

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Children's Village at Manzanar Oral History Project

An Oral History with ROBERT YAMASHITA

Interviewed

By

Arthur Hansen

On March 3, 2006

OH 3502

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NARRATOR: ROBERT YAMASHITA
INTERVIEWER: Arthur Hansen
DATE: March 3, 2006
LOCATION: Alameda, California
PROJECT: Children's Village at Manzanar

AH: This is an interview with Mr. Bob Yamashita by Art Hansen for the Japanese American project of the Center for Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton. The date of the interview is Friday March 3, 2006, and the time of the interview is approximately 11:40 a.m. The interview is being held in Alameda, California, at the Alameda Main Library located, at least temporarily, at 2200A Central Avenue. The focus of our interview is the Children's Village orphanage during World War II at the Manzanar War Relocation Center in eastern California. Mr. Yamashita was a resident of the Children's Village for three years, from June 1942 to June 1945. Bob, I'd like to begin our interview today by having you tell us, in as much detail as you can provide, what you recall and what you have since learned about your connection to the Children's Village orphanage at Manzanar.

RY: I haven't really learned anything new about Children's Village since I left because until recently I didn't really have much interest about what happened at Children's Village or even after that. Like most people, you're working for a living, and your life seems to be focused on a job and whatever else you're doing outside of work. While I tried to find out how I happened to end up in Milwaukee, I wasn't able to do that because the government agency called Children's Services in Milwaukee have no record of my being in Milwaukee during my three years of high school that I still had left. They had kept no records of people who were just living with families and working for their room and board and going to school. They only had records of children that were adopted through the Children's Service Society.

AH: Before we get to the period after the war, which is basically the Milwaukee thing, why don't we go back to the beginning of your life insofar as you know about that.

RY: Our family lived on a farm in Lodi, California, area, and I'm the youngest of six children. I have three brothers and two sisters. We're all about two years apart, and

all my brothers and sisters are still living, with the exception of one of my brothers who passed away, I'd say over twelve, fifteen years ago.

AH: Can you tell me a little bit about your mother or your father?

RY: Just from talking to some of my older brothers and sisters these are approximate dates. Both of my parents came from Kumamoto Prefecture on the southern island of Kyushu, Japan.

AH: Do you know something about each of those parents?

RY: Our father came to the U.S. approximately 1915. I'm not sure whether he was in Lodi or Sacramento area, but after working on a farm for two years, he saved enough money to go back to Japan around 1918 and married our mother and came back to Sacramento, California, first because my older sister was born in Sacramento. Shortly thereafter, the family must have moved to Lodi area where we lived as a family until 1939 August. Our mother—am I talking too fast?

AH: No, you're doing fine.

RY: Our mother went back to Japan in the summer of 1938. From what I remember, she wanted to take one of us with her back to Japan. From what I recall, she wanted to take her youngest daughter, who was four years older than me, and she didn't want to go. When I was asked, I guess because my sister did not go, I decided I did not want to go, so she went back to Japan by herself in the summer of 1938. And August of 1939 our father passed away.

AH: You're talking about your mother going back to Japan. Is this because the marriage broke up, or it got too difficult for her to be able to cope with the situation?

RY: The reason why our mother went back to Japan was because she had something I guess you might call a goiter, and she wanted to be treated by a Japanese doctor. She was scheduled to return to California about a year later, and that never happened. From the little that I know, it probably had to do with some legal papers and the fact that she was not an American citizen. You were aware of that right?

AH: Right.

RY: The fact that she was not an American citizen [meant] she never returned from Japan.

AH: Did you stay in touch with your family through correspondence?

[00:09:25]

RY: I'm sure she did, but I'm not aware of it. After she returned to Japan, myself and my other brother who passed away were the only ones to see her again in Japan. How

that happened is I was in the Army Transportation Corps from November of 1948 until August 1952, and I was assigned to a port battalion in Yokohama in summer of 1949. I requested some leave time to visit my mother, and I was able to see her then. My brother came to Japan in March of 1950 by himself. He was supposed to come with the father of the Japanese family that he lived and worked for on a farm around Pocatello, Idaho. Before the trip, the father of this family passed away so my brother decided to come by himself. I was based in Yokohama at that time, and my brother came in on an American _____ (inaudible) vessel. I was able to meet him then. He may have stayed a day or two on the Army base and then went down to Yamamoto.

AH: To see your mother?

RY: Right. After that I saw my mother only two more times before I left Japan because, in June of 1950, when the Korean War started, they froze all leave time, and I also stayed in Japan almost an extra year because President Truman extended all of our enlistments for an additional twelve months because of the Korean War. [Our] first cousins on our mother's side of the family had kept in touch with my sister, and our mother's brother, our uncle that our mother was living with, had kept in touch with my oldest sister so we knew approximately when our mother passed away, which was around 1954 in Japan.

AH: Can you talk a little bit about your feelings during the time that your mother went back to Japan? You had rejected the opportunity to go with her, as you pointed out. She was gone and then she was still gone and then your father died. What was going through your mind? Were you sad by this or angry or a combination of these emotions, or how were you feeling about all this?

RY: When my mother went back to Japan, I was about eight years old, and, when my father died about a year later, all of us were still under eighteen, with the exception of my older sister who was just turning eighteen. We had an uncle living around Lodi. He had a family of his own, so he couldn't take on and care for all of us children. They decided that we should go to the orphanage home in San Francisco run by the Salvation Army. We all ended up there with the exception of my oldest sister, who came to San Francisco to work. My oldest brother, who was not yet eighteen, he stayed back in Lodi because we had an uncle that came from a family living up near Seattle, Vashon Island. He agreed to be my brother's guardian until my brother turned eighteen. I don't remember feeling any anger or anything I guess because I still had my brothers and sisters after my mother went back to Japan, and we were still living as a family. After we went to the Salvation Army home, of course, there were plenty of kids close to your age you could play with and hang out with.

AH: You did have a chance three different times to see your mother in Japan. The first time was the biggest lull between the last time you'd seen her. You're talking about 1938 and then not seeing her again till 1949, right, so eleven years. Now tell me a little bit about that experience. I'd like to hear about that.

RY: Before I visited my mother the first time in Japan before I had permanent assignment, I was communicating by letter with our mother. There was a lady that was related to us who spoke English, and I told them approximate time that I would be arriving by train. I assumed that somebody that I would recognize would be waiting for me at the train station in the area, where our mother lived, which was probably about an hour's train ride from the city of Kumamoto. And, in those days, they were just villages. When I got to the train station, nobody was around, so I'm looking to see if I can recognize anybody. Then some Japanese gentlemen in their late twenties, who spoke a little English, he knew that I looked kind of lost, so he was asking me. I gave him some names of relatives that I knew that lived in that area, and, when I mentioned this one family, he did know them so he took me over to this family. This is a family where this woman that used to live in the U.S. so the father spoke some English and, of course, the daughter did. I had breakfast there, and then the father took me to our mother's place. He said "I'll take you." He called me by my Japanese name.

AH: What is your Japanese name?

RY: My Japanese name is Hideo, but I didn't realize till just going back a little till I enlisted in the Army when I looked at the birth certificate that my name on my birth certificate was just in Japanese name. I did go to court in Milwaukee and had my name legally changed to Robert because I was always known by Bobby or Bob. Anyway, when this man took me to our mother's place, there were three women standing outside this was probably midmorning, and I didn't recognize my mother because she'd been sick for a long time. I guess it was over ten years. So, this man that took me there, he finally said, "This is your mother."

[00:20:11]

AH: And how old would she have been about that time?

RY: At that time?

AH: In 1950. Was she born before the turn of the century?

RY: She must have been in her late forties. When she died, she couldn't have been more than fifty-five.

AH: So, she was close to fifty then when you saw her, but she looked older than that even?

RY: I think because she lost a lot of weight or something I just didn't recognize her. It was kind of an embarrassing moment, but then after he explained to me these other two women were my mother's sisters who I had never met before.

AH: So then, how did the relationship start to develop?

- RY: Well, first of all, since I didn't speak hardly any Japanese at all, I remember her telling this woman that spoke English that when I was a kid she could talk to me, and I would understand everything. But now, after ten or eleven years, he can't understand me at all.
- AH: Which was true. How was her English by that time? A lot of Issei women could not speak very much English.
- RY: Our mother's English was I think almost nothing. Our father, because he dealt with American people, he spoke better English.
- AH: Was your mother warm as far as receiving you, even though there was no language that you could communicate in? Did you communicate emotionally?
- RY: Yeah, I think our mother was probably always a very warm person. On my second trip a fellow who was born in raised in Hawaii wanted to go with me, and he remembers—you know, his reaction of my mother seemed like a very kind person. This fellow he was mixture of Puerto Rican/Hawaiian or whatever. I don't know. He didn't speak any Japanese, but, for whatever reason, he wanted to go with me, so I took him.
- AH: What's funny is that neither of you could really converse with the other in the language that was the language choice for them and probably, correct me if I'm wrong, but you didn't get any explanation from her about what had been happening over the last ten years?
- RY: No, other than where she was living with her brother's family
- AH: And then, when you went back the second and third time, how was that different? Were you building a relationship again with your mom?
- RY: Um—
- AH: Once you were accompanied by this other fellow you were talking about but—
- RY: I didn't feel like—maybe the second and the last time I saw her was a little better even though I didn't have any better speaking ability of Japanese. I think just having seen her more than once made things a little easier.
- AH: So, she was becoming more your mother again then, right?
- RY: You know, when I saw [her] the first time, I was barely nineteen, and it was like I was going through my first eighteen years of my life. I don't know. It's kind of hard. I never asked my brother, who's six years older than me who passed away, his history. I might have been different because he spoke some Japanese having lived

with a Japanese family and being that he lived with our mother six years longer than I did.

AH: He also went over to see her in Japan, right?

RY: Right.

AH: And did he talk about his encounter with her a little bit? Because he could speak some Japanese.

RY: No, I don't remember. I guess we never talked much about it.

AH: Were any of the siblings—I asked you that original question about was there any anger or anything else. Were any of your siblings sort of upset that your mother was out of their lives? Because some of them were younger than you.

RY: No.

AH: Oh, you're the youngest?

RY: Yeah.

AH: Oh, really? I didn't realize that. Well, of the older ones, were any of them feeling that they had been abandoned by your mom?

RY: No I don't think so because I don't know if they know any more than I do as to some of the specific reasons why she never was able to come back. No, I don't think there was any anger there because her original plan was to come back after a year.

AH: So, is it fair to say that the way the kids dealt with it was number one, you had a large group of kids anyway, and so you still functioned as a family. You even had an older sister that could step in as a surrogate mother of sorts. And then, you had your own concerns dealing with your dad's death and probably illness even before the death.

RY: Right. I don't remember my dad being sick too long before he died.

AH: So, it wasn't something that you tortured yourselves with about why did mom go, etc, like that? It was a fact of life, and you coped with it and tried to get by and expected that, at some point, she would maybe come back into your life.

RY: The thing is my being in Japan in the U.S. military, I would have arranged to bring our mother back. When you're a nineteen, twenty-year-old kid, you don't think about who's going to care for her or whatever. I did bring that subject up with my uncle, and he said to me that there's no way our mother, in her health condition, could withstand that kind of travel. This is back in the early 1950s so that subject was dropped, but I did bring that up.

AH: Are your parents ashes together in Japan, or do you know the conditions of either of your parent's funerals or where their remains are? Were they cremated?

RY: Yeah, I think our parents ashes—we went to a small temple in the countryside there where the ashes are kept, and I know our mother's ashes were there. I ended up going back to Japan, but I'll get back to that later. I think both of our parents ashes are over there, although I understand our father has a tombstone in a cemetery around Stockton though I've never been there.

AH: Hold your point because I'm going to have to turn this over. [recording paused] Okay, so at some point later on you took your father's ashes to Japan?

[00:30:00]

RY: No, I don't know how that was arranged, but I'm sure that my father's ashes were taken to Japan.

AH: Let's get to the San Francisco Bay Salvation Army orphanage because that became your home. As you explained, not all of the kids went there but how many were there total that accompanied you to the orphanage?

RY: All my brothers and sisters, except for my oldest brother, who was I think seventeen going on eighteen, and my oldest sister came to San Francisco so there were four of us that went to Salvation Army. Yeah, four of us ended up at the Salvation Army home. Before we moved over to Children's Village, my brother, who was not yet eighteen, had already left Salvation Army and was going back to room and board.

AH: Were you one of the bigger groups at the orphanage of family or were there other big families like that with that many siblings all at the orphanage?

RY: Well, what I remember I think the Matsunos^{1 2} and the Isozakis^{3 4} were the largest families. By any chance, did you ever interview Akira Isozaki? Tamo's brother?

AH: I did.

RY: I have his phone, and I'm going to call him up. He lives in the Bay Area. I never contacted any of these people because they were kind of out of the life most of my life. Since the time I was sixteen I didn't see these people till I went to the reunion so everybody had their own life going on.

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⁴ Tamotsu Isozaki, O.H. 2332, Center for Oral and Public History.

AH: Tell me a little bit about your impressions of when you first got to the Salvation Army orphanage, where it was located, and then your recollections. I mean, I can remember when I first went to school or other important events like this, and I'm sure you do.

RY: Yeah. The Salvation Army home that we're living in is on the corner of Geary and Laguna in San Francisco.

AH: So, it's in Japantown.

RY: That building, which was a three-story building still exists, but the Chinese consulate is located in that building today so it must have been sold by the Salvation Army to the Chinese consulate. I tried to get in on a couple of occasions but was not able to do that. From what I remember, the building itself had a backyard with concrete and had one basketball hoop. It's not big enough to play baseball or softball, but we could at least play catch. I used to be out there playing catch with baseball sometimes. As I said, there were kids around my age many younger and many older so there was a lot of kids to play with. To me, it was kind of a fun time. I was starting my fourth grade when I went there, and when I left I had just finished my sixth grade.

AH: You went to a public school and probably would have gone to a public school that had quite a few Nikkei students there right?

RY: Well, I'll tell you what happened to me before the evacuation. There was, I assume, a single mother who had son and a daughter that she brought to the Salvation Army. Both of them were slightly younger than me, but the daughter was deaf. She had to go to a special school for deaf children, which was, I think, in the Pacific Heights area today. They chose me to take her to school each day, and I used to take her, drop her off, and then I had to go to another school, which was close by a public school called Pacific Heights. I think it was Pacific Heights.

AH: Was the name of the person that you took named Hannah Takagi [Holmes]?

RY: I don't remember her name. Was this girl deaf?

AH: Yes. I did a long interview with her. She ended up at Manzanar briefly, and then they sent her up to Tule Lake.

RY: I didn't see her in Children's Village. Did she say she was in Children's Village?

AH: She wasn't in Children's Village because she wasn't an orphan. She was deaf.

RY: I don't know what her name was.

AH: That's so interesting. She went to the Berkeley School for the Deaf.

AH: They emptied that out at the time of the war, and all of the children went to different camps. Then, when she was at Manzanar, there were very few others that she could deal with so they took all the disabled students from all of the different camps and they brought them up to one place in Tule Lake. They started a school, started the Helen Keller sort of school, and she was involved with that.

RY: Well, this girl who was taken to this special school was in San Francisco, and, of course, I didn't like doing this because I guess my first reaction was the other kids are going to be teasing me. But, they didn't tease me at all. There was a few times that, after I took her to school, I didn't pick her up. You're going to be a little surprised about this. Of course, the people at the Salvation Army at that time were Caucasian Salvation Army officers so when one major and one captain, when they found out that I wasn't picking her up they called me in and they called my older sister who was not in the home. She was working in the city. They called her, and they said, in front of my sister, If you don't do this, we're going to have to send you away. So, my sister said, "Well, you know, you better do that." I did it, and then, before the evacuation, the mother picked up the two kids because evidently she didn't know what was going to happen to the kids in the home, right? She was probably concerned so she took the kids, and I don't know what happened to her after that. Then I went back to, after _____ (inaudible), to finish up my year. Those kinds of things, when you're a kid that age, you don't ever think about—there were other kids my age, and when you got older you realize the only reason where they [chose] you is because they trusted you.

[00:40:26]

AH: Reliable. How were the kids at the orphanage treated by the rest of the Japanese American community there in Japantown?

