TC: See them for who they are?

SI: In time they will. They'll see through these guys. And even through Clinton because he's nothing but an opportunist politician.

TC: He's a real calculator, isn't he? He's checking the polls a lot.

SI: Yeah.

TC: Sak, thank you. Sorry for the glitch getting going here in the beginning of the tape, but we've covered a lot of material today and I appreciate it.

SI: Well, if there's any further information, I want to be helpful. Just give me a call.

END OF INTERVIEW