RY: I think when you're in a Salvation Army home and an orphanage the other kids have a tendency to think that these kids are all bad so they're not likely to become friendly with you. But, there were kids that were friendly to me. There were kids that _____ (inaudible) who came from Asia, who spoke very little English, and so these kind of kids needed more contacts with the other kids who were born and raised here that would help with English and things. I remember one of the teachers—I guess she was looking to kids like me and others to help these kids that came from Asia that didn't speak much English. I've always had the impression that kids who were living with families were not that keen about the kids in the home.

AH: What about the parents? Because sometimes when there's an institution like that a lot of people will rally around and give gifts and stuff at Christmastime and provide some sort of assistance, even do volunteer work with the organizations. Did you have contacts with adults and everything from the Japanese American community there?

- RY: No, I don't remember having that at all. The only adults that we had contact with were people who were working at the Salvation Army in various capacities. Other than that, as far as those from outside the home, I don't remember hardly any contact.
- AH: Of the staff that you had there, what percentage of them would have been Salvation Army people and what [percentage] would the non-Salvation Army personnel that were working at the orphanage?
- RY: I think there were a few people who were probably not Salvation Army, but it appeared that a majority were Salvation Army officers.
- AH: Wearing uniforms?
- RY: Yes. I don't know if through your other interviews they explained to you that the people that were managing the Salvation Army home who were Salvation Army officers were Japanese when we first went there.
- AH: I was just going to ask you that. I didn't know that.
- RY: The names are important, right?
- AH: Yeah, they're fine if you have some names. That would be great if you can.
- RY: I remember names, but I just didn't want to mention names too much because it's like do I have permission? Maybe these people are gone.
- AH: But, that's not a bad thing that they are gone. You can name their names.
- RY: The people that were managing the Salvation Army home was named Furusho.
- HA: How do you spell that?
- RY: F-u-r-u-s-h-o. They went back to Japan before the evacuation and after they left—
- AH: Were they Issei?
- RY: Yes, I'm sure they were Issei. After they left, a couple of Caucasian women came to manage the home. One was a major, and one was a captain in the Salvation Army.
- AH: So, you had some Japanese leadership, and then you also have some non-Japanese leadership.
- RY: After the Fushuros left, besides two Caucasian Salvation Army officers, there was one Japanese. I think she was Nisei, but I'm not sure. Her name was Ichida. She had two sons who stayed at the home.

- AH: You know, at the time that you're talking about before the war, virtually all Japanese American kids went to Japanese school as well as the regular school. Was that permitted or encouraged with the respect to the Salvation Army orphanage?
- RY: Before the evacuation, I remember that they had some Japanese classes, but it didn't last very long.
- AH: Was that at the orphanage itself?
- RY: Yeah, it was at the orphanage, but the Japanese kids who were living with their families went to Japanese school. I don't remember any of the kids in the Salvation Army going to any Japanese school within the home or outside the home. I don't know what they had before we got there. My education as far as Japanese was nil.
- AH: So, that sort of helps to explain why, when you went to see your mother, you had almost nothing in the way of Japanese. Tell me a little bit about the activities at the home, including any religious proselytizing that went on through the Salvation Army.
- RY: Well, the Salvation Army—we used to go to a Sunday school. On Sundays I guess the older kids went to church, but it's more like a nondenominational Protestant religion. They don't call themselves Baptists.
- AH: Non-denominational.
- RY: Right. They had a church within the Salvation Army building, and they used to go to that.
- AH: On a regular basis? Was that every morning? Did you have chapel or anything?
- RY: No, just on Sunday as far as I know. Just on Sunday we used to go to Sunday school.
- AH: So, there wasn't a pervasive religious environment there where you had at almost every turn some reminder that this is a Christian institution? Or was there? I mean, prayers before meals and sayings on little signs around the facility, participating and helping to raise money at Christmastime, was there any of that?
- RY: No, but I think they were saying grace before meals.
- AH: So, you didn't feel that you were in a powerful Christian environment while you were there?
- RY: No.
- AH: So, it was semi-secular in the way it was operated. What kind of recollections do you have about the family feeling there? Was it weak or strong? Or the other kinds of dimensions of it, the quality of the food—you mentioned a little bit about the

recreational facilities, but there's other facilities like sleeping quarters. How would you assess the place?

RY: I thought the home was pretty good as far as sleeping quarters. I think we had no more than three to a room. We stayed in rooms with kids close to your age. We used to scrub floors and other things, but that was usually once a week so the place was always pretty clean. The food I thought was pretty good. And, if you were really young—when I first went to the home the younger kids used to take naps, and we used to be given baths by an older woman that used to work there. I think by the time evacuation started I was already through with naps. (chuckles) I was on my own so to speak.

[00:50:41]

AH: Was it exclusively Japanese—I mean, I know there were some mixed heritage of the kids, but was there a segregated Japanese American facility?

RY: Yeah, I don't remember any mixed children at the Salvation Army while I was there.

AH: What was the reason usually that the kids were there? Because they lost both parents or similar situations like yours, or how would you characterize that?

RY: Yeah, I think most of the ones that were there had probably lost both parents. A few of them that I knew did have one parent, but, after the mother died or the father died, they just couldn't take care of all the kids so they ended up at the home.

AH: When we had the reunion in the 1990s for the Children's Village at Manzanar, there was a lot of discussion about [how] that functioned as a family, a substitute family for a lot of the kids. A lot of the kids even retain connections with one another after they left camp, and I've always thought about it. Even if they hadn't seen each other for a long time, once they got together again, the reunion of the old family feeling came back. Was that same family situation prevalent at the Salvation Army facility, too?

RY: I would think, yes, among some of them, but that didn't really seem to apply too much to me personally because once I left Manzanar—and I was fifteen-and-a-half—I had about three years of high school. I didn't think too much about the other kids except maybe for the first time in my life I was homesick after I ended up in Milwaukee. My arrangement was—and that's one of the reasons why I wanted to find out how this all came about—my arrangement was working for my room and board and going to high school. During the two years of high school that I had left, I lived with about five different families. The first family I lived with after I got to Milwaukee, I was in the city for one day, and then I went out to a small town by the lake about thirty-five, forty miles outside of Milwaukee to live with a family that had three children, all boys. I think they were around five, seven, and nine, and I was supposed to take care of them when the parents were not there. But, I only spent the summer with that family because I had to go back and start school. The kids in this

family were attending private school, and they didn't start until mid-September. The reason I ended up with different families—I know the reasons for some but I don't know the reasons why I didn't stay with one family long. I can only assume that for whatever reason they decided that I wasn't happy there or whatever. So, when I left to go back to school, I ended up at the hostel, and the reason why I was able to stay at the hostel was because my oldest brother who was in the 442nd—and here again these are things people at the Children's Welfare Society knew my brother was in the service and they probably made the arrangements where I was listed as a dependent. I was getting \$30 a month. It cost me \$1 a day to stay at the hostel, and I'd get a couple of meals and go to school. I told my guardian this—during the two years I was in high school, he was my guardian for about the first year-and-a-half of school. Then I had another guardian. I don't remember his name at all. I told my guardian that I had to go and work for my room and board and go to school because I needed money to buy clothes and things. My two sisters were in Milwaukee so they couldn't support me, right? What he said to me first, you know, World War II was still going on, and it wasn't so easy to find a family that was willing to take me in. You know?

AH: We're moving way ahead of our story aren't we? Let's go back just a little bit because I want to get into the resettlement stuff that you did in the hostel and who ran the hostel and those kinds of things. What I was getting at before was—and I think the answer I got from you was this—the question I was asking is apparently, according to some people there was a family feeling within the Children's Village. And then, what I was asking in comparison to that what was the case at the Salvation Army orphanage before the war? Did you have that family feeling? But then, I think where you went with it was you didn't have that much of a family feeling even with the Children's Village. Is that fair?

RY: Right. Yeah, I didn't, but I think the family feeling came more from people where the families probably stayed together when they left Children's Village whereas our family we were kind of more spread out. I think a good example is the Isozakis and maybe the Matsuno family, which had fairly large family. One of the Matsuno brothers was around my age, who passed away—Shioo Matsuno, have you heard the name?

AH: Yes, I have.

RY: Did you meet Shioo Matsuno?

AH: No, I didn't, not that I remember.

RY: I might still have a letter that Shioo Matsuno sent me.

AH: But, the situation with the Salvation Army orphanage—was there a family feeling there? Later on, do you ever think back upon that group and say, Well, I remember them there? Now you've mentioned some people that you knew both places. You

knew them at the Salvation Army, and then you knew them again in Children's Village.

RY: Yeah. I don't know if there was a family feeling among the other children that spent time at the Salvation Army, but here again, I personally didn't have much of that kind of feeling because, once I left Manzanar, I never saw these people unless there was a reunion. Maybe our lives and where we lived was very different.

AH: Let me ask you this another way. Are there any people from the Salvation Army orphanage who didn't go to Manzanar that you remained in touch with and perhaps are even in touch with today?

RY: No. There are very few people outside of my family who were in Salvation Army and maybe Children's Village for a short time that I would see. One of them lives in Milwaukee, and she is related to Clara who lives out here. I've been seeing her because of—but here again, some of these people—

AH: I'm going to have to turn it over. [recording paused] Getting back to what we were talking about.

[01:00:00]

RY: I think in both Salvation Army and—there was one other home, and also in Children's Village they had maybe more years together. Maybe there was a little more desire to keep in touch. But also, the families that stay together after Children's Village there was a more desire to keep in touch with other family groups. Whereas in my family, that wasn't the case because, before I left Children's Village, our family was already pretty much separated because all of my brothers and sisters who were in Manzanar had left before I did. And I personally never had that close feeling. Even though I went to the reunions, I was still working at the time living my life. It was one of those things where it was nice to go to the reunions and see some of the kids that you grew up with when you were young, but I didn't have any strong feelings about keeping in touch. Everybody was kind of living their own life in those days, you know? In my case, I never went back to Manzanar until only less than a year ago. The only reason why I ended up there was a guy I've known through my job for over thirty years, who lives up in Sparks, was nice enough to drive me.

AH: Sparks, Nevada?

RY: Yeah, he and his wife.

AH: So, did he go up with you?

RY: Right.

AH: Is he Japanese American?

RY: No. He is a Caucasian American who grew up in the Bay Area.

AH: So, he had no connection?

RY: No, what he knows is whatever he read, and the part is Children's Village—nobody knows hardly anything about Children's Village. The few people who know anything, they heard it through me. But, here again I don't talk about it much at all. It's only now I talk about it more. Not because of what's going on here today, but I'll explain it that.

AH: Well, I'll tell you a couple of things. Number one, when I went up to the grand opening of the visitor center at Manzanar—which was not last pilgrimage, but two pilgrimages' back—when I went up there they had a lot of tables representing organizations that were handing our literature. And one of the tables, I was really surprised to see it was the Children's Village at Manzanar. They had a table, they had some handouts, and they were trying to collect information about people who had been in the Village. And there may be some reconstruction of portions of that Village because it's a unique kind of feature, not just of the Manzanar camp, but of all the camps, so they may use that as part of a tour to be able to interpret that site. And the person who is in charge of the Manzanar Historical Association, which takes care of the bookstore at Manzanar, is very anxious to get a book out about the Children's Village.

And that's one of the things that I am working on right now, which I was hoping we could have gotten a long time ago through Lisa [Nobe], but that didn't work out. But, we will get that out, and it will be published in a series that we put out, which is named after Michi Weglyn. It's a Michi Weglyn multicultural series, and we put out four books already in that series. This would be the fifth book, so we are trying really hard to get that out. So, you mentioned Michi Weglyn, and she's donated \$20,000 to be used in any way that I saw fit. One of the things I wanted to do was to get this multicultural publication series started. Two or three of the books out of the four have been with some aspect of Japanese Americans. This one here will be multicultural because there were people of some different heritages in the Children's Village, but also multicultural because it deals with other than our main stream population. Now, I want to get back to the pre-war period, and I want to get into what was happening after Pearl Harbor. Because you had a number of months before, it was almost half-a-year, so what was going on in your life and the life of the other kids at the Salvation Army orphanage during this period?

RY: Okay. Raphael Weill School, where we were going had a lot of mixture of kids. There were a lot of Asian Americans, and some African Americans.

AH: And what was the name of that school again?

RY: Raphael Weill. It doesn't exist anymore. It was only a couple of blocks from where the Salvation Army home is.

AH: Is it two names? Is it Raphael Will? W-i-l-l or?

RY: I don't know if it was W-e-i-l. That school is no longer there. I don't know if the building is there. But, because there were mixed children there, I mean different ethnic groups, I don't remember much prejudice going on. We were not restricted from staying at home or anything, so we were going about our business as usual. But, because the Executive Order removed all the Japanese before the end of March I think—Executive Order 9066 was signed, I think February 19?

AH: Yeah.

RY: The teachers at school who knew we were from the Salvation Army, there was no problem. But, when we went outside in public I think that most people assumed that we were Chinese or something because they figured all the Japanese are gone. So, me and couple other kids from the Salvation Army were going down to the ball park, I think to a stadium one Saturday. I think this could have been in May after the season started. We were passing like the Coliseum; we called it the Coliseum, where they have wrestling or whatever, and this man hollers and say's something to us in Chinese. We don't know what he's talking about okay? Within a few minutes, this man comes by in his car and says, "Where you kids going?" We say, "Oh, we're going over to the ballpark." and he says, "Get in. I'll take you there." So, since there were two of us, we get in the backseat of the car, and then he turned around and said something else in Chinese. He didn't get any response, and he says "Hey, you kids can't be Japanese. I thought all the Japanese were out of here." I don't remember him saying this, but he just dropped us off.

AH: So, he was surprised.

RY: But, again, the teachers at school, of course, knew we were from the home already. Believe it or not I had some contact, corresponded with the woman who was the principal when I left school, but unfortunately, I didn't keep those letters. I remember I had one or two.

AH: Did you have conversations among yourselves, within your family group, your siblings, and then maybe others about what's going to happen to you, especially after all the Japanese people from the area have left? Even have left your school? Because they were classmates of yours and, all of sudden, they were gone, and you were still around. I mean, what did you think was going to happen? Were you too young to even think about that?

[01:10:24]

RY: Well, I was twelve-and-a-half. I don't remember even thinking about that. Of course, we didn't know anything Children's Village. I don't remember anybody telling us what was going to happen. All I remember is that either—it could have happened

before Pearl Harbor—some of the kids were sent to Lytton, but they came back before and went to Manzanar. I'm not sure of the exact reason why some of these kids went to Lytton. Maybe at the time because new kids were coming in, maybe there wasn't enough space there? I'm not sure.

AH: Now for the purposes of the tape, do you want to identify what Lytton is? Because we were talking about it off tape?

RY: Well, Lytton was the home for kids. I was under the impression that it was a home for kids who had delinquency problems, but I'm not sure.

AH: So, you saw it as a juvenile hall then?

RY: Yeah, that's what I thought. But, like you said, the kids in the Salvation Army, they could have made arrangements to send some kids there.

AH: Now you off tape had said that you had gone there briefly, too.

RY: No, I went to visit there when some of the kids that I knew went there. Here again, when I talk to Clara, about a month ago, I found out that her sister and she went to Lytton after the Children's Village.

AH: And this is Clara who?

RY: I don't know what her last married name is. It's Yoko something, a fairly long name. Anyway, I didn't get a chance to ask her who else went to Lytton. Here again, maybe I was surprised because I figured that all the kids, after I found out that Miss Robbins main job was to get all the kids out of Children's Village without worrying about sending them to another orphanage or whatever, I figured they all ended up someplace. In my case, because my two sisters were in Milwaukee, I ended up there.

AH: Now you had some classmates that were going to the same school as you were going to who left San Francisco and then went off to Tanforan. Did you know anything about Tanforan? Did that crease your consciousness at all, or were you just oblivious to where they were and where their parents were going or anything like that?

RY: Yeah, I would say I was more oblivious to it, except that my sister and brother ended up at Tanforan. My oldest sister and my other brother who had left the Salvation Army, I know they went to Tanforan, but there again—

AH: You never visited them at Tanforan did you?

RY: No. Maybe at the time I didn't even know they were at Tanforan.

AH: When did it start pressing upon your consciousness that you were going to be leaving San Francisco and going someplace else to live?

RY: Well, I think probably a very, very short moment. It wasn't like somebody saying, "A month from now you're going to be leaving."

AH: Do you remember being told that you are leaving and being gathered up? The whole business about getting out of the Salvation Army home, I mean that must have been reasonably traumatic, I mean to pick up and go someplace else.

RY: Yeah, I remember, I guess none of us had much to carry, but from what I remember, we were taken to a train station. It seemed like it was in San Francisco because there were in trains going across the bridge. As far as I know, I think the train must have gone to Union Station in Los Angeles and from there we went by bus to Manzanar because I don't have to good recollection of that.

AH: Do you think you remember where you were going to go? Did somebody say, We're taking all the kids from the orphanage, and we're going to move up to this place out in the desert in California? Did you get any kind of preview of any coming attractions or not?

RY: No, I don't remember any kind of advance notice of exactly where we were going to end up.

AH: So, you were going, but you didn't know where, right?

RY: Yeah.

AH: Then as you were going on the train and then on the bus, you must have been getting somewhat curious as to where you were going. Do you remember that experience very well? I mean, the actual trip itself or not?

RY: The train trip more than whatever the bus trip was—yeah, I don't remember too much about what I feeling.

AH: Do you remember getting to Manzanar? Because here, all of a sudden, you are out in the middle of nowhere, except that camp was almost completely populated by the time you got there, because you got there kind of late.

RY: Towards the end of June.

AH: And they had been there for a while. You were probably close to eight, nine, ten thousand people already. What did you think when you got there at Manzanar?

RY: I guess because we were a little bit isolated where Children's Village was, I had no idea, at the time, how many people there were or anything. Within a couple of months, of course, we started to go to school, and the school was closer to the main gate area, and we were kind of at the opposite end.

AH: Did Children's Village and Manzanar make any kind of impact on you of being different from what you had been doing for three years before in San Francisco?

RY: Um-hm.

AH: It did?

RY: Yeah, I think at that point I realized that the Japanese were evacuated or whatever. You didn't stop to think about how long you'd be there. But, I never gave much thought about wanting to get out until some of my brothers and sisters left. I don't recall many kids in Children's Village who left before me. I know my brother did. My brother left in March of '45, and I left in June. But, the last year that I was in camp I really wanted to leave bad, because my brothers and sisters were all gone. Even though I had a lot of kids—you know people ask, "Well, what was the reason why you wanted to leave so bad?" Even when I was asked if I wanted to be adopted, I didn't want to leave so bad that I would have said yes. I didn't want to get adopted. What I really missed was going out and playing sports against all kinds of kids, instead of just Japanese kids. Because I use to love to play sports, and I wanted to play baseball. I played a lot of softball. I played a lot of basketball, in camp. That was one of the things on mind. I wanted to go back to a normal school and play sports with kids of all different nationalities.

[01:20:20]

AH: Like you had done in San Francisco?

RY: Sure. Like I said it started probably the last year I was there, I remember, but it wasn't anything I ever talked about. Okay? But, I remember how badly I wanted to leave.

AH: Well, you know what, when I was young I could hardly think of anything but sports, when I was that age that you're talking about, so I understand where you are coming from. Now one of the people that I interviewed about a year ago was a guy named Hoshiyama. Did you know Mr. Hoshiyama?

RY: I don't think so.

AH: Well, he worked at the Buchannan YMCA there in Japantown, and he worked first for Lincoln Kanai who was in charge of that. Did you have much to do with the YMCA before the war?

RY: No.

AH: You didn't?

RY: No.

- AH: Okay, so that wouldn't have been something that was in your life? So, when you are talking about playing sports, you are talking about mostly the different elementary schools playing against one and other?
- RY: Right, yeah.
- AH: That's where you played kids from other backgrounds. Even at your own school, you had kids from other backgrounds? It wasn't just Japanese and American kids right?
- RY: Well, what I remember is that I know that if the evacuation didn't happen, that I would have been going to John Swett Junior High School. I don't think it exists in San Francisco, but, at that time, they had John Swett. They asked us what kind of musical instrument we wanted to study at John Swett. I knew that the older kids use to play soccer and other things at John Swett, and those things were on my mind. You know, it would be nice to do that.
- AH: Did you feel any sense of a stigma for being in an orphanage, that you felt that somehow you were a compromise person in the eyes of other people if not in your own, and that there was something like a stigma attached to being an orphan?
- RY: Sure. When I was in Salvation Army I knew that there were a lot of kids who didn't want to be friendly with kids in the home because they think you are a bad influence, or you always want to fight and do bad things. Well, part of that is true. When you are in an orphanage like that, you have your meals, place to stay, and you're taken care of. But, you don't have any money, so kids are going to get in trouble. So, that's one of the reasons why I think every summer we use to go to camp.
- AH: Oh, where did you go?
- RY: Well, the first couple of years that I was in Salvation Army we use to camp out in tents by the American River near I think Sacramento. I think some Japanese people—I found this out later—that they own property used by the Salvation Army for the kids.
- AH: Would you just go up there for a couple of weeks?
- RY: Oh, no. We were there for the summer.
- AH: The whole summer? Oh, wow!
- RY: Because this gets the kids out of the city, and you don't get into trouble, right? Some of the people you talk to from Salvation Army, Children's Village, say that they'd get in trouble. But, I think, when you don't have any money, and you want things, you're going to end up doing some bad things. I'm sure some older kids, instead of going to Manzanar from San Francisco—you couldn't get into too much trouble in Manzanar.

AH: I'm kind of curious about this news, because you said you use to go to camp every summer, and now, all of sudden, it's summer again and you're going to another camp, except it's a different kind of camp. Did it seem that different? Or did it seem a lot like the camp you use to go to up by the Russian River?

RY: No, you mean Manzanar? Oh, it was much, much different. Because you knew that you couldn't leave. Even if you could go beyond the fence, you know the fence that was on the perimeter, you couldn't go out very far. I remember going beyond those fences very few times, but I don't remember there being much of anything other than just desert. I think people were able to go toward Mount Williamson, but I don't know if they had to get a permit. But, we never went that far. Like I said, if there were any creeks or any kind of river where kids could fish—I know there were some kids in Children's Village who would have loved to go fishing, who use to like to fish.

AH: Now you said that you felt some stigma attached to being in an orphanage. Did you feel some stigma attached to being at Manzanar?

RY: In the Children's Village?

AH: Well, not necessarily just in Children's Village, in Manzanar as a whole. Because Children's Village was a camp within a camp, but in the general camp you are there because of your ancestry, because you are Japanese-American. Now did you feel some stigma attached to that? Like this is a punishment, or this has to do with not trusting people of your background. I don't know what you felt, so I'm just asking you about that.

RY: Yeah, I don't think I gave much thought to it. Because it seems like once I left Manzanar—and I was going to school and after I went in the service—I don't remember hardly ever talking about being in camp. The few times that the subject of evacuation came up, especially in the Midwest and East Coast, people that I came in contact with through work or whatever didn't know anything about the evacuation. I got, "Well, we didn't know about it," and the subject kind of ended there. So, it's something that, for most of my life, I just didn't talk about.

AH: Now one thing you were there for though, and the first thing I ever wrote an article on, was the Manzanar riot. That occurred in December of 1942, and you were in there for six months by then. Now, was that something—two people got killed and other people were wounded? Did that bring home to you that this was a little different kind of place?

RY: When I remember about the riot, I do remember that somebody did get killed. They just told the kids in Children's Village to stay home and don't go out. I don't remember how many days the school was closed. As many days as school was closed, we didn't go out until school started up again.

AH: Well, one of the big action points on the night of December sixth when the shooting occurred, big action points, was the hospital. There was a whole gang. Thousands came over to the hospital, and you were pretty close to the hospital.

RY: Right, but I don't here again remember seeing anybody, because we were told to just stay home.

AH: Okay. So, you knew what happened but you didn't really witness much right?

RY: Right, right, and probably didn't know as much about these things until years later when I read about it in the book, especially that *Years in Infamy*, that goes into a lot of detail.

AH: I got to turn this over.

[01:30:00; recording paused]

RY: As far as, when you say any stigma of being in camp or Children's Village, because I never talked about and really didn't bring up the subject until more recently—I'm a lot more open about talking about it. Before that I never wanted to talk about it. But, I never felt—it wasn't because I was ashamed about being an orphan because you certainly don't have much control over that. But, some of the people that I knew, I think that they are ashamed to talk about it.

AH: Well, I guess I'm asking you the question because even during the Redress movement, when they had all of the hearings and a lot of people would say more than the loss of financial things, more than an upheaval in my life, the other thing was it cast sort of a stigma on me in terms of who I am: my ancestry, my American citizenship. All of those things seemed to sort of be in question now. That it was bad to be Japanese, that I wasn't quite an American for some sort of reason, and then the same sort of thing with respect to being an orphan. Even though you don't have much control over it, other people act like you have committed some sort of crime for being a victim, rather than actually victimizing anybody else. So, that's why I was asking you. Just as there was a camp within the camp, the Children's Village is a camp within a concentration camp or whatever else, there could also be that there's a stigma within the stigma. There's the double stigma, the stigma of camp, and the stigma of being an orphan. I know some of the people, when we were tried to do this project, just didn't want to talk about it. They said, That's an experience I don't ever want to talk about, and we were wondering if the experience they didn't want to talk about was number one being at Manzanar, or number two being in the Children's Village? Or both! And so your situation is different obviously.

RY: Yeah, because the way I felt, maybe even though I never gave it that much thought, part of it might have been the fact that I was able to spend about two years in Japan. I was in the military. But, I felt proud of my racial background, but also I was realistic because, even after the war, I knew there were American's who had very little contact with Japanese. In the Midwest or East Coast, for various reasons, they wouldn't hire

you as an employee. This was before [there were] any civil rights laws on the book. And because of being aware of those things, I use to tell some employment agents back in New Jersey and New York, where they were already plentiful back in the fifties, sixties, “Don’t waste your time and my time if any perspective employer wasn’t interested in hiring a Japanese American. There’s no point of me even going there.” So, I was aware of those things, I guess like a lot of people who experience hardship in their life, maybe they know that in order to succeed that they have to work harder. I think that I always felt that way, when I was younger, that if I’m going to succeed in the business world, I have to go and work harder and do a good job, you know.

AH: Well, tell me a little bit more about the Children’s Village. I mean, how did it compare physically as a place for eating, for lodging, for playing recreation? I know they had a basketball court and a baseball diamond and a number of things like that. Qualitatively, was the place a better sort of facility than what you had experienced when you were living in San Francisco?

RY: No, because we were sleeping in a large dormitory area, not just small rooms. Even though they didn’t have sandstorms all the time, they had their sandstorms when you’re going to school or coming home from school sometime. The overall conditions were not as good as San Francisco.

AH: Not as good as San Francisco? The food?

RY: The food was okay. But, here again I think the food at the Salvation Army was probably better. I just couldn’t get all the things you wanted. I don’t remember—I wasn’t always drinking fresh milk, maybe at the Salvation Army, but I don’t remember that I was having fresh milk or skim milk in camp.

AH: So, the standard of living for you went down?

RY: Well, sure.

AH: You’re talking about that in San Francisco, at that orphanage, you had a separate room?

RY: Yeah, with maybe two other kids.

AH: So, you had greater privacy. And then, there you were in a dorm situation, so you were having a cot or something, rather than having a separate bunk bed?

RY: Right.

AH: Then the sports facilities you described as pretty bad in San Francisco, and I know you were really interested in sports. Now, there was a better situation for you in Manzanar in that regards, right?

RY: Yeah, in that regard we had our basketball court and a softball field and we had a lot of grass area if we wanted to play football. But they wouldn't buy the kids any equipment, so they weren't too keen about that, they didn't want kids getting hurt.

AH: So, when somebody who was not in the Children's Village as you were and looks at the comparison between what your living situation was and the situation of people like in Block 29 or the rest of the thirty-six blocks that made up Manzanar, it looks like your facilities are better. That you have a better bathroom situation, and probably that you have better buildings that you are in, that they are better constructed. That there are fewer of them, so that it doesn't look so much institutionalized. Did you feel at the time that you had an advantage situation compared to your schoolmates who you would meet at school and came from these other barracks?

RY: No, not really because I saw where my brother lived. My sister was living at the YWCA after she left the Children's Village.

AH: Where was it?

RY: It was at another block.

AH: They had a YWCA at Manzanar, and she moved there? And the bachelor one is where your brother was, right?

RY: Yeah, my brother just lived with some bachelors, but they did have a YWCA. I don't know if they had it from the very beginning, but my sister and some other girl, after my sister left Children's Village and before she finished school, went to stay there.

AH: So, you had a chance to compare because you had siblings who were in the camp?

RY: Yeah. Having a basketball court and having the nice grass and having our own mess hall, yeah, I think it was better, but as far as the living facilities, these people at least had partitions. We had a couple of big rooms: the older kids and the younger kids.

[01:40:12]

AH: You know, I would like to make the point that your chef was a person who had worked at Clifton's Cafeteria in Los Angeles, and they had really good food there. But, you didn't feel that way, huh? (laughs)

RY: No. You see we learned at the Salvation Army that we had to eat everything, whether you liked it or not. So, by the time I got to Children's Village, even if the food wasn't the best, I always ate everything. (laughs)

AH: (laughs) So, you were very good at that? What did you think of the Superintendent and his wife, Harry and Lillian Matsumoto?⁵ They came from the Shonien, and they didn't come from San Francisco's Salvation Army, nor did they come from Maryknoll. They came from that facility that had the most kids that came to Manzanar. What did you think of them as sort of surrogate parents for you at the camp?

RY: Well, I remember them both, but since the boys were probably dealing with Harry Matsumoto more—and they were fairly a young couple. Harry Matsumoto used to play softball. Not the young kids, the older kids who had a softball team. He used to play—I forgot whether he was playing first base. Yeah, I thought they were fine. Here again, I think they were probably strict like the people running the Salvation Army. They have to be kind of strict. But, by the time I went to Children's Village, I didn't need any supervision. People could leave me alone. When I first went to Salvation Army, I was only about nine years old.

AH: So, you needed more affection, sort of nurturing.

RY: Yeah. You know, one of the things I think people a lot of times think is that people who grow up in orphanages or foster parenting, whatever, who don't get much love at all, and, when they grow up to be adults it's more difficult for them to, you know—

AH: They don't have the models—

RY: I'll be very honest with you though. In my own case, okay, living in the Salvation Army, maybe more so than living in the Children's Village, when I was really young I've always felt that there were people that did care. Even after I left Children's Village, my experience with living with five different families, I had some pretty good experiences. Not all good, but most were pretty good people who showed me that they cared.

AH: And that was true at the Children's Village, too, right?

RY: Yes, I would say yes. Except when Miss Robbins took over it was kind of different.

AH: Oh, could you talk a little bit about that. How did that change?

RY: Well, first of all, I just assumed that she was a widow or something because she had no husband. We didn't know that she was a federal government employee, and that her job was what you said. So, after I found that out, I realized why I was asked if I wanted to get adopted.

AH: Was she a cold person as opposed to say the Matsumotos?

RY: Yeah, she didn't seem to be as close because, here again, maybe her—

⁵ Lillian Matsumoto and Taeko Nagayama, O.H. 2492, Center for Oral and Public History.

AH: Well, she wasn't Japanese American, for one thing, right?

RY: No, but I think more because of her job being different in some respects, I got the feeling that the best interest of the kids was not the main point. The main point was to get them out.

AH: And did you think that was a generally shared feeling?

RY: With other kids? I'm not sure because see, in my case, I felt that because of them asking me if I wanted to get adopted and then how I ended up in Milwaukee, I didn't know anything about foster parenting. Even if I did, that was the only way that I was going to be able to live good. Here again, Miss Robbins must have gotten in touch with the Children's Welfare Society and made those arrangements I'm sure.

AH: Do you remember when the Matsumotos left and your feeling about that?

RY: I think my first reaction was that I was really surprised they were leaving so early. I think they were there about two years? I just remember being a little surprised that they were leaving all of a sudden. I guess I knew that people were allowed to leave, but I didn't think they had someone who was managing Children's Village. Maybe a kind of a feeling of abandonment? I don't know. These are things I never talked about with other kids, but maybe some of the other kids had similar feelings.

AH: Well, I asked you if you felt a sense of abandonment when your mother went to Japan. I guess I'm asking you the same question here. It sounds like you found more abandonment in terms of the Matsumoto's leaving than you did your own mom, right? Maybe that was just a reflection of your age difference.

RY: Sure. I was pretty young when my mother went back. I guess I knew that it wasn't a permanent thing.

AH: Of the two Matsumotos, you spent more time with Harry because he did things with the boys and was a younger person and played sports and stuff. Did you have a relationship with his wife, too? Did she talk to you at different times, or did you feel close to her?

RY: No, no. I don't remember talking to either of them one-on-one when they were there, because maybe I wasn't getting into any trouble. Or maybe my school grades were good enough so that they didn't have to talk to me. (chuckles)

AH: So, you weren't particularly close to them?

RY: No.

AH: Now I think Lillian Matsumoto was a trained social worker, and her husband was not. Although, her husband held the position of Superintendent, and she was the assistant

Superintendent. Who did you think of when you thought of who was the boss of this place? Who did you think was the boss of the Children's Village?

RY: Well, I think I thought Mr. Matsumoto was, Harry Matsumoto.

AH: So, you looked towards him as the leader. Of the counselors that were there—because they had a staff. Not just the youth counselors, but then they actually had some other staff people. And they're in some of the pictures in this article I was showing you about the Children's Village. But, were their ones that you became close to there that were staff members that sort of were more hands on kind of working with the kids and different kinds of activities?

RY: Well John Hohri⁶ was the only that I can remember. One of the physical education teachers—and I don't know if the wife was teaching the girls—they stayed at the Children's Village for a while. I can't remember his name, the husband, Caucasian. I don't remember where they were from.

AH: It was a husband and wife Caucasian then? Were they the Nielsons?

RY: I'm not sure. Anyway, the husband used to play softball with us. But, other than those people, John Hohri was the only one—here again because I was already twelve-and-a-half years old, and I didn't need somebody to take care of me. The reason why I got to know John Hohri so well is because he used to tell stories to the younger kids, and I used to sit in and listen to his stories a lot, because he was a good storyteller. He was telling the story about Jean Valjean or whatever and continues ever night.

[01:50:27]

AH: Well, that's interesting that you mention that because the next question I was going to ask you was this. This is the same fellow, John Hohri, Sohei Horhi, and one of the things that was legendary about him was that he was a great storyteller, and he was liked by the kids at the Village because he told those stories. I was going to say maybe you were too old for the stories but—(laughs)

RY: He was also was a good artist. He sketched.

AH: So, he was important to you then?

RY: Yeah, I really got to know him quite well. Of course, I saw him at the seminar—he was on your panel—but I never really kept in touch. My brother in Chicago gets a card from John Hohri. I see my brother at least once a year. I talked to him on the phone recently, and he told me that John Hohri got married. I don't know if it's second marriage or whatever.

⁶ Sohei Hohri, O.H. 3786, Center for Oral and Public History.

AH: Now, did you have any woman that filled the void for maternal guidance at the camp? Or was it just a male world for you at that time?

RY: It was just a male world. In Salvation Army, when I was really young they had some women there. But, when the Japanese Issei couple was running it, we didn't have much to do with the Mrs. because here again the boys were dealing with the Mr. Furusho. When I first went to Salvation Army when I was about nine, I remember this woman used to give a bath to the younger kids. Other than that, there were a few women that worked at Salvation Army that we used to see but not much beyond that.

AH: So, you really didn't have much of a maternal presence in your life after your mother left?

RY: Right.

AH: When you were at Manzanar, would you say that the center of your existence was the Children's Village? Or was it the public school that you went to where you went most of the day and where you probably played some sports and had your classes and things like that? Which was more sort of central to your identity, your existence, to your life?

RY: Well, I think, here again, because of having kids your age that you are seeing more, I would have to say Children's Village was more central than going to school. Going to school, most of the teachers that we had were Japanese Nisei, but they had some Caucasian teachers. I think that was good. I remember always thinking that some of these teachers, the Caucasian teachers that came to camp, came maybe because they were curious. They never knew anything about Japanese Americans before. I don't remember whether some of these Caucasian teachers that came to camp, how soon they left, but I don't remember anybody who was there from the beginning until I left in '42.

AH: There was a big turnover of teachers, and part of the reason some of them came was just because it was a war related sort of job but also paid reasonably well. Usually, in the area of where camps were located, the salaries to teach for the government in the government camp was more than the teach—and, you know, the students were pretty good. They were new Japanese American students, and their parents emphasized that they take education seriously and honor teachers and things. So, I'm sure it was attractive in that way. Some of the other parts weren't so attractive, and you all roomed in a place for a long time. When you were at the school, just talking about that a little bit, would you participate in any after school things? Or would it be a case that you went home right away because you were doing these recreational things at the Village rather than the school?

RY: The only after school activity that I got involved in, *maybe*, was sometimes some softball or other games that were played after school. I'm not sure. Or it could have

been part of the physical education program. I never got involved in any other clubs or things at school.

AH: So, it was back at the Village then? When they had sports sometimes they had block based teams and stuff. Did the Village sport their own team to play these other blocks?

RY: We had our own team, and we used to play kids from some of these other blocks. I don't think that every block had a basketball court. I know there were some, but there again I remember that the kids that came from regular families didn't specifically like playing with the kids in Children's Village. They didn't want to lose to us either. (laughs)

AH: (laughs) Did you make use of the facilities in the general camp to much of a degree? Like the dojos for different kinds of martial arts sports?

RY: No. I don't remember any of the kids in Children's Village taking up judo, or other things. I don't know why that was, whether we were not allowed. I didn't even give it a second thought. Most Nisei kids did take up Judo and Kendo, but that was more when they were living as a family. Because my two older brothers, when we were a family in Lodi, they both had some Judo. But, in Salvation Army and things, they didn't have any of that.

AH: Yeah, because it was really big in the camp as a whole. And then, what about use of the libraries in the camp? Did you go to the library to get a book, or did you have your own library within the Village?

RY: No, we didn't have our own library, but I don't remember going to the library at camp either.

AH: Were you encouraged to stay in your own area, or were the villagers sort of enjoined to, except for going to school, pretty much stay close to home there?

RY: Yeah, unless you had friends in other blocks, there was no restriction about visiting them. But, here again, I don't remember kids in Children's Village visiting other kids in other blocks. Maybe here again because most kids with families probably didn't want to associate with kids in Children's Village. The kids that were living in Block 29 the Satos and the Neos, they used to come over, but I don't remember us going over to their house.

[02:00:00]

AH: I have to turn this over. [recording paused] You know, I wanted to talk a little bit about some of the things that escape notice because they're more personal kinds of things, maybe things that people would feel, well, these are things that you should necessarily be talking about. Because we should be talking about the riot and we

should be talking about the loyalty oath and things like that. But, you know, up at the Manzanar camp right now, there's a big attempt to start collecting information about what was the life of kids at Manzanar. There's a book that's going to be coming out that deals not with the Children's Village yet, but just children at Manzanar. So, they kind of want to know what was their kind of way of life like. I'm also interested in the way of life of young people, not necessarily kids, but youth, teenagers. The average age of the Manzanite, the people who went to Manzanar, was not fifty. It was not forty. It was seventeen-and-a-half. That's because there was so many kids.

AH: Right.

AH: You were a bit younger than that, so you would have been a young Nisei, and then you'd have siblings who were in that sort of age group. What was the life like for them? I mean, they went to school, and they did others things and stuff. But, this was a big place, and, after a while, the families had some tendencies to break down. The parents were together, and then the kids with their fears, sort of the way you find in society now. But, kids learned a lot about life other than what they learned in the classroom. So, a lot of kids say, "You know, when I first started to smoke was when I was in Manzanar." So, I was going to ask you about your life at that particular age, and not just your life, but what about the kids at Children's Village? Was there, for instance, the same kind of propensity to figure out places where you could be private? And you sort of learn about the other gender, but you also learned about how to be a man or something in those days.

RY: In my own case, it seems like it revolved around school and sports, so I didn't think about—well, first of all, I don't remember that I had friends I used to visit outside of Children's Village. The only guys that I got to know really well were the guys that used to come over from Block 29, Gordon Sato and his brother, and some of the people who worked there like John Hohri. So, I never thought about—well, I was only fifteen-and-a-half. The thought about smoking or other things, my brother, the one that's a couple years older than me who was in Children's Village, I think he got into weightlifting. So, he used to hang out with some of the Nisei kids that lived in a block where some kids from Venice, California, used to be. Well, my brother when he left camp he was about seventeen-and-a-half. Yeah, he wasn't eighteen yet.

AH: So, he was just like the average age I was talking about.

RY: My brother, he was never into sports, but he got into weightlifting. And the guys that he was hanging out with outside of Children's Village, those guys were close to his age, maybe same grade in school. I'm not sure. I didn't know those guys too well.

AH: When I said before that the average age of the camp was—I should have said that the average age of the Nisei in the camp was seventeen-and-a-half.

RY: Just going a little bit off. I didn't know how it came about that my brother was going to leave at seventeen. I know he wasn't eighteen yet. As far as Miss Robbins was

concerned, even if my brother was fifteen she would have probably let him go. Because my brother said he got a job at a country club in Omaha, Nebraska, through the War Relocation Office. People had to have a job before they could leave, and that's how my brother left. I didn't know that. I didn't know that because my brother quit high school through camp. But, I didn't know how long before he quit, because in camp, even though he was in Children's Village, maybe they didn't have any final control over whether my brother was going to stay in school or quit school. I only found this out just only recently that my brother that's how he left camp.

AH: That he quit school?

RY: No, I knew he quit school, but that he got his job through the War Relocation Authority Office or whatever. I just thought that Miss Robbins, that they arranged this. As I told you, I'll never know for sure how I happened to go to Milwaukee, other than because I can't talk to these people. But, I can only assume that Miss Robbins communicated with the Children's Welfare Society and made the arrangements for me to go to Milwaukee.

AH: You were the last one from your family to leave camp?

RY: Right.

AH: What happened to each of the other siblings?

RY: Okay, my oldest brother ended up in Rohwer, Arkansas. He was in another camp.

AH: Wow, how did he up there?

RY: My brother, when the Executive Order was signed, he was living in Rohwer. I don't know, maybe there wasn't a temporary center in Stockton or someplace. Maybe he ended up there. I don't know how he ended up in Rohwer.

AH: Did he go to an assembly center?

RY: I'm sure he did, because when I asked my brother when he went to Rohwer, I think he told me this is September of '42. There was a temporary center I think around Stockton.

AH: In Stockton there was one. There was one right at Stockton at the fairgrounds.

RY: So, that was my oldest brother. He was in another camp. My brother, the one who passed away, the one that was in Manzanar, he ended up in Manzanar, and my sister ended up in Manzanar because they asked to go there. I think they were in Tanforan. I never asked them before, but I didn't even know that they were allowed to make these requests. Because myself and my other brother and sister were in Children's

Village; I think they asked to go there. Anyway, my brother left and relocated to Idaho probably within a year, or year-and-a-half.

AH: Which brother was this?

RY: The one that passed away, six-year-old. I don't know if he went directly with this Japanese family that had a farm around Pocatello. My oldest sister relocated to Milwaukee, because the only kind of job that she could get in those days was like a maid.

AH: Sure. School girl or whatever.

RY: She went to Milwaukee, so she left within a year-and-a-half, as soon as they allowed these Japanese to relocate. My sister graduated high school in Manzanar. Right after she graduated she went to Milwaukee because my other sister was there. Then my brother left in March of '45 when he got the job with the country club. But, because I was in Children's Village—it wasn't so much because my brothers and sisters left. Even though I used to see them, we can't say that we were close. We're talking about two years in Salvation Army and another two years, you're playing with kids your age, and your family brothers and sisters aren't.

[02:10:06]

AH: Well, it was sort of logical that you would go to Milwaukee. You had quite a contingent that was there.

RY: Yeah, two sisters.

AH: So, you had the oldest sister, which sort of they viewed as the closest thing to a mother for you. And you ended up seeing them when you were back there?

RY: Right. When I was in Milwaukee going to school, it was usually Sundays if I wanted to see them.

AH: Then you all lived in separate places in Milwaukee, you and your two sisters?

RY: Well, I ended up living with about five different families, working for my room and board most of high school.

AH: And then, your oldest sister was doing what there?

RY: Well, at first she was doing housework, and then later I think she got a job in a factory.

AH: And then, your other sister?

RY: My other sister was also doing housework. Then she went to beautician school, but she didn't work at that very long. Then she also got a job I think at a factory.

AH: Was there a pretty substantial Japanese American community in Milwaukee?

RY: Uh, no, nothing like Chicago but there wasn't very many at one time. My guess is probably less than a thousand. It was very small.

AH: I knew there was a small Japanese American community in Madison, Wisconsin, where the university was, because I knew a number of people who had been there. But Milwaukee, a thousand isn't too small.

RY: Yeah, I don't know the real number. The people that I knew there were guys that I met outside of school. Some of the people that were staying at the hospital when I was there for about three months, a few of them are still in Milwaukee.

AH: Why don't we return to the camp and get through that, and then get you through Milwaukee and through other places actually, up to the present, if we can. When you were in camp, are there things that you want to relate to the experience that you had at the Children's Village? Something that you feel that has not been touched upon in our conversation, but hasn't been something that you haven't heard people talk about very much? Dimensions of the life there that I should know about and that others should know about?

RY: No, I can't—

AH: Let's talk a little bit about the relationship with Block 29. How close to you was Block 29, and how much of an interaction was there? You said they used to come over to your block, but you didn't necessarily—

RY: Yeah. Block 29 was only really separated by space there. It wasn't more than half a block of whatever. The two Neo brothers and one other—I can't think of this other fellow's name—there were three of them that used to like to come over and play basketball. They used to like to come over and shoot baskets. Some of these guys, they were a little older than me, but close to maybe my brother's age. Gordon Sato and his brother used to come around, but Gordon wasn't into sports much. He used to just come around and talk to us. But, like I said, I knew him quite well. I didn't know his brother that well. John Hohri's brother, Willie, used to come around because of John. He was a little ahead of me in school, so I used to see them. Aside from that, like I said Block 29 was very close we could kind of look over there. I can't remember hardly any other kids coming around over to Children's Village.

AH: Did you ever eat over at Block 29?

RY: No, I never recall ever eating at any other mess hall, other than the—

- AH: Because there was a lot of switching around, like people bringing guests in, but you didn't do that, huh?
- RY: No, as far as I know, because the families in these other blocks, they had to wait in line. Because they had one mess hall for blocks, if you're not there first, you're going to be in line to eat. But, in Children's Village, we didn't have to do that. We used to go into the mess hall and sit down.
- AH: Now the high school period and junior high even, are periods when there starts to be reaching out to the opposite sex and things like that. If not having torrid love affairs, at least having sort of boyfriend / girlfriend. Did you see a lot of the boyfriend / girlfriend thing going on within the Village as opposed to kids from the Village having relationships with people in the other blocks and people that they met at school? I'm trying to see how closed of a society the Village was in terms of social relations and things.
- RY: Within the Village itself, I didn't notice any of that, whether it was boys and girls.
- AH: There was flirting or something?
- RY: Of course, we would see them in the mess hall and things. I don't think, as far as I recall, we didn't have any assigned seating in the mess hall. You could sit wherever we want. But, the close relationship between somebody not in Children's Village, but from the Salvation Army, there were very few. I know one couple in Chicago that ended up getting married.
- AH: You know, in Manzanar, they always showed these photos—they always had these Jitterbugs and these dances. What did you do for that, for dancing?
- RY: I wasn't into that yet. I don't even recall thinking, Gee, I'd like to go to that! I just wasn't, maybe because I was more just into the school and the sport thing.
- AH: Did the Children's Village have their own dances or not?
- RY: No, they had a small recreation room, which was in the building where they had the mess hall, a small recreation room, and a room where the Matsumoto's or whoever, Miss Robbins stayed. But, the small rec room only had paint on the table. I think the older kids, maybe not inside the barracks, but outside where they had a little space might have had or done a little dancing. Nothing organized.
- AH: But, they would go to the dances in the general camp?
- RY: I don't know.
- AH: You were just a little too young for that.

- RY: I never did, but maybe some of the older kids who were fifteen or seventeen did because I know some of the older kids got involved with maybe some of the school plays. Do you recall the name Lou Frizzell?
- AH: Sure, because I met him at one of the Manzanar reunions. He was a great bit actor, a character actor in Hollywood.
- RY: You know, I have a tape—I didn't even watch it. Lou Frizzell used to come to Children's Village.
- AH: Really, you have a tape of that?
- RY: No, I have a Lou Frizzell tape. I don't know who it was produced by. I bought it at the Japanese American Museum in San Francisco.
- AH: Uh-huh. And what was on the tape?
- RY: I didn't even watch it yet.
- AH: Is it him though talking about the Children's Village?
- RY: That I don't know. I'll tell you what, after I watch it, maybe I'll send it down to you.
- AH: Okay, because I would be interested in that. So, he used to come over?
- RY: He used to come over because I think some of the kids at Children's Village were in some of his classes. But, I remember him coming around. In fact, I think I may have a picture of him and my brother around someplace. I wasn't in any of his classes, but I only remember him from coming to Children's Village and the fact that he put together some these plays that were held in the auditorium where the museum is now.

[02:20:30]

- AH: Wow! You know, there are two things that I'm kind of curious about, and I'll make sure to ask you before I forget. One of them has to do with the persistence of kind of relationships among the three different feeder institutions to the Children's Village because most of the people came from one of three places, right? The smaller number came from Maryknoll and the middle number came from the Salvation Army and the most came from the Shonien orphanage in Los Angeles. I was wondering if, once all of these rivulets flowed into the Children's Village, if the friendship patterns tended to persist? You tended to have your strongest relationships with those people who you knew back before the war because, after all, that was in San Francisco and that was in the Salvation Army. And then, these other people are from L.A. as far as bring from the Shonien or Maryknoll. That's my one question.

And the other question has to do with you see a lot of different stories during the war, and then also we see a lot of photos indicating that the Children's Village

was kind of a special place when the administration would take around public relations people or social workers to show them this was the unique place. The Merritt Garden was kind of a unique place, and they would take people there because of the Pleasure Gardens. Another place they used to take them was the Guayule plant because even Gordon was interested in that and scientific Cal Tech people. And Children's Village was a special place. So, I'm wondering if you remember that being sort of a place where you see strangers coming in or taking photos, walking around? Like it was a place where you live? Those two questions the first one having to do with the friendship patterns.

RY: I would say it probably wasn't done consciously, but the friendships I think among the kids from Salvation Army probably was stronger than the people that came from the other homes. Although I remember—I don't know where Ken Yoshikura came from, whether it was Shonien—probably Shonien. He wasn't in the same grade as me, but I think that he was friendly. In this case, if you looked, it didn't look like he had any Japanese blood. I would say probably I don't remember some of the other kids—well, let's see the Matsuno family that was pretty large. Shioo was in some of my classes. We were pretty friendly.

AH: Your primary friends tended to be people from the Salvation Army?

RY: Right, because they were kids in the Salvation Army, some of the names you mentioned before, the Tanaka family—Shoji was about my age and in some of the same classes. Mas [Masami] Tanaka was a year or so younger. So, I would say probably just having been with those fellows already two years, we were a little closer.

AH: But, there was no real strong exclusive feeling?

RY: No, I don't think so. I think kind of all of us being in the same boat so to speak, you know, you don't think about it when you're living it, but as I got older, you kind of look back on it and say hey, we're all kind of in the same boat. You kind of just get along with each other.

AH: And then, this other question I have about was it a place that you noticed where other people were coming to visit and to document?

RY: I know that I found this out later that people have come around, but I personally don't remember being around when somebody came around when somebody came over to the boys barracks or something. Maybe they went to the girls and where some of the babies were. I just don't remember when Ansel Adams came to Manzanar.

AH: He took pictures there.

- RY: Sure, he did take some pictures there of some kids, too, but he didn't come over to the boys barracks maybe because the boys weren't—(laughs) maybe they figured they wouldn't behave as well or whatever. Yes, I don't remember.
- AH: They saw something special in Children's Village, and it was special in that it was the only camp that had an orphanage. So, no matter where you were from, if you were going to go to camp and you were an orphan, that's where you ended up. And it was special in the sense that you had special facilities that other blocks did not have. Even the size of the block was different. The fact that you were not in family units—it was all one family unit in a sense it was special in that way. I think people who think back about it, when they think about Manzanar, they probably, at the core of what they're thinking about, is if they would live in Children's Village? First Manzanar, maybe second—I guess what I would like to know, from your perspective, what was special about the Children's Village? If you had to give it some personality and said like [you would about] somebody, This is special because they have beautiful eyes or they have a great personality or good at sports or something what kinds of features of the Children's Village good and bad were they characterized this place?
- RY: Well, I think what made it more special was that they made an effort to make a nice place for these orphan children. By that I mean we had our own cafeteria. We had our own separate barracks for girls babies and the younger and older boys, who were separated. It was like a large room with toilet and showers in the middle. And the fact that they took the time to plant grass and that covered a pretty big area there, you know?
- AH: The baseball field?
- RY: No, this was separate from the baseball field. The three buildings are here like this and then as long as the three buildings don't move—and going quite a ways, to me, it looked like a football field. They had nice grass there. We couldn't play football on it. They didn't want us to. Of course, I've forgotten who used to cut the grass or whatever, but we couldn't go on the grass or take pictures. The group picture was probably taken in that area.
- AH: So, it was a nicer sort of ambiance around.
- RY: Oh, sure.
- AH: It's not the fire break, that's for sure.
- RY: Instead of the fire break, we had this nice grass. The basketball court that was built there I thought that was a pretty good basketball court compared to some of the others. I don't know. To me it looked better.

AH: It probably had something to do with Block 29 wanting to play on it. Hold on a second. This is beeping me now.

[02:30:00; recording paused]

RY: And the fact that we didn't have to wait in line to eat—we had our own mess hall—since I didn't eat in any of the other block mess halls, I don't know how our food compared, but I gather that they prepared the food better for the kids because they weren't in as much of a hurry and they weren't feeding as many people as these other blocks.

AH: You know how, in this case, you talk about grass just not actually but sort of as a metaphor. You know when people say the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, other people could have looked at your facilities and said they have special facilities better than what we have. When you look the other direction at people in life, do they have something better than you? What did the rest of the camp seem to have that you would have envied at that time? It's like growing up, when I was a kid, I said, "Boy, I wish could live in the suburb, to have these nice houses and big yards and stuff like this and here we were living in a sort of a rundown sort of place." But then, later on in life, you think to yourself, Well, your run down place had a lot of advantages. But, from that point, what did you envy about what people in Block 29 and other blocks might have had that you didn't feel you had?

RY: I don't recall having any feelings of envy about the people in the other blocks because I knew that even though the families that maybe had one barracks, they could have been three families in maybe four, but it was partitioned off. I don't feel that their situation or anything else that I saw in camp was better than what we had at Children's Village.

AH: Lots of people who were at Manzanar envy people on the outside of Manzanar, not because of just physical facilities, but sometimes, because people outside of Manzanar had freedom, they could go where they want. They weren't going to get shot if they were outside the fences or get reprimanded by a military policeman or something, but what about, from the standpoint of somebody in Children's Village, did you sometimes envy people in the other blocks because they seemed to have more freedom than you did? Was yours a more controlled environment? To the point that it was restrictive compared to other people. Not that theirs was so free and easy, but everything is comparative, right?

RY: At my age, no. Maybe the little younger kids, we had needed more supervision, felt supervision, but I never saw much restriction at all. Nobody was watching over me. Of course, when I first went to there, I was twelve-and-a-half. If I did want to—we didn't have our own church in Children's Village as far as I know.

AH: A lot of blocks didn't have a church either.

- RY: If we wanted to go to church, we would go outside. I did go to church, but here again, it wasn't because it was forced on me. It was because of the habit I got into when I was at the Salvation Army when we had to go to Sunday school. I used to go when I was twelve and thirteen. Before I left, I was going to church, Bible class or something once before I left.
- AH: You know Manzanar, because there's ten thousand people there and, even though people lived in barracks, there were some public life there where people would go for one or another things. Sometimes they'd see films at night maybe outdoors.
- RY: They had a movie theater.
- AH: Or they would have dramatic kinds of presentations, or they would have sporting events. You see those pictures of those great, big sometimes huge crowds lining all the way into the outfield. And then, they had the store area where you could go and get things: purchase Pepsi-Cola or get newspapers or just get some things from the store. I'm just wondering, were you able to participate freely in that part of the camp life or not?
- RY: Well, first of all, we weren't getting any money. If we were going to have any money, we had to get a job.
- AH: Could you get a job? Were you eligible for those?
- RY: I worked a couple of summers that I was there, at least one summer, and got \$16 a month.
- AH: What did you do?
- RY: My brother I think helped me get it. I worked in a warehouse for a while. I don't know what we were moving around. Then I also worked to put new tarpaper roofing on the barracks but because of the heat—this was in the summertime—we had to start work at four or five in the morning and maybe stop by 9:00 to 10:00 because when it got too hot that tar would melt too fast. I did some of that, and my brother, the one that's a couple of years older than me, he was doing that.
- AH: So, when you have a few more dollars, then you can go out and do some of these things in the camp?
- RY: Right. Older guys used to play baseball. I was too young to go out and play with the older guys. I played a lot of softball and played like ten-inch baseball, but I think it was part of a school physical education I used to do that. I used to get a nice glove or a bat and shoes with the little money I had and I was able to either order that through Sears. Some of the kids that were in Children's Village, when I first went there, and was getting to be seventeen or eighteen, before the camp closed, some of us went out to work in bean fields and what not. I don't know how many months they were there.

AH: You didn't do that.

RY: No, I was too young. As far as I know I couldn't do that. But, these slightly older kids that were doing that, one of them used to, through mail contact, I think he had brought me back something.

AH: So, these were people on what they call short term leave clearance. They would go and harvest topping beets and whatever else it was.

RY: And my brother did that, too, but, as I said, we didn't do that very long because he left camp and went to Pocatello, Idaho.

AH: Let me ask a global sort of question, which gets you into comparing your situation against people who lived in the camp at large as opposed to the village. Would you say that because you lived in the Village as opposed to block 29 or 20 or 18 or something else like that your life at Manzanar was better because of that, or would you say that your life during that period was diminished because you were in the Village? In other words, was it an asset or a liability toward being able to make a bearable thing out of a pretty bad situation? I'm not asking you to say was camp great, but, you know, what I'm saying.

RY: I'd have to say it was really more of an asset. I really never gave it much thought, but when I explained about living in the barracks and having our own mess hall and the grass and everything, I think we had it better. (laughs)

[02:40:05]

Ah: Now you left that and went to Milwaukee.

RY: Right.

AH: And when you got to Milwaukee your status was that you were a totally free or were you connected to some institution in some way or another?

RY: Because I was sixteen-and-a-half, I didn't know it at the time but the gentleman at Children's Services Society, he was to be my guardian. As I said, after a year-and-a-half or two years, then they assigned another person. But, until I finished high school and turned eighteen, if I had any problems, I could go to them.

Ah: Okay, but there wasn't a lot of supervision from them.

RY: No.

AH: So, it was at your volition, if you had a problem? They didn't check up on you on a regular basis or put you on a short leash or anything?

- RY: I was pretty much on my own, but they said the difficult part for these people was the fact that I ended up moving around and living with five different families during the two years of high school, but fortunately, I only went to two different high schools.
- Ah: Okay. Now, when you and I were emailing each other back and forth, you sent me some interesting information, and one thing you said that I thought was interesting, you said, *Will you be you were talking about high school particularly? Does the project include the period after they left Children's Village until they finished high school? I would think that period is most interesting experience for most of us.* I'd like you to enlarge upon what you were getting at there and why you said that.
- RY: In my case, when I first went, the reason was set up that I stayed with this family that had three kids, but they were at their summer home by the lake. And then, I found out before the school was to start that this family no longer wanted me to live with them. You know, at times like that, I don't recall being upset or annoyed or anything because it's like I just have to survive so to speak. After I thought about it—maybe not right away—I think one of the reasons why that family—kind of an interesting thing about this family, the man was president of a sugar company in Milwaukee, and the wife was the daughter of Senator Wheeler of Montana. They had three kids, all boys, and they used to be out at their summer home. They had a tennis court whatever. But, these people had money so they were doing a lot of things. The husband used to go to Milwaukee, to work anyway, and drive back because it was only about thirty miles. That's the first and only time I was homesick. I probably didn't seem too happy, so they probably think that I wasn't happy living with them.
- AH: What were you homesick for? Children's Village? (chuckles)
- RY: No. Because, all of a sudden, I was all by myself, no kids. I don't remember being depressed, but I remember having this homesick experience. That was the first and last time. I got the feeling that I was doing whatever I had to do. The oldest boy was about nine. He was able to go out on the sailboat but not the younger ones. They were not old enough to go out by themselves so I decided I was going to. I wasn't a good swimmer, but they just didn't think I was happy there because I never talked to them and said, Hey I'm homesick. So, I thought that's maybe why they decided they don't want me. That's when I went back to stay at the hostel because I was able to stay there because I was getting a \$30 allotment.
- AH: Now tell me a little bit about that hostel because, when I have seen pictures of hostels and read reports on hostels, they're really quite variable. The one thing they seem to have in common is that there's usually some provision for a maximum amount of time that you can stay there because their idea isn't to be a permanent home many stages between sort of places. And, as you build up your resources, get a job, a place to live in, they want you to move out and let that place be for somebody else who's going through the same struggle. So, what was your situation?

RY: The person that was managing the hostile was Mrs. Neo, the mother of these two employees that used to come over. They live one block from them. I never knew her, and she probably didn't know who I was. But, when I went to stay at the hostel, it was one of these big managing companies out of Milwaukee. I had my room there, and I got two meals a day.

AH: So, it was a mansion, that's what it was. Carved up into a hostel thing.

RY: I thought it was okay, but here again, like I said I think having lived in orphanage—whatever I thought it was okay. In my case, they knew that I was _____ (inaudible), right? I don't know if they knew my sisters were there. They were all nice to me, but I didn't have anyone looking after me. I was there to take care of myself, but, after I think, they would have let me stay there until my brother got out of the Army and my allotment stopped. But, after I was there three—and I was going to an inner city high school. The high school was tough school. It wasn't so much the school. Because I needed clothes and things, I told my guardian that I needed to move and work for my room and board and go to school. I explained that so he was able to find a place. This was a fairly young couple that had two adopted children through the Children's Welfare Society. So, I went to live with these people and transferred high school, and I was with them for less than a year.

AH: What was your responsibilities for them?

RY: Well, the oldest one was probably around four or five. I don't think he was in school yet. The youngest was only about two or three years old, so I was a babysitter if they were going out. If they were going to have guests, I would help with the food and other things. I would mow and cut the grass.

AH: So, you did everything, a little of this a little of that.

RY: I don't remember doing the laundry for her. I don't know. Then I went to school, whatever I had saved up for the school. I went to the high school. Great, really

AH: Good high school?

RY: Yeah, really good high school because it was in Wauwatosa. It was a suburb. But, when I went there was only one Wauwatosa high school. I guess in those days that was an upper middle class area, and, like I said, the school and the teacher was really good.

[02:50:12]

AH: Were you probably the only Asian American in the class? Or in the school?

RY: In the whole school. The only other person that had some Asian blood was one fellow. I think his father was Filipino. The mother was Caucasian. But, the three

years I was in that high school—a little less than three years—I was only Asian. No African Americans either.

AH: How did they treat you?

RY: Well, here again, I got along okay in school because I never talked about what my situation was. But, from the kids in school, I had one place, one of the kids in the same class as me, he lived across the street so he knew my situation. If they didn't know it, the parents certainly did because the parents would be talking to the people that I was living with. But, I didn't experience prejudice of any kind.

AH: Did you have friends at school?

RY: Yeah, I did. When I went to live with this first family that was a long ways from school, I used to take the bus. Within about ten blocks of where I lived, there was a kid who was in the same classes as me. He had two sisters that were younger, and this fellow's father, he was really good to me because we used to take his son to maybe, not a ballgame. We'd go into favorite park from _____ (inaudible), and he brought me along. But anyway, I stayed with that family for less than a year and then here again I moved. The Children's Welfare Society was the one that—they have to check out the family. They make those arrangements, right? Then I went to live with another family, this time older couple both working and their son, who was in the Navy. The son didn't talk too much about a lot of action that he saw in the war. He never talked about it, but this son was just out of the Navy, was born and raised around Milwaukee, and went to the same high school.

Ah: Oh, really.

RY: He was living at home, working. I don't know, I guess he was still in school, but he treated me really well. We used to play touch football in the street, and, when I was playing intermural basketball in the school, he would come and see me play sometimes. That family, like I said the couple was older. They were already in their fifties. I really enjoyed living with that family, but, within a year, they left to come to the West Coast, Southern California, because one of the woman's sons was working for Walt Disney Corporation. I guess because they were getting older, they wanted to come out to California where the weather is nice. After they left I went to live with another family.

AH: Geez! You're staying there for how many months at a time?

RY: Well, most of them was less than a year. Then this other family that I moved to, they were still within the same school, so I didn't have to change schools. This family had also a son at home. He was already through school working for one of these food companies. I got along well with him, but there wasn't much interaction because I'm busy. But, this family, the man was a lawyer in Milwaukee, and the mother, the wife was very active with the Women's Club and other things. I didn't get along too well

with her. I'll tell you, maybe this wasn't the only thing, but one of the things that was going on there was they when they had guests they wanted me to wear this white jacket and that bothered me. I don't know if it was pride or whatever.

AH: You, all of a sudden, were a servant.

RY: Yeah. So, that bothered me. I did a lot of same kind of work around the house and outside house. It wasn't just the jacket thing. I didn't really get along too well with this lady, not that she was mean to me or anything.

AH: She wasn't warm.

RY: She was a prominent lady I guess in the community and so it was kind of affecting me and maybe my schoolwork. I was already getting good enough grades, like a B, but anyway I didn't feel like I was doing too well and I wanted to move. But, when I went to my guardian, the first thing they told me was that, Bob, it's not so easy to find families that you can live with and go to school.

AH: Get along with them.

RY: Right. They said it's not going to be easy, so nothing happened. I'm sure they were trying, but nothing was happening. So, the family that went to the West Coast from across the street was the same grade as me. I told them about it. I didn't tell him the problems I was having, but I told them that I wanted to move away. I think the parents helped find a place for me.

AH: That was nice.

RY: Yeah. So then, I moved for the last time. This other family had a couple of children. The family owned a Chevrolet dealership, but they were a couple probably in their mid-thirties. I got along pretty well over there, and I finished high school with that family. Right after I graduate from high school I moved and was pretty much on my own.

AH: Two big questions that emerge from what you've been telling me is one, overall would you say that the experience in Milwaukee was a positive one, an enjoyable time, a period of growth for you and renewal and things?

RY: Definitely wasn't positive because, even though I was on my own so to speak, the experience of living with these different families—not that I felt like I was over worked with going to school—but it wasn't the happiest part of my life.

AH: So, you prefer camp to that?

RY: Yeah. Here again when you're living that the only motivation I had was to finish high school, graduate high school. The reason why I was so motivated in doing that was because, in my family, only my one sister, that graduated high school in

Manzanar, she was the only one to graduate. None of the other sisters graduated high school.

AH: I've got to turn this over in a second, but I'll give you something to think about. Continuing along with what you're talking about the nature of that experience, be thinking ahead about how did it affect your education in high school. Because you're just talking about how you want to finish but you changed schools twice. You've also changed different families, work setting, then trying to go to school and you didn't have a lot of money and stuff. I was kind of wondering how did you do in high school? Not how did you do in grades, but how did you do in terms of this pivotal sort of moment in your development as a student? So, I'll turn this over. [recording paused] Okay, you were talking about the qualitative life in Milwaukee or the limitations as far as you were concerned. Did you want to talk a little bit more about that?

[03:00:00]

RY: Here again going to school there and living with these different families, my own experience, aside from that one family, I had very enjoyable time with most of these other families and learned something from these people. This couple that came to California were an older couple. I remember the wife of this family used to work at one of the large department stores Milwaukee Boston department store. She used to work in the chinaware department, and I guess she was involved with that kind of setting table and that kind of thing.

AH: Oh, really.

RY: She was really a nice woman. Even though I was there to help—I did more than help with cooking and things because they were both working—but this is the only family that wanted me to have the same opportunity as their son who went to that same high school. So, they encouraged me to go out for sports or whatever. I tried that, but it didn't work out too well. I went out for track and field. I used to like to pole vault, and I found out with the practice and the work I was doing, especially because both of these people were working, it didn't work out too well so I gave it up. With the other people, I never had that kind of opportunity. So, even though you could say, out of my first eighteen years of my life, those two years of going to high school and living with these different families was the toughest part of my life. The way I looked at it, it seemed like the positive side is that after that almost anything else was easy.

I'll tell you a good example how this really kind of reflected itself was after I got out of the military, I got the Korean GI Bill. So, I went to business college in Milwaukee. I was going to this business college that was catering to World War II vets, and I was able to go to class like five hours straight, one fifteen minute break, so that's fulltime. I was getting out of class around 2:00 p.m. and then I was going to work part-time for some to supplement my income because I was on my own. That's when I realized that—I didn't finish. I was majoring in accounting, and even though

it was a two year business college, one year was equivalent to two years of regular college because I was going fulltime. I gave it up after a year. At the time, I didn't think about it, but even through my going to business college and working part-time, all of that seemed easy compared to two years of high school.

AH: Tell me a little bit about high school, even looking at a comparison against the other high school you went to, which was at Manzanar, right?

RY: Two years of inner city high school.

AH: But that was in Milwaukee.

RY: Right.

AH: Your high school experiences generally, like, if you had to rank the three high schools you went to, my guess is the best high school is the last one, second best was Manzanar, and third best was in the inner city one?

RY: You're correct. And the reason why I have to say the last high school I went to was the best was because that's where I got my best education, and I did do things that I didn't have a chance to. I played intermural basketball and things. One summer I even played in a city basketball league. One of the kids that was the same grade as me, I think his uncle—the candy that was called Ziegler Candy Bar candy company? They sponsored it. And then, one summer I played—well, in fact, the first family I was living with during the summer, when I wasn't in school, going to work, I played baseball with a city league for sixteen, seventeen year old kids.

AH: So, you had a really good experience.

RY: Yeah. That was my first time, and I really loved to play baseball.

AH: Did you get good counseling at that high school to the point that they pointed you in the direction of a college preparatory program or not? Because I wonder how they treated Japanese Americans at that time because, nowadays, a Japanese American will come to a student, and they always cater to that. They will say right away, You're definitely a pre-college sort of bound student. But coming out of the camp there like this and living in a lot of places which were inner city, Japanese Americans were sometimes treated like blacks and Hispanics and whatever so I don't know what kind of counseling did you get.

RY: When I went to the inner city high school, there wasn't as much counseling there or anything. They only seemed to be interested in being there because some of the kids weren't there to learn and stuff. But, at this Wauwatosa High School, the only thing I ever remember is they had—what do you call it, somebody that counsels the kids that way?

AH: Counselors.

RY: Okay. I don't remember a special counselor, but I know that if I wanted to prepare myself to go to college I had to have at least two years in math and two years of foreign language. So, I took those courses.

AH: You mean teachers were acting as your mentors?

RY: Right.

AH: Okay, I gotcha.

RY: I don't know why I took Latin. I ended up taking two years of Latin. I had physics and biology, and I took two years of math, algebra.

AH: Then you had the complete college preparatory program.

RY: Because I was told that I needed those courses if I wanted to go to college. One other thing I remember, this school, before I graduated, I had to take public speaking, which was great. Yeah, one semester of public speaking. I still remember the teacher I had, Miss Gibson. She was tough, but she was really good. You know the other thing, in Milwaukee—I don't know about the California—students we had to buy our own books.

AH: Really? For high school? Like you were going to parochial school instead?

RY: I could buy used books. I had to buy my own books. The other thing that they allowed—and this was at Wauwatosa high school—you could choose your teachers for some subjects.

AH: So, they had some electives? You could choose what you want?

RY: The thing is I remember is we had two or three English teachers. One of the English teachers was very popular so all the students wanted to get into her class, but it was filled. So, I ended up having another teacher. But, as I said, the teachers at that school were really excellent because before I graduated, mainly by the time I got into my junior year, I understood my English grammar pretty well. I know that before I graduated—and I knew my spelling was always pretty good, but those things that, even though I didn't have in college, it helped me later in my working life.

[03:10:27]

AH: You know, you're telling me some real interesting and very ambivalent stuff because, in some ways, it's sort of like these were the greatest of times, these were the worst of times. (chuckles) I think that's probably true. Looked at in one sense it has these negative [sides], but, when you focus on the school, it was such a positive experience.

You got a good education. You had great teachers. They're understanding. They tried to direct you in different ways. You were able to participate in different kinds of intramural sports and things like this, but you can still feel bummed out by other things.

One of the things about Milwaukee, when you think about the general population and the fact that is a German American town—now German Americans have been treated pretty badly during World War I, and actually, some of them weren't treated that well during World War II. Do you think that there was a little bit more simpatico on the part of the population to somebody who was of Japanese ancestry because they had been through that kind of thing before themselves? Or they were prejudice against—I remember when they were changing the name of Sauerkraut to victory, this or that or the other thing. I was wondering if that played into it in your life? Did you even notice that these were Germans living here?

RY: Well, I know that a lot of the kids, especially Wauwatosa high school, were German Americans. This fellow took his son and me to this racetrack. The last name was Kleflein, so I think maybe they were German American. So, yeah, I would say that because a lot of the population was German American, maybe they had a little more feeling toward me. I remember this one kid in high school—I don't know if was the _____ (inaudible). I was in some of his classes, and he was telling me about another student. I can't remember his name. Maybe he wasn't German American. He said that fellow's mother, when the war with Japan started, she had a lot of Japanese chinaware, and she told me that she broke all the chinaware. (laughs)

AH: (laughs) She did?

RY: It sounded kind of ridiculous to me, but she was just explaining that to me. I don't even remember his name. Maybe he was in some of my classes. Like I said, I got along pretty good.

AH: You know what happens sometimes when you go to a place like Milwaukee, if you're from Southern California, there's all kinds of foods that you're used to eating, and you don't have them anymore.

RY: (laughs)

AH: If you're from a Japanese background, rice is one of them. The potatoes are great, but as you were growing up and you were at the Salvation Army or even at the Children's Village, were you getting Japanese food at those places or were you mostly getting—

RY: We were mostly getting a lot of regular American type food but probably some Japanese. I wasn't getting rice every day, and when I went to Milwaukee and I was living—

AH: You were getting nothing in the way of Japanese food.

RY: Right, but unlike a lot of Nisei who were growing up with rice, because I wasn't getting it all the time, when I went to Milwaukee and I wasn't getting any, I never missed it.

AH: So, it wasn't a big adjustment for you.

RY: It wasn't because gee, I was thinking I've got to go to a Chinese—in those days, they had no Japanese restaurants in Milwaukee. They had a couple of Chinese restaurants in downtown Milwaukee that I did go to occasionally, but I never felt like gee, I have to go and have rice because my brother-in-law and a lot of other Nisei—

AH: They want a fix. They need their rice, and they go crazy! But, there were some Japanese families and did you make any Japanese American friends in Milwaukee or not? You remember the WRA, when they sent people out, said don't congregate more than ten in a place. So, a lot of people didn't know what to do, and yet sometimes you want to be able to share your traditions, so did you make any contacts with any other people?

RY: I didn't have hardly any contact because, of course, the schools, when I went to the first school inner city high school, they had some Japanese American kids there. But, they were ahead of me in school, whatever, and the people that were living at the hostel, there wasn't anybody that was around my age. There were younger kids and some adults, so I can't say I built up any kind of friendship with kids my age because there wasn't any at high school. And I didn't see any during the summer. One summer I did work before I graduated because the family I was staying with they said if I wanted to work in the summer I can go to work, and I worked on some construction company.

AH: So, you made a little more money.

RY: To get some extra money.

AH: You were basically paying your way through high school, right? Buying your books because you had to there, and then the little spending money you needed, that would come out of what you were doing. You weren't getting rich, but you sort of getting by.

RY: Yeah. I was getting only \$2 a week from this family, but, during the summer, here again while I was cutting grass and things in the wintertime—I could go and shovel snow and make some money. They weren't paying much to shovel the snow, but this fellow whose father took me and him to this racetrack, he and I used to go out together and shovel snow sometimes. I don't think he needed the money. I needed the money. (laughs) But, he knew I needed the money. The two of us would shovel snow.

AH: Now, in the meantime, the years are going by because you got there in June of '45, right?

RY: Right.

AH: And then, you leave when— in '49?

RY: November I left in enlisted in the Army.

AH: What prompted you to do that?

RY: Well, first of all, by that time we had to register with the Selective Service, and two of my brothers were in the Army. One of my brothers, of course, was with the 442nd, and my other brother, one went in before he was eighteen. My sister signed for him. And the reason why that brother, just the one who went to work in Omaha—I don't remember it too much, but he came to Milwaukee in '45 after I was there.

AH: To visit you and your sisters?

RY: No, because he knew we were all there, he was going to come there. But, what happened was, when he got there, he found out that the state of Wisconsin—I don't know if the laws are still there—but in the state of Wisconsin at that time you had to go to school at least one day a week until you were eighteen.

AH: Oh, I see. So, he got out of there in a hurry. (laughs)

RY: He didn't want to go, so he decided to join the Army, and my sister signed for him when he was I think seventeen-and-a-half.

AH: Did the service for you, at that particular time, have a positive feel to it? There are people who I've talked to who were your age in camp—and one of the things in camp was you can kind of know you're in camp because people are suspecting your loyalty. That's what it comes down to. Yet, there are people who then became soldiers and became heroes. People talk about the 442nd—they got a lot of attention. They made a movie, *Go for Broke*, later on, and so I guess I'm trying to feel for a kid—I remember I was young enough that when my uncles and aunts were coming back from World War II, as a kid, I really wanted to get into the military because I saw them come back and in these different uniforms, and they were heroes to me. Now the 442nd were heroes generally. Did that have play into your desire to go into the service or not?

[03:20:41]

RY: No, it didn't because, here again, even though my brother and my brother-in-law were in the 442nd, I never lived the same place that my brother did, so I didn't know it. He never talked about his war experience. My brother-in-law never talked about

his war experience except a couple of years ago I just found out some of the things he went through.

AH: Because, when you lived in Manzanar, there were plenty of people who they were coming in to wearing a uniform and the USO [United Services Organization] club.

RY: At Manzanar, when I was still there, I didn't see that.

AH: You didn't see that?

RY: No, because I was in the village. I know that in 1942, when they decided to get volunteers, I'm sure a lot of Manzanar.

AH: So, did you go into the service like some people to see the world, learn a trade or to make some living or to get a change in your life?

RY: Well, I think in my own case, it was kind of a change because, to that point in my life, I had a lot of changes, a lot of moving around, and the fact that that my brother and my other two brothers were in the military. When I went in, my one brother—I think he was already about out. He spent two years. I just enlisted for two years. My brother and my oldest brother, who lives up in Seattle, even though the war wasn't going on and the Korean War hadn't started yet, he didn't think that I should have enlisted for two years because, when I enlisted, they had one year enlistment, too in the Army. One year or two. Unfortunately, if I enlisted in one year, I would have been out and get recalled to the service.

AH: Where did you go when you enlisted? Where did you go for basic training?

RY: Camp Breckinridge in Kentucky where the 101st Airborne trained during World War II and believe it or not they gave us the Screaming Eagle patches. Anyway, I went. It wasn't primarily because of education, but, when I enlisted for the three years, I could choose to go to school and so I chose to go to quartermaster school. Basic training was only eight weeks in those days, and so, after I finished basic training, I went to Fort Lee Virginia to the quartermaster school and that was my first.

AH: How'd you happen to choose that?

RY: Quartermaster school? In high school, I had to take public speaking, and I had another half a semester open so I took typing. So, I said, "I'll go into quartermaster." But, when I went to Fort Lee, here again, when I went to basic training, there was no Asian Americans in the whole battalion. I don't know, it's just the Midwest, right? The only Asian Americans, one of the captains or something—maybe he was in the 442—this is the 1949 they still needed linguists so they had a couple of Nisei guys in the service touring the camps looking to see if they could find any Niseis that were proficient in Japanese. They interviewed me but—

AH: You weren't.

RY: No. (laughs) When I went to Fort Lee Virginia, that was my first experience being in the south where you had to ride in the front of the bus.

AH: You were somewhere in-between, right?

RY: Yeah. I remember getting on the bus with one of the guys who grew up in the Midwest, and they never experienced before getting into the bus. We get into the back of the bus, the bus on the base. The bus driver turns around—

AH: You get up here, right?

RY: And these guys just thought it was a big joke. They just laughed it off, but the bus driver wouldn't move. Then I had some other experiences down south after I was out of the service. I was down in Jacksonville, Florida, for a couple of weeks because, when I went in the service, it wasn't integrated yet. By the time I got out, they just started to integrate the Army. I ended up in Japan, as I told you.

AH: I know you went to Japan, but was there someplace in between there? You went to Lee.

RY: After I finished, I thought I would have a choice of where I wanted to go, and, if they gave me the choice, I was going to go to Europe because my two brothers were there. Of course, I knew our mother was in Japan, but we're talking about ten or eleven years, here. But, I didn't have a choice. They ended up sending me to Japan, and I didn't realize.

AH: As a quartermaster? Doing quartermasterly—

RY: They sent me to transportation corps battalion. See, what I didn't realize at the time, even though this was five years after World War II, they weren't sending Nisei to Europe as far as I know. It was to Japan and when I got there I found out that there were very few Nisei in that whole battalion. Besides myself, there was only about three other Nisei all from Hawaii. They were cooks. Once I got there of course right away I realized hey I could go see our mother. And so I did that.

AH: And then, it turns out that there was a lot of Japanese Americans involved in the occupation, especially ones who were bilingual because they could use them.

RY: Let me tell you what happened when I—

AH: I've got to turn this over; hold on a second. Keep going for a little while.

RY: What happened was when I got to Japan before I got assigned they had translator interpreter school, which was part of General MacArthur headquarters, and they

interviewed me there to see if I could do the same thing. I said, “Hey, I have no Japanese education,” so they just crossed me off the list. But, those guys were there primarily to translate a lot of the war documents, and I think they had to do some verbal translation. But, when the Korean War started a lot of those guys translator interpretive school were shipped to Korea to be used as interrogators of the North Korean prisoners who understood Japanese.

AH: That’s true because Korea had been under Japan from 1905.

RY: I remember seeing one guy at TIS I used to see in Manzanar.

AH: No kidding! Strange place to see him.

RY: I didn’t know his name he was a couple of years ahead of me, fairly tall Nisei guy, and he was at TIS.

AH: When we get back and we start talking again—I’ll turn this over—I’d like you to talk a little bit about what your experiences were as a person of Japanese ancestry attached to Japan, people looking like you, but being obviously from another country and their conditions. Even though they were rebuilding by ’48, there was still enough devastation and the kinds of feelings you had. Hold on I’ll be right back. [recording paused]

Okay, Bob, we were talking about you going into the service and then being stationed not in Europe, as you hoped you would be, but in Japan, which gave you some opportunities. It gave you a chance to see your mom. And to see her not only once but twice and then three times, and also later on to see one of your brothers in Japan, too. In addition to that you had a chance—and this is three years after the war had ended, and there’s still a lot of devastation in Japan. Japan now is thought of as very progressive and, although troubled somewhat by its economy, nonetheless an affluent world power. But, at that time, it was completely bombed out and trying to rebuild and people living out in the streets and kids orphaned from the war. You’re over there. You’re in an American military uniform, but you’re also wearing a Japanese ancestral face. And you’re looking at this experience—and people I’ve talked to, who have been in the same situation as you, have a variety of different impressions and perspectives on this. I’m wondering what your experience was and how you felt about it.

[03:32:00]

RY: First of all, in my own case, because our mother was still there and had some first cousins and our uncle and had probably a lot of first cousins on my father’s side who I also saw, once, but didn’t see them again. It was a good experience for me in that I was able to see these people, but, as a Nisei, I was told by some Japanese, maybe some other Nisei there that went there right after the war ended, that Nisei weren’t too well liked by the Japanese. Being in the military—and even though we were allowed to go out anyplace we wanted to—I didn’t really have that much contact with

Japanese people other than the Japanese who were working within our camp which was based right in the heart of Yokohama. We were living in a Quonset hut. The city of Yokohama, I don't know how much of it was bombed, but they still had main streets that were not totaled at all and any time it rained it was messy. My relationship with Japanese, even though I didn't speak any Japanese, the Japanese were able to speak English. It seemed to be okay, but I don't recall having any real friendship with Japanese.

AH: Did you date Japanese women when you were there? Because you were of an age now where you must be getting interested in the opposite sex?

RY: Yeah, I did see some Japanese women while I was there but nothing serious enough where I was thinking of getting married.

AH: So, they were friends and relationships but not really were not serious ones. When you went to see your mom, to what extent could you discern what she might have experienced being over there in Japan during World War II.

RY: Where my mother lived, which was probably an hour by train from Kumamoto, was just a lot of small villages. My guess is that the war didn't reach that area, so life for my mother and my uncle and their family maybe didn't change that drastically. They were farmers. At the time, I didn't really think about how much hardship my mother had been through, but, as I got older, I realized that it must have been very tough on her because she never got back to the U.S. All of her kids were back in California after the father died, and we were all under age. I don't know. I wasn't able to communicate with her about what happened after our father died. I'm sure she knew some of these things because I think I explained that to one of the women who is related to us in some way who used to live here in Gilroy. She spoke good English so I think she was able to tell my mother some of these things.

AH: Oh, she told her some of these things?

RY: I'm sure she did, but I wish I could have communicated to her one of the things that happened.

AH: Did you travel around Japan, apart from these trips to Kumamoto to see your mother? Did you go to Hiroshima for example?

RY: No. Of course, once the Korean War started and they froze the leave, we just didn't have much opportunity to take any time to travel. The only places that I saw while I was in Japan—of course, I went down to Kumamoto three times, and I was also based at an ammunitions depot port after the Korean War started, which was about ten miles south of the Naval base. I also went to what they call an air transportability school for about two weeks up in Sendai, Japan. Those were about the only place I saw at that time.

AH: And you were in Japan a total of how many years? Four?

RY: No, about three years because I wanted an extension.

AH: So, actually, you had a lot of three year hitches. You think about that. You were at the Salvation Army, Manzanar, three, back in Milwaukee, Japan—your life was ladled out in these three year increments. You evaluated your stays at the other three year places and four year places and stuff. How would you characterize your experiences in Japan? I don't mean totally good, totally bad, but which elements of it do you think of as very positive and which ones do you think of as more of a liability?

RY: I think it was part of from the viewpoint, even though I didn't speak the language, at least I got to see the country where my parents came from and the area where my parents both came from. I think those probably helped me to feel a little more pride about my heritage, which is good.

AH: Probably both pride about your family, too, in the sense that you lost your mom so early.

[03:40:00]

RY: And the fact that I think it took a lot of courage for my father to come to the U.S. the first time with little or no money and work hard. This is something that I never really told I think any of my brothers and sisters, but after I saw my mother the first time, I asked for a transfer to the 21st Infantry Regiment, which was part of the 24th division, which was based on the island of Kyushu where my mother lived. I asked for the transfer so I could be closer to where my mother lived, and this was right after I got assigned to my permanent unit. My request for a transfer, I explained why, and it went all the way up to 8th Army headquarters in Yokohama. Then they stopped it, and they wanted to get medical reports about my mother's condition and all that. I guess I probably didn't really want the transfer to start with, and I acted kind of pissed off about it all. Oh, I didn't do anything, but as it turns out, if I did get the transfer, I would have been in Korea with the Korean War. At the time, like I said, I was a little pissed off.

AH: It turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

RY: I just let it go, and I never got the transfer because two days after the Korean War started 75 percent of the battalion I was in there shipped out. They didn't all go to Korea. Some of them stayed back in Sasebo, Japan, which was a Naval base, and the others went to Korea because they had to set up the port facilities in Pusan so they could bring in the 14th Port Battalion, which was stationed in the Presidio here. They were the replacement. They came in, but I was down in this small ammunitions port in Yokohama. We were quartered in a large houseboat, like a barge. We would load

ammunition that was going to go to Korea. I was there less than a year when I went back to area near Tokyo.

AH: Now the big takeoff for the Japanese turn around was really the Korean War because Japan became the industry and everything else became the supply base for the Korean War. Even the buildup of some troops, despite the fact that they weren't allegedly to have any military forces, the U.S. needed them. Aside from that aspect of it, did you see Japan changing a lot during the period you were there so you could each year, in a sense, see an improved state of affairs in Japan?

RY: I didn't notice that much at all. I guess because I didn't see too much of Japan, but I remember, when I was on the train going down to Kumamoto, a lot of areas were bombed. I didn't notice much change in Tokyo or the Yokohama area where I used to be. I'm not sure—this was from '49 till middle of '52, and I really didn't notice too much change at all.

AH: Two people who weren't seen very much but they were seen were MacArthur and Hirohito. Did you see any one of them while you were there?

RY: I saw MacArthur.

AH: And how did that happen? Coming out of the Ichi building?

RY: It happened to me and this other fellow in my outfit. We were down in Tokyo one day, and we noticed that there were a lot of Japanese. We found out right away that MacArthur was to go to the Dai-Ichi building—this was on Sunday—and usually spent a few hours and came out and a lot of Japanese would be there. We waited around. I had a camera. He wouldn't look up at the crowd or anything, but he just saluted to his lieutenants and get in his limousine and then drove off. The picture I had of him, I don't know what happened to it.

AH: You lost it? (laughs)

RY: I had a picture and then I left them with a friend of mine when I left Japan early. I got the pictures back but that wasn't around.

AH: So, how much longer did you stay in Japan? It was three years and then you left in '51?

RY: Fifty-two.

AH: So, it was almost four years you were there.

RY: Forty-nine till June of fifty-two.

RY: So, you weren't over there in '48. You were there in '49. And then, where did you go to?

RY: I got discharged at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, which is _____ (inaudible) because I enlisted in the Milwaukee.

AH: So, you're back to Wisconsin.

RY: Yeah, I went back to Milwaukee, and gee, in less than a month, I signed up to go to business college.

AH: And so you stayed there for a while, for a year at least, before you dropped out of business college, right?

RY: I was in Milwaukee a couple of years. Then I went to the East Coast.

AH: And where did you go there?

RY: I went directly to New York City. It was my intention—and it never happened—to try and get a department civilian job with the military and go to Europe because my two brothers were there.

AH: You were still trying to get there weren't you?

RY: It didn't work out that way. New York, even in '54, plenty of employment agencies, so I started to look for work. I was going to get a job in accounting because I studied accounting but nothing materialized. While I was going to business college in Milwaukee, I worked part-time at a trucking company. I didn't know much about rating, but I was doing some building, things like that. Anyway, I ended up going to one trucking company in downtown New York. They were looking for people who build whatever, and they gave me a job. Ever since then most of my career has been in transportation. After the trucking company, I went to work for Sea-Land Service.

AH: You were in transportation when you were in the service weren't you?

RY: Right.

AH: You had a long play on that.

RY: Yeah.

AH: How long did you stay in New York?

RY: I was in New York no more than maybe a little over a year, and the reason why I moved to New Jersey was because the company I was working for had a terminal in New Jersey. It was in seven _____ (inaudible). They had their terminal down in

downtown New York where they had that big trucking terminal. When I got a job with the same company in New Jersey, I decided I'll move to New Jersey and stayed at the YMCA for a while. I lived in New Jersey for over seventeen years.

AH: Wow.

[03:40:00]

RY: Up to that point, that was the longest I stayed in one place.

AH: I was born in Hoboken, and then I lived in the Hackensack area.

RY: During the seventeen years, I lived in New Jersey, I lived in Orange West South Orange, Montclair, Upper Montclair, lot of places.

AH: So, you were near Seaton Hall.

RY: Yeah.

AH: And then, what brought finally got you out of New Jersey. Common sense? (laughs)

RY: No. After working for this trucking company—while I was at the trucking company, I worked with another fellow, native of New Jersey. He was a guy close to my age, and he went to work with Sea-Land Service in the early years. He said, “Bob, why don’t you come down and see me over at Sea-Land Service.” They were over in the old Port Newark area, and so I went to see him one day. Sea-Land had their car carrier. They used to carry cars to Puerto Rico or whatever. I don’t know if we went on the vessel. Probably couldn’t get on the vessel, but anyway after that visit, he says, “Bob, why don’t you come over and apply the job at Sea-Land.” He thought it was pretty good company. So, I went over and filled out an application and went in I guess for one—no, nothing happened. Then, when I mentioned it to him, he said, “Oh, one of the personnel managers was on vacation,” a guy that he knew well. So, he said, “When he comes back, I’m going to tell him to look at your application.” And then, Sea-Land called me back, I got interviewed again, and they finally offered me a job. So, I ended up working for Sea-Land, and that was early 1962. The man that started Sea-Land, he’s passed away now, but Malcolm McLean, he is the pioneer of containerization. This man used to own McLean Trucking, and when he bought this company that became Sea-Land the name of the company was that he bought was called Pan Atlantic was based down in Mobile, Alabama. He moved there from Newark I think shortly after they changed it to Sea-Land Service. What he did in the initial stages was build container vessels from the mid-body of tankers, the front and back, and then the cranes built on the vessels. They called them self-sustaining vessels. Today there’s none of those around anymore because all the cranes are on the docks.

AH: I didn’t know that containerization went back to ’62. That’s interesting.

RY: It went back to when he first bought Pan Atlantic, and he bought it in 1957.

AH: Okay, so it was even before that.

RY: Before that he was even up in Newark in 1969 because there were about nine or ten shipping companies all going to Vietnam carrying supplies. Of course, Sea-Land and American Independent were probably two of the better ones. Sea-Land decided to open up Asia commercially. They were already in Europe a year or two before they opened up Asia. When they opened up Asia, the first country that they opened up was Japan.

AH: Yeah, of course.

RY: They set up quite a few offices in Japan besides their two main ports, and shortly after they had their first sailing out in Japan. Before that, I was interviewed for a job in Japan by one of the guys who was already assigned to Japan. He needed an assistant, and at that time—see, I was always involved in what they call traffic or pricing, guys that get involved in tariffs. And this fellow and many of the other guys that ended up in Japan were from the West Coast terminals, and primarily Oakland, because they knew each other. But, in those days Sea-Land had very few guys that were involved in pricing other than those working for their headquarters back in Newark, Port Newark. So anyway, he came from Japan and interviewed me and shortly after interviewing me, the longshoreman went on strike. I was in the union then, so they laid us off for about three months. Right after the strike was over I went back to work the guy who was head of the Japan division, whatever they called it, he said, “Bob, Ron _____ (inaudible) is going to call you.” I think he probably said, “He’s going to call you and offer you a job. So, I got the call, and he made sent me a job in Japan. They knew that I didn’t speak any Japanese, but they knew I was Nisei. I think it was on a Tuesday. I said, “Can I get two days and get back to you?” because my first reaction was I had no intension of taking the job outside the country. I would have probably had some interest getting into the Japan division, but I remember by that time I was in Jersey for over nine years or whatever and I remember some of my friends thy all told me, “Bob, we wish you would go.”

AH: Wow. Good.

RY: They said I should take the job. So, I took the job, and I ended up in Japan.

AH: And how long did you stay there?

RY: I was in Asia seven years. I spent two-and-a-half years or so in Japan, and then they opened up South Asia. They couldn’t force me to go, but they wanted me to go to Singapore to be part of South Asia headquarters because Sea-Land, being the pioneers of containerization, they were the biggest container shipping company in those. So, no matter what country they went to, the governments of these countries wanted Sea-Land to be in the conference. They didn’t want Sea-Land to come in

there and operate independently because they want to keep an eye on them, if they belong to the conference, they can't unilaterally do everything. So, I think there was a lot of pressure when Sea-Land went to these countries to join the conference so that was part of my job. Because in Japan and Korea, they belong to all these conferences, and I used to go to all these conference meetings. So, when I went to Singapore—they had the conference in Singapore. They had a conference in the Philippines. The conference in Singapore took in Malaysia and Singapore. They had a conference up in Thailand, but I used to go to the meetings in the Manila. Once a month I used to fly from Singapore to Manila to attend meetings. Then I was down at Singapore for a year-and-a-half, and then they started up in Tokyo. It was already in Yokohama. They started their own auditing and overcharge claims things in Japan for all of Asia. Then they had me to back there and run that department.

AH: So, you went back to Tokyo?

RY: I lived in Tokyo, but I was working in Yokohama. By then, I drove—when I was in Singapore, you drive on the left side of the road, right? But, the thing is in Singapore the steering wheel had to be on the right side. That was by law. In Japan, they didn't have that law because the U.S. military used to bring in—but, by the time I got to Japan, the company said, Bob—

[04:00:00; recording paused]

AH: Bob, you were just talking about going back to the Yokohama / Tokyo area, and you had been there after World War II from '49 to '52. And now here is it what year when you go back?

RY: Early 1969, late March.

AH: Early 1969. A lot of things had occurred in Japan from the time that you had left to the time that you returned and we were talking about how you weren't able really to see, perceptibly, the changes that had gone on around you during those three years. What about the big gap from 1952 to 1959? In those seventeen years what did the Tokyo and the Yokohama look like to you?

RY: It was just tremendous change. Of course, probably not only Tokyo. The main section in the area had changed tremendously. They had a lot more high rise buildings by then. I think that high rise buildings in Japan started in early '60 because when I was there in the military, as far as I know, the tallest building they had was maybe no more than twelve stories. And near where the emperor used to live they weren't allowed to build too tall because they didn't want them to relocate the emperor's home.

AH: Well, the Da-Ichi building must have been one of the biggest.

- RY: Yeah. I went to look at the Da-Ichi building. I'm not sure what it is now, but, of course, those buildings are still there. I remember the old Imperial Hotel when I was there in the military, but then they had the expanded it and just so much change that I just wouldn't ever have recognized it. Same for Yokohama. I didn't notice quite as many big buildings around Yokohama, but, of course, no more dirt roads. Everything was paved. I was in Japan last June, and just between the time I left at the end of '75 and last June, there's been changes. It's even more modernized in certain areas.
- AH: You had mentioned, either before we started taping or sometime during the taping, you mentioned living in Long Beach. So, somehow or other you left Japan, and, if I read all the signs you've been indicating, with all the containerization that goes on down in the Long Beach area, did you stay within transportation?
- RY: Yeah, when I came back from Japan end of '75, beginning of '76, I worked with Sea-Land Pacific headquarters in Oakland. The only obligation that Sea-Land had when they sent people outside the country is that they had to bring them back to the point of origin. My point of origin was Newark, New Jersey, and if I insisted on going back to Newark, they would have had to send me back there without a job. But, what was going on was Sea-Land had a lot of Americans over in Asia.
- AH: Excuse me, is it Sea Lane or Sea-Land. And is it one word, S-e-a-l-a-n-d?
- RY: S-e-a-dash-L-a-n-d.
- AH: Okay, thanks. I say that for the benefit of the transcriptionist because whoever has to transcribe this will—you've said it a lot. I want to make sure that they get it right.
- RY: Yeah. The reason why I didn't insist on going to my point of origin was because the guys that were coming back to the U.S. side ahead of me, many of those went back to the point of origin, and, if they didn't have a job assigned right away they were like floaters. I didn't want that so, when they offered me a job in Oakland, I took it, and I came back to Oakland. But, I was only with Sea-Land until early 1979 because while I was doing work for which I was experienced at, what I learned in Asia, I didn't feel like I was utilizing all the things that I knew. And in late 1978 this Korean Company called Hanjin Container Lines—it initially was started by Mr. Cho who was the Chairman of Hanjin group. And in the Hanjin group, they had a company called Hanjin Transportation, the land transportation, and they were Sea-Land's agents for many years in Korea. So, when Mr. Cho decided to start his own shipping company, Sea-Land had some financial investment in that company, so they had some connection there. But, the the first North American general manager was one of these fellows that went directly from Sea-Land to Hanjin here in Oakland because Hanjin was going to have their North American headquarters in Oakland first. And they told this fellow, We don't want you going around offering jobs to Sea-Land guys that you know. Any Sea-Land people going to come and talk to us, they have to get permission from their higher up. So, I knew who the first general manager was—he was in the same office where I worked—but we didn't know each other real well.

One day he was occupying some space at the Sea-Land office, when he was still in the process of hiring people. He was walking by the office I was interested in, and I said to him, I said, “JD, if you have any job opening I might be interested.” So, he said to me, “Bob, why don’t you come over here a second,” in another room, and he showed me the job that he had filled and some that were open. The pricing manager’s job was still open. So, I got permission to talk him, from the guys that I was working for, and eventually, they offered me the job.

AH: Where did that send you to?

RY: I stayed in Oakland because Hanjin had—when they set up their permanent office, it was away from Sea-Land, but it was in downtown Oakland area. I was there from ’79 until ’86 when Hanjin decided to move their North American headquarters to Long Beach.

AH: Now were you happy to be back in the Bay Area? It was many years from the time that you were in San Francisco as a kid.

RY: I enjoyed it because a lot of the guys that I knew in Asia who were back here before me and not because I felt any real connection. I didn’t feel like coming back to my roots or anything like that. I found out later that there were some people that I knew from Salvation Army that were living in the Bay Area. I never was able to contact them, but I did see some people—one guy that I knew back in New Jersey who was working for Betco in this area, I ended up seeing him, but most of the people that I knew were guys I knew from Sea-Land.

AH: Right, knowing them from Asia and not knowing the locals here. And then, you went to Long Beach?

RY: What happened was when they moved from Oakland to Long Beach, they decided to set up an office first at LAX airport in the Korean Air cargo terminal building because Korean Air was part of the Hanjin group. When they made that move, most of the guys who were in San Francisco didn’t move to Long Beach. Because most of them didn’t make the move, even in my group, it was like going down and hiring from scratch. Hiring people, training people, and what have you. So, what I did, because Sea-Land and exSea-Land people were still involved on the board of Hanjin, I told this one man who was on the board, ex Sea-Land who was in Asia, one of the top guys—and I knew him very well—I made a commitment to him that I would go down to L.A. X and Long Beach, that area, and hire and set up the pricing department. And then, I said my intention was to come back here, the Bay Area.

[04:11:27]

Ah: Now did you have a family to consider at this point?

RY: No.

AH: You didn't? Okay.

RY: I was a bachelor.

AH: So, you weren't making your decision on behalf of the—

RY: For me getting around was easy all the years I was moving around and living in Asia, because, with a family, it's not so easy. Anyway, my intention was to come back. The Korean people in the company, I guess they really didn't think I was going to leave but, after I set up the department, what happened was, about that same time, another shipping company down in Southern California that had some exSea-Land guys, there they contacted me, and they arranged to have lunch. This was after I had already decided I was going to come back here. (laughs) I thought I'd think about it and then make the decision. But, the fact that I know this exSea-Land guy and the other guys who were running this company down in Southern California—I knew some of them not that well. But those guys knew me. They used to call me up. They offered me a job, and so I took the easy way out.

AH: Boy, you traveled a long way to—

RY: I took the job, and so I stayed down in Southern California.

AH: Did you retire down there and then come up here?

RY: What happened is that I left Hanjin for about two-and-a-half years, and the reason why I went back to Hanjin was because this other company I was working for, Hong Kong Island, they didn't file bankruptcy. They just closed their shop. But, before that happened, one of the exSea-land guys was working for Hanjin now. They called me up and had a talk and offered me to come back. That doesn't happen too often, but here again, when I was with Hanjin shipping company people always kidded me, "Hey, how come the Koreans hire a Japanese and all that?" Well, the one good thing was that the people that were running Hanjin back in Korea and some of the guys that were here were people that used to be with Hanjin Transportation, Sea-Land's agent, so I knew these people from when I was in Asia. They were probably signing off and saying, Bob, want to come back? And then hiring me. I didn't know at the time why they decided to contact me or offer me the job, okay. I'm talking about the exSea-Land guy who's now the marketing guy. I found out—and I didn't ask him. I never asked, "How come you guys called me?" because, for myself, I don't think it's right for me to ask those kinds of questions. They want to tell me—but this guy volunteered the information one day and told me how it happened that he came and contacted me again.

AH: What prompted your retirement? Just age or you wanted to do other things?

RY: No, I'll tell you what happened. Right now I'm not working, but I was working couple a days in San Francisco.

AH: So, you're not really retired now?

RY: No, I got laid off because business dropped. I like the idea of getting up and going to work two or three days a week. It doesn't have to be five days a week. At my age, I probably couldn't get a seven day a week job anyway. I'd like to work part-time. Anyway, what happened was, when I was in Long Beach with this company, I told them I was going to retire in '94. Before I retired in '94, they asked me if I could come back and work after I got back from my trip—I went on a long trip. It didn't happen right away but, within two or three months after I came back, they called me back, and they hired me back. It wasn't quite the same arrangement, but it's the type of department where you can't find a lot of experienced people in Southern California. So, they hired people, and they did a lot of training. I did a lot of that. So, in 1996 this Hanjin decided they were going to move their headquarters from Long Beach to Paramus, New Jersey. Anyway, way before the move they asked me if I would go back to Paramus, New Jersey, because same thing, hardly anybody is going to go back. They're going to have to go back and hire people and train people, but what I did, the reason why I'm back here, is I knew that if I didn't make some kind of commitment as to how long I was going to stay, I might still be there. I don't know! Maybe! So, I said okay I'm going to—this was in June of '96—I'll stay back there till the end of the year '96, and then I'm going to retire.

AH: And where did you retire to?

RY: When I left New Jersey, I ended up here. The reason why I ended up here is, before I left New Jersey, the people in San Francisco, who runs the Pacific Coast Tariff Bureau, that's the company that publishes and then files tariff for the shipping company plus what they call service contract that they had with the customer. They filed with the Federal Maritime Commission. The man who owns the company, I met him when he was still working for one of the Japanese container shipping companies when I came to the Bay Area in '76 and an exSea-land guy. He's retired, too. But, they were working there. They said, Bob, if you ever come to the Bay Area, stop in and talk to us. So, I came up here and talked to them, and they said they could use me three days a week.

AH: Had you ever had any connections in Alameda before?

RY: No.

AH: So, this is the first time you've lived here.

RY: No, I'm sorry. When I came back from Sea-Land in Tokyo in '76 and I'm working at Oakland. I ended up living here.

AH: Oh, okay. That's not too far from where you worked, so you did have a sense of the place. Probably felt comfortable here, too.

RY: Yeah.

AH: Used to be Navy and now with the connection in Oakland, it worked out well for you here. Are you involved in a lot of things now that you're-retired? You're still very youthful, and your mind can turn to a lot of things. Are you getting involved in other types of activities?

[04:30:00]

RY: Unfortunately, not enough. I don't do volunteer work. Alameda has a pretty good senior center. I go there to use their computer for email and stuff. I go out and exercise. I should try to play some tennis or something. Believe it or not, it's been such a long time, but I wanted to play chess. I put up a notice over at senior center but no response.

AH: There are leagues that are seventy-five and older leagues. I played a couple of years ago because the Japanese American National Museum had a team, and I thought, Geez, I'm sixty-five years old. I haven't played for a few years, but, when I went out there, it was fun. I really enjoyed that, and now I'm in a bowling league. I haven't done that for thirty years. I just decided I'm going to do it because I like doing those things and there's a lot of other people that are like us and want to do it. They're even playing basketball and stuff. You see these articles in the paper. It's amazing.

RY: I should try to get into the softball thing. I'm not doing any sports right now, but I'm still a sports fan. I go to ballgames, Giants games and the As. The As are probably the only team that has senior prices and \$2 Wednesday, which is sponsored by BART. Until a couple of years ago, Wednesday home games, whether day or night, was only \$1 plus \$1 hotdog. They raised it to \$2, still \$1 hot dogs. It's great, especially, for families with kids. And then, their upper deck, I think it's \$10 now, but they have senior prices for \$5.

AH: Now you wait, and if you stay an As fan a couple of more years, you're going to have to this guy who played for Cal State Fullerton, Japanese American, Suzuki. He's going to make it.

RY: I've heard of him. He's from Hawaii?

AH: He's from Maui.

RY: I read his name because I know Cal State Fullerton took the championship—

AH: Championship four times. He is one of the best catchers you'll ever see. The thing is that he was so good when he first came in—we had this guy who was pitcher named Chad Cordero and then last year—where did Montreal go? They closed their team.

RY: Washington.

AH: So, he was on their all-stars last year. He had more saves than any other pitcher in the major league. Can you imagine those two in the battery mates? And now Mark Kotsay, who plays for Oakland, was also at Cal State Fullerton, won the world Championship in '98.

Before we wind up, I wanted to just raise a bigger sort of question, and that is you have now sort of come conscious again about the experiences you had at Manzanar. And I'm just wondering what was the train of events that occurred that caused this interest and how has the interest manifested itself beyond this particular interview? I know in the nineties you came to the Japanese American National Museum when we had a program. There were quite a few former Children's Village residents there. I was surprised and pleased, but I didn't know *you* at that time. Your life went on, and you were busy and stuff. So, what happened?

RY: Mainly, because when I heard about the Manzanar museum, and my sister and brother-in-law—my brother-in-law passed away—they used to go to Manzanar on the—

AH: Pilgrimage.

RY: Yeah. Then they had one in L.A. I went to one of those, but I was still working then. But, when I heard about the museum, and some of my sister's relatives went there one time—I guess they stopped on the way to Vegas or whatever—and they said they didn't see my sister's name on the register and everything. I decided that I would at least go visit the museum. I was thinking that my sister had never been there. I was going to drive and maybe take my sister, but I don't know if she still wants to go. She never wants to travel much anymore because she has problem with legs. But, this fellow that lives in Sparks, Nevada, somebody I know from my Sea-Land days over there from Asia, he and his wife and his daughter—his daughter is grown now. She was outside the country. I think she's back in New York now. Anyway, he and his wife, they don't know too much about my experience other than the camp and the fact I was in Children's Village and all that. He asked me, "Bob, you want to go down? You can come up to Reno, and I'll drive you down." And he did that. In fact, he wants to do it again, but I told him, "Ron, don't do it unless you want to go, too, because, if you want to go, yeah, I want to go again." When I went to the museum it gave me more interest. Then, after I went to Encino high school, I decided to read some books, which I did, and that really kind of opened things up more. Not for myself, but I got a lot of nephews and nieces and grandnephews and grandnieces.

AH: And you did this going to the school, too.

RY: Yeah. So, I have a lot more interest. I don't know if you have any comments from any people that were in camp that they read this book *Years of Infamy*? When I read that book—because I didn't know much about all of the things that were going on that caused the evacuation, the kind of emotion that comes out—I'm glad I read the book, but maybe a lot of anger.

AH: Well, you know, it was the first book full length treatment of the war experience done by a Japanese American, so it was a very important breakthrough. And she wasn't a person that was real conscious about things either when she was younger. She had a career in television and worked on the Perry Como show. She did things like costume design and things. She's watching TV one time, and somebody said, Well, that's not true about Japanese Americans having been in concentration camps. These were very nice sorts of places. She got so boiling mad she quit her job. Her husband made quite a bit of money; he was in the perfume business in New York. She went down to the National Archives, and she spent about six years poring through and that result was a dedicated—it's clicking to me. I want to use the occasion to thank you for a very wonderful interview and a nice conversation that happened to be on tape is one thing, but having the conversation on or off tape, thank you very much on behalf of me and the Japanese American Project and Cal State University of Fullerton and for the public history program thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW