

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Children's Village at Manzanar Oral History Project

An Oral History with SUSIE WATAMURA

Interviewed

By

Celia Cardenas

On September 7, 1993

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NARRATOR: SUSIE WATAMURA
INTERVIEWER: Celia Cardenas
DATE: September 7, 1993
LOCATION: Monterey Park, California
PROJECT: Children's Village at Manzanar

CC: This is an interview with Susie Watamura by Celia Cardenas for the Japanese American Project of the Oral History Program of California State University Fullerton. The interview is being held at approximately 12:14 p.m. at the home of Susie Watamura in Monterey Park on September 7, 1993. We're talking about Manzanar, basically trying to concentrate on Children's Village. Susie, were you ever in Children's Village?

SW: Yes.

CC: Do you remember when you went in?

SW: The same time the whole group went in.

CC: Were you one of the first ones, or the last ones or—

SW: One of the first ones with the CV group, Children's Village, because originally it was—what was the name of it?¹ [distortion in recording]

CC: Oh, that's okay. We can think out loud! So, it had a different name?

SW: Well, because Children's Village—over here was Silver Lake area. Then the Salvation Army from San Francisco and then the Maryknoll from down here, but Maryknoll had only one group.

CC: How old were you when you went in?

SW: Eighteen.

¹ Recording skips throughout transcript – denoted by: [tape skips].

CC: And you went into the Children's Village?

SW: I forced them to make me go in the Children's Village because I couldn't get into Manzanar otherwise.

CC: Oh, really?

SW: First of all, when we came home from school, everybody on the island, Terminal Island, where we were living then, had a notice to leave in forty-eight hours, but they didn't tell us where to go, so we went to the Baptist church because that's where Tatsue used to go to the nursery. Tak² and Shiro never went there because they went on to the grammar school after the—[tape skips] We had forty-eight hours. That was the whole group of people that were living on Terminal Island. There was this man, and he was mad. He was very angry.

CC: Why?

SW: Because he came knocking, and he said, "Did you see this? We have to leave the island in forty-eight hours," just because they made it a Naval base there.

CC: So, not only the Japanese Americans were kicked off, but everyone?

SW: Everyone. So, he was very, very upset. He said, "Well, if we don't get out of here by Friday night midnight, it says we'll be shot." I don't know if there is a paper on that. Each home on that island had a notice saying that you have to leave in forty-eight hours. Most of the people living there, the men were fishermen, so they were spies, in other words. That's why all the able-bodied men, they were out on their boat, because you figure this was on a Wednesday after three o'clock when we come home from school. Then wherever they were on the boat—they would be in Monterey. They would be in San Diego, if they had gone in. I think it was full moon or sometime because the men would come in, and we'd have to—I know I used to have to wash my father's clothes on Saturday so that he could get on the boat back on Sunday to go out. So, it was once a week that they would come in to see the family. I have an older brother—I had, rather—and he was too young at that time, all below twenty-one years old, which was the legal age at that time. Otherwise, they're minors. So, the father's taken, all the fathers, so that left the mothers and their children and grandparents, if they had any, to shift for themselves. Whoever had anything, a truck or something, they could pack their things and move it, but forty-eight hours, you don't have time for anything. So, when we went to church, my oldest brother, myself, and my [tape skips]—so he figured he didn't have to go—[tape skips]—in Silver Lake at that time.

The missionary, Miss Swanson, she told my brother that Mary³ and everyone below Mary will be picked up the following morning and taken to the Shonien. At that time, Betsy was only—she was born in November, so she was only four or five

² Takatow Matsuno, O.H. 2339, Center for Oral and Public History.

³ Mary Matsuno Miya, O.H. 2489, Center for Oral and Public History.

months. She was being taken care of by a family in Los Angeles, where my father had—[tape skips]—still going to school. [tape skips]—was in the Patton State Hospital. [tape skips]—in the car because we just told them, “Oh, you’re going for a ride.” If we told them what they had to do, they would never leave. So, we got them out of the way. Since we just made the last payment on our stove, we had to make sure that went to the—Miss Swanson would be able to take care of it, then it was sent into the camp for storage. Whether we got it back or not, I can’t—[tape skips]—the only thing that we owned. So, that’s what happened.

My older brother volunteered to go to Manzanar to build the barracks. In Manzanar, volunteers were called for to help build it for the people that would be evacuated, right. I had to worry about Isa, my younger brother. He always tried to make it like he was—[tape skips]—two years older than you. (laughs) We were sent to the Evergreen Hostel, at that time. That’s where some of the—[tape skips]—to worry about Betsy, so I used to go visit once a week to this couple’s place. Their daughter was princess—is it princess or queen, of the Nisei Week in ’39. I forgot her name. Terrible. But anyway, her parents were taking care of Betsy, and they wanted to more or less take her with them to the camp. I kept saying, “No, she has to be sent to the same place that we will all be,” which was Manzanar. Then, at that time, Shonien said they could not take anyone that is not potty-trained, and I insisted, “Well, she has to get in there because the rest of the children were in there to go to Manzanar.” They finally relented, and I had her taken to Shonien. [tape skips]—at that time, the whole group in that hostel will have to go to Santa Anita, and then from Santa Anita, most of them were sent to Poston. There were three camps at Poston, and that was out of state, because Manzanar—[tape skips]—and I had to go to Santa Anita. I said, “No way am I going to Santa Anita,” when he had me go into his office to talk to me. [tape skips]—“I can walk out with my brother, and you won’t be able to find me.” We could go to Manzanar by hook or crook, just walk or do whatever just to get to the camp.

[00:10:00]

CC: To be with your family.

SW: Uh-huh. I said, “No, you can’t do that. If you want to try me, test me out. I’ll just walk out that door and take my brother with me.” He says, “Well, how are you going to prove that you’re not Japanese?” I said, “We have friends. The Chinese are putting buttons on, you know, the badge that says ‘I am a Chinese American.’ I could get those. It’s a cinch, just go to Chinatown and ask for a badge.” Because we used to go to school—we moved to Terminal Island, by the way, in ’36 so we had friends that were Chinese. We knew some of them—[tape skips]—where we used to live and just ask for a badge. They’re Chinese American. They know we’re Japanese American, and we’re no spies or anything. We’re born and raised in America. So, what is it? It’s just racial, by your heritage. But everybody that’s—[tape skips] Because he knew that I was very independent and I spoke my mind, so he knew that I would do it, too. He said, “Wait a few months—” [tape skips] That’s the only way we were—because they were the last group to go into the camp because the camp was

- closed to anyone else because they had—[tape skips]—because even your own race there's prejudice. Okay? You know that, don't you?
- CC: Yes.
- SW: Because you have it in your race. I remember when I was about—well, I was thirteen when we moved—[tape skips]—that my father had asked me—[tape skips] “What about Mom?” He says, “Well, you have to leave her there.” I says, “I can't take her over there and then come back without Mom. I'd have to stay there, and I don't want to go to Japan if that's the case. I'll do whatever you want me to do after I graduate high school.” He looked at me funny. I said—[tape skips]—“you ask me.” I said, “You know, all the people that have been sent to Japan, the children, they come back here.” They're called Kibeis, at that time, because they're the ones that were born here, sent to Japan. They were educated in Japan, and they came back. I told my father, “They go to Japan. They were born in America. In Japan, they are a person without a country because they're looked down on from the national people that's in Japan. Then, when they come back here to be with their folks, they're looked down from their peers here because they were raised in Japan, and they have that broken English. And they're Kibeis. So, I feel sorry for the people that have been sent to Japan and come back here. That's one good reason why I would not like to go to Japan, even if it was for my mother's health. And another reason is I can't bring her back here. No, I don't want to go.” It's surprising. That was the only—
- CC: That was the only time he asked you?
- SW: He asked me, uh-huh. In those days, you got to figure the parents did what they wanted with their children. My father was never like that. He was very understanding, and I could—[tape skips]—could do that. If he was told to do this, and he was told how to do it at one time, he's supposed to have it in his mind already. So, when my brother—well, this was after the war. When my brother was teaching me, you know, how Boy Scouts do things with their ropes and whatnot, he was teaching me how to do a knot. Well, it didn't go through. When he's doing it and I practice, it's fine, but two or three days later, when I tried to do it, I couldn't do it. Oh, he really yelled at me!
- CC: Your brother?
- SW: Oh, yes. He said, “You know, Pop, if you show me how to do it, I had to remember.” That's what he said. I says, “Well, I'm a girl, so I'm different. When I talk to Pop or when he shows me something and I forget, I can always go back and ask him and he will show me. So, being a girl is being different from being a boy.” I says, “You're the oldest boy. You're the firstborn, so you're expected to do quite a bit.”
- CC: And why did your father want to send your mom down to Japan to stay?
- SW: Because she had a nervous breakdown, and she was—my peers, they would say, Well, she's crazy. I says, “Well, there's a difference. If you look back at that time,

when you have a cold, what do you do? You go to a doctor. When you have a headache, what do you take? Aspirin. Now, when your eyes are bad,” which my eyes are bad so they used to call me four-eyes, “so you go to an optometrist.” Well, my mother at that time, I figure she was sick, which she was, mentally. So, I would say, “She’s crazy. She had a mental breakdown.” What caused it we do not know, and I would not say even if I knew! But it’s one of those things that happened, and at that time she had how many children then? One, two, three, four, five, six—[tape skips]—she had more that she would more or less—[tape skips]—she had two more children, after that, two more. But, this is getting off the course of what I’m saying. Anyway, she—where am I?

CC: Where they told you if she had more children she would calm down.

SW: Well, she calmed down because, as children, we used to make a lot of noise. You know children make a lot of noise. Every time we made noise, she used to get so mad. She used to get very angry. We used to say—well, she used to chase us with a knife, but we’d go hide under the bed. When she moved the bed this way, we moved with the bed. (laughs) So, after that she thought it was funny, and she forgot about it. See, that’s how her mind was. She’d get angry and try to kill us, or whatever, to reprimand us, but we’d always scoot and disappear or hide, and she couldn’t get us. That was kids in those days, and there’s still kids doing that these days.

CC: So, you’d be one of the oldest that went into the Village. You probably remember a lot more than other people.

SW: No, not really.

CC: How long were you in there?

SW: Only about two or three months, just to move into there and stay with the different girls that we saw the Salvation Army, from San Francisco, come down. Then we saw the Maryknoll group—[tape skips] Let’s see. There were three—[tape skips]—for the girls. One was for the nursery, and one was for the night for the girls’ side. For the boys, I can’t remember, but they usually had an older person that came in from—[tape skips]—I think Mr. and Mrs. Matsumoto⁴ had their office, living quarters, and then the lounge and the kitchen. Then the next thing—[tape skips]—the middle barrack, half of it was for the girls and then the room area for the matrons.

[00:21:00]

CC: How would you describe the overall condition of the Children’s Village to the rest of Manzanar, since you were—[tape skips]

SW: We were all put together. The group of girls would help each other, and then the boys would—you know, the boys and girls would try to play together and things like

⁴ Lillian Matsumoto, O.H. 2494, Center for Oral and Public History.

- that. Bashful and everything else like that, as you would in any orphanage. [tape skips]—complete supervision, I would say, except when it's time to get up, time to go eat, time to—[tape skips] The children, I think they had better quality food than the rest of the camp. I think so.
- CC: And their education?
- SW: Their education was very good, I think. [tape skips]—likes and dislike of the supervision there. Doesn't make any difference.
- CC: Did they punish you guys? Did you remember seeing it or happening to you?
- SW: No. [tape skips]—as a family, our family was—there was one matron that used to take it out on Betsy and Tatsue because they didn't like—[tape skips]—the older Matsuno—[tape skips]—catch it one of these days. But, we knew what was going on because you hear rumors, or somebody would say something. As the children got older, there were two, Taiko and Fudge, I think. One spelled their name with a W and the one—Fujiwara and Fujihara. One is a W, and one is an H. At that time they were older, so they would be assistant to the matrons, and they were very nice.
- CC: Oh, they were nice. Not the ones that would pick on Tatsue and—
- SW: Oh no, no. This one that would pick on was a very heavy-set woman. You know, it's just like any other neighbor. If you don't like them, they pick on you, and then you just yell right back to them.
- CC: Right. And once you got out, how often would you come back to visit the rest of your family, I would say?
- SW: As often as we could until my father came into camp. Because he was sent from North Dakota, Louisiana, Texas—[tape skips]—being as I'm responsible and I'm the head speaker of the children, I said, "No. If you want to go to Japan, which is your country you were born and raised in until you came here—but I see no reason why you want to go to Japan when you've raised us in America, and you've been living here since you were about fifteen—[tape skips] If you want to go back to Japan, fine. But, as long as we're in Manzanar, and I'm more or less responsible, brother and I, I say, No. We will not go to Tule Lake because we do not want to go to Japan—" [tape skips] I realized that it's his country, but since—[tape skips]—I guess he would because it's his country. But, he should realize that since he's the father, he had overall say-so, but he never—that's one thing about my father I could say, he gave us choices. [tape skips]—was fine, he just left it at that. [tape skips]—the other ones, which is like myself and Betsy, about seventeen, eighteen years difference. Between Betsy and I there's I guess eighteen years.
- CC: Did everybody else get out of the Children's Village and go live with you in the barracks?

SW: Just my sisters and my brothers, after my father was—

CC: After your father got there, did they release all of them, including Betsy?

SW: Yes.

CC: That's interesting. How long had you guys been there before your father got there?

SW: I would say about a year, a year-and-a-half. [tape skips]—because family. [tape skips]—he had a choice, but being that he loved his children so much, he'd rather come to Manzanar. That's the way I would think, because he came, and he was real happy to see all the children together in that one camp when he came back. So when he came—[tape skips]—of us that were out from the CV. That's why I said I think I was in there only about—[tape skips]—months or whatever. Then, since my older brother was there already, he was able to get a little space in the barrack so that we could live as brothers and sisters. So myself, my older brother John, then my other brother Isa, and Mary.

CC: John's the oldest, then you, then Isa, then Mary?

SW: Uh-huh. We were able to get a little—[tape skips]—of space.

CC: Did you work in Manzanar?

SW: I worked for a while before my father came, and this is really something when you—like my work is \$12 a month. Whereas, the medium people—I don't know if the teachers are given \$16 a month. But the wages at that time were \$12, \$16, and \$19. The doctors were getting \$19. That's *per month*. So, it was a joke. Without experience or anything, I worked at the hospital in the laundry room, folding the clothes after it was washed and ironed. (laughs)

[00:30:00]

CC: [tape skips]—she worked in a pickle factory. She worked in a hospital.

SW: Uh-huh. She worked as a—

CC: Mary worked everywhere.

SW: Well, she was able to, but, after my father came home and had the whole family, I wasn't able to work.

CC: Why? After your father came back, why weren't you able to work anymore?

SW: Well, who's going to wash the clothes and take care of the kids? So, that's what I was. I was more or less the washwoman that bathed them, washed ten people's clothes every day.

CC: Would it be safe to say that you assumed the mother role?

SW: Well, that's what it would be, so that's why when some of the sister-in-laws I have—[tape skips]—the fact that whenever we had a get together, they would ask me a question, then I would tell them, I would advise them, or whatever. I can't help it if I have the mother role. There's a few of them that—[tape skips]—you resent the mother-in-law, right? Well, they resented the sister-in-law because I had more or less control. I had no choice because my father had always said the family sticks together.

It's so funny, because he was the only boy, and my grandfather was here—we didn't realize my grandfather was here before my father was brought over here. He was here before, and then he either went after my father or he sent for my father when he was about fifteen years old. [tape skips]—here for a while. We figure that my father had sent his father back to Japan. That's why my mother is a picture bride. There was a cousin that they were going to send, and my father had told his father, "No, thank you. There's a girl in the country." That's who he wanted. [tape skips]—in those days there was nothing but picture brides. You might laugh, but I figure some of these—well, even the Italians have that, don't they?

CC: I think they do. I think I heard—

SW: So, it doesn't make any—[tape skips]—some kind of—

CC: Arrangement.

SW: Uh-huh, arrangement made.

CC: Even in Mexico they do that. They used to do that. What about when you used to go back and visit your sisters and your brothers back in Children's Village, did they seem happy playing? Were they treated different?

SW: No. They were happy. When we used to go to the nursery, it's funny because the kids would always be on their potty scooting around the floor. (laughs) That's one of the things I remember because whenever we went to visit, they would be on their potty, and they'd be scooting across the floor because that's the only way they were potty-trained. There's too many—[tape skips]—matrons in the system. They can't take care of say fifteen to twenty children at one time. If one wants to go potty, I guess they used put them all on the potty because that's when they would—

CC: How did you feel about Children's Village? Was it a help, or was it a hindrance? Would you have rather kept your whole family together from the beginning, or did they help you out by taking them from you?

SW: They helped by taking them from me for a while because I didn't have all that responsibility of the children, but still, you want to be with them. But, when you have forty-eight hours, you don't have time to think about those kinds of things. You just do what they tell you to do—[tape skips] So, they would arrange, you just go over here. That's how it was—[tape skips]—too highly of me because when—well, she's a missionary. At that time I could care less, because I figured, well, gee, my mother's sick like this, and what has God done? I know there's somebody higher up but—

CC: Mrs. Swanson, the one that worked for the—

SW: She was a Baptist missionary.

CC: Is she still alive today?

SW: I don't know. I was going to ask somebody, but I haven't got around to it yet. [tape skips]—my peers really thought I was a smart aleck, and I used to tell them—[tape skips]. So, they didn't know what to do about that because, well, that's how I was. Like my older brother, whenever—[tape skips]—you still have your gangs. It doesn't make any difference where you move. You have gangs. Even to this day they do have them, in schools, anyplace. So, at that time, I remember one of the younger boys went up to the older brother and said, "They ganged up on me, and they're going to beat me up." So, my older brother would look at him and say, "Well, get them one-by-one, if you know who they are. Just get them one by one, and they won't hurt you." [tape skips]—how the boys were. So, the boys were never—if they were, I would know, but I know that they were never—what would you say? Abused by the peers. [tape skips]—taking care of the little ones, but we'd tell them what to do if they are in trouble. The older brothers would say, "Well, I'll tell my older brother." Naturally, the younger one would say, "Well, I'll tell *my* older brother." But, my older brother always said, "You just get them one-by-one, and you won't have any problem." One thing that helped—because my father in 1929, '30, and '31—[tape skips]—I don't care. (laughs)

My father didn't marry until—he was champion of sumo in that era, so my father—[tape skips]—before and after the war, I know he was written up in the newspaper, the *Rafu Shimpo*. We never did cut it out, and we never did go find out about it. [tape skips]—he had taken a—[tape skips]—up the stairs, walked to the— [tape skips] My older brother and Isa, they were in the express business. They were trying to budge a safe, and both of them couldn't do it. And, my father came along, and he was very angry at his sons. He says, "Get out of the way. This is how you do it," and he put it on his back. The elevator wasn't working in the tall building at that time. He took it up the stairs. That's why, as he got older, his legs used to bother him.

CC: Because he did a lot of heavy lifting and stuff?

SW: Uh-huh, heavy lifting.

CC: When you were in Manzanar in the barracks, were there a lot of social activities planned for you guys? Could you guys go out and do things?

SW: [tape skips]—because you have to go to school, but after school you had to get back and do your homework and anything else. [tape skips]—you have your own area where you sleep, your cot, and before you go to school you make your bed and everything, before you have breakfast and go to school. So when—[tape skips] just like you would a family, right? Mother and father. But, you had to report in, and then you have—[tape skips]

[00:40:17; recording paused]

CC: Since you were the oldest and you did a lot of work for the rest of the family, do you feel you missed out on things in the camp that you could have been doing instead of doing the laundry or the cooking for all those people?

SW: Well, you didn't have the cooking, so all you had was the laundry. You do the laundry, hang it up. In the morning—they would have double sinks in the wash area, the laundry room. I would take a double sink and another one because I always used to wash in one, rinse in another, and make my last rinse in another one. And then, take it out and hang in on the line, and in the evening you'd take it down and fold it up so you have the clothes for the children.

CC: What's your biggest most vivid memory of those years in Manzanar?

SW: All the work that I had to do, which I don't resent because it was for the good of the family. And then we had a neighbor, she taught me how to crochet and knit, and she was a great help. There were others that would help. They used to say I did a good job, but I thought, Well, who's going to do it? Not you, right? (laughs)

CC: Did you feel any resentment for being put in there? After all, you were *American*.

SW: Well, I felt—how would I say it? That the older generation had time to rest instead of worry so much all their life since they'd been here in America, but I felt sorry that one thing, they were losing control of the family. The mother wasn't cooking, so if you didn't like the food in your block, they would go to another block to see what kind of food *they* have and seasonings.

CC: Different food in different blocks?

SW: Well, they should have had the same menu for each block because each block consisted of one barrack that was a dining area. So, each block had a dining area. If you were in this part of the camp, in the corner of the camp, you'd go to the other corner of the camp because you have friends there. When you go to school, you make friends, and you have different areas. So, you know, Oh, the food was good last night, so you figure, heck, I'll try it tonight. Because whenever you had your

mess call, I would say, you figure that it's an hour. You'd have to stand in line, just like you do in the Army camp, and then go through the line just to get served.

CC: Did Manzanar break down part of the family togetherness?

SW: I think so because the children could do what they wanted, unless the parents were stricter with them and made sure that they stayed together and they all ate together in the mess hall. Either that or some of the—if they had the mother and the father there, some way or another they would have a cooking area where they had a one burner or two burner stove, and they would fix—because later on, they had a co-op where you could buy your things. They had a fish shop, I would say, where the fish would be sent into camp. You could buy whatever fish you'd like and cook it.

CC: Did the Matsunos stay together at the dinner table most of the time?

SW: No, not really, because we had—well, we tried. When my father came, they had to more or less eat together. When the older boys would go out, they had no control over the younger boys, but my father made sure—because I remember Isa one day when he saw Takatow's report card, oh, he was very angry. "You mean you don't know your timetables and your division?" He got hold of him. I think from that time until late at night he kept pounding in him and pounding in him the multiplication and division so that he would memorize—at that time, everything was being memorized. You have to know your timetables and your divisions and everything else. So, the next day you never saw Tak. Every time he saw Isa he'd be running the other way. (laughs) It was funny. So, we had our moments of fun.

CC: Discipline.

SW: Uh-huh and discipline. My father wouldn't know. He'd just look at the—sign this, and he'd just sign. When I was going to school, whenever I felt like ditching, I ditched. I wrote my own notes and took it to school. So, I'm not a perfect one either. I had my fun, too.

CC: Do you remember the day that the camp got notice that the order had been declared unconstitutional and the gates were open?

SW: I don't know. Were the gates open?

CC: It's just a matter—

SW: No, it was a matter of closing the camps after the war. I remember when people started the—

[recording paused]

CC: —and them getting the notice.

SW: Uh-huh. But, the boys were still draft age, and they were called. I can remember the older generation, the Issei, saying, "How dumb. They're going to go fight for this country. They have been locked up. They can't even go out of the wire fences." But, you hear of some of them sneaking out and having fun. I know the Isseis are very angry about that. But the Nisei, since it's their country, even if they're behind bars, they would volunteer.

CC: With the atmosphere in Manzanar, did you guys feel like prisoners?

SW: Well, I had no choice. All I knew was every day I had to wash. I mean, there's the barbed wires and everything. We couldn't go anywhere because Lone Pine was so many miles away, and Bishop was so many miles away. You have to figure it's a desert and you won't be—I know there was one person that went in the mountain and died.

CC: Trying to get away?

SW: I don't know if he was trying to get away or he just went up there to paint.

CC: What did he die of? Do you know?

SW: He died because he got lost. Well, you gotta figure it's a desert, and if you don't make a rule of being able to come back by making trails, you're going to get lost.

CC: So, where did you guys go after they released the camp?

SW: When they released us from camp, we went back to Los Angeles.

CC: Back to the same old place?

SW: Well, my father, Mary, John, and Isa—Mr. Yamamoto I think was the one that set my father up as a partner and ran express, because my father was known for the express company he had before Mother got ill. Before the war, my father and mother ran a hotel, boarding room, and he used to recruit workers to work in Palos Verdes. That was at that time San Pedro Hills, in the camps, different camps he had for workers to pick the tomatoes and the vegetables to take to the produce market. So, that's what some of the people did. My mother, actually, must have been the brains in the family. (laughs) Because my father used to run the express, and my mother would answer the phone and she'd do all the handling of the money, running a boarding house, having a family and then have the camps and then owning two trucks and a passenger car. That was still something, with the amount of children that they had.

[00:50:27]

CC: You were very well stabilized.

SW: Well, that's what my older brother used to tell us. He would remember more. I remember when First Street from Hill used to be a little hill, and he'd be driving the truck—because he would help my father drive the trucks to take the baggage from Los Angeles to San Pedro, whoever was going to Japan, or wherever they were going. I remember he took one of the trucks and went to the library, which was on Fifth and Grand, and then he would be driving home. I remember Shioo went through the windshield.

CC: Shioo's your brother, right?

SW: Shioo's the other brother after Mary. He had his nose cut. That was right in front of the police station. Thank goodness it was right in front. Anyway, in those days, they didn't have the driver's license or things like that, but when a nine, ten, eleven-year-old boy is driving, he has no business driving a car or a truck. He just happened to stop, and Shioo went through the windshield. He cut his nose. They took him to the emergency hospital. He used to say, "God, it hurt! They didn't give me any anesthetic." They sewed his nose up. See how my father says, "You had no business taking the truck," even with the younger brother in the truck. But, he just wanted to go to the library and get some books. He used to do a lot of reading.

CC: John, your older brother?

SW: Uh-huh.

CC: When you guys got out of camp, do you remember a different feeling from the people? Did they treat you different? Was it hard getting back into society is what I'm trying to say?

SW: Well, all the Japanese stuck together again. They had no choice. When they went back to the Japanese town, there were more of the colored people at that time. They were able to get along, but eventually the colored people moved out and the Japanese had the town back again. So, it was nice in a way.

CC: You didn't feel a different reaction from the Anglos? Did you get any prejudice towards you?

SW: Well, when you apply for work, you always had that prejudice. Anyplace you went, you had the prejudice. I remember before the war where the people that had gone to college would end up working at Grand Central Station, which was a produce market, unless they were taken under the wing of their Issei people. Then they would be able to get into office or something. Otherwise, there wasn't any place that American citizen Niseis could work at that time. A few of them worked at the Department of Water and Power, some of the county jobs.

CC: Would you say there was a notable difference before the war in the treatment or after the war? Was there a big difference?

SW: Well, there was a big difference because, before the war, there was a lot of prejudice. During the war and after the war is when the Niseis, they couldn't come back to the West Coast, so they had to travel to the Midwest and the eastern coast. Seeing as how there weren't that many Japanese Americans in that area, I think they were able to make more progress in the professions, or whatever degree they had, to go into that area. Before the war, the parents more or less suppressed their children, I think. Not suppress. I would say even if they were sent to college and they came back, they could never find a job for what they were prepared for, except in the county or the governmental jobs, because they weren't supposed to be prejudiced, right? They were supposed to have—well, they had the degree so they were able to get in as long as they had the grades. Well, the grades and they were hiring.

CC: Did any of your brothers join the military?

SW: Uh-huh. Isa, Shioo, and Shiro.

CC: During the war or after the war?

SW: After the war.

CC: Tak didn't?

SW: No. Tak was the youngest, and there was no draft after that. Besides that, he got married when he was about nineteen or twenty. He's one of those boys, had to get married. I know Mary would always say, "Don't you remember when you told Pop that if he didn't sign the paper saying that Tak could get married," because he was underage, "that we would disown him as a father." "I can't remember, but I know I went to Pop and I told him—" Because at that time I was married already and out of the family life, but I've always kept in contact to see that the children are doing fine and everything.

CC: How old were you when you got married?

SW: Twenty-eight.

CC: Where did you meet Mr. Watamura?

SW: He used to be the meat man. I used to go to the grocery store. Then he used to run around with Isa.

CC: Did he go to camp, too?

SW: No, he was in the service.

CC: He was in the service during the war?

SW: Uh-huh. He was in Minnesota or—I know there was two camps up there. Camp Savage and Camp something. He never went overseas, though, because he was a meat man.

CC: Do you feel that having had a large family, and all of them in Manzanar, you guys have been able to stay together and talk about, it has made it less of a bitter experience?

SW: I think so. We used to talk about it and laugh about it and see the dumb things that happened. As a family as a whole, I think we—

CC: Have helped each other?

SW: Uh-huh.

CC: Have you seen a difference, one of you being more bitter than the other towards that experience?

SW: My oldest brother, he was very, very bitter.

CC: Any particular reason you know of?

SW: No, not really. With all the things that had to be done, being the oldest, too—but he came out all right.

CC: That would be John again, huh? Because when I talked to Mary, your sister, she's forgiven, and she's just gotten on with her life normally. Have you forgiven all that happened?

[01:00:00]

SW: I guess so. You can't very well say, well, should have done this and should have done that, because you can't change what happened. And you can't be resentful for the fact. I know there's a lot of resentment—there should be—but what good is it? Time goes by, and you just adjust to it.

CC: Do you believe deep inside that something like that could happen again? Maybe not to Japanese Americans but to—

SW: I don't think so. Because we know what happened to us, so that's why some of these that's in the JAACL [Japanese American Citizens League] and everything, they would take a stand and all the Sanseis.

CC: So, it could happen to any race?

- SW: It could happen to any race, but I don't think it's possible now with all the knowledge that the younger generation has and the knowledge that the older generation give to them.
- CC: How do you feel about the encampment of the Japanese Americans being a big thing in the American history, yet it's not really talked about in history books as much as it should? Do you feel it should be discussed to a greater length?
- SW: Well, if it would put knowledge and educate the people, but I don't think there would be any education to the people because, in the southern area, you have your black and whites. I think to this day even they still have that prejudice unless you go to the bigger cities.
- CC: Something more of a help than a hindrance, though, to have more education. I speak for myself, I would have loved to hear more about it during my high school years, and I regret that I didn't.
- SW: No, because in your—how old are you?
- CC: Twenty-four.
- SW: Because my daughter is—what is she now? She must be in the late thirties. You have to figure she's in her late thirties, and when she was going to high school is when it started coming out. So, that would have been in the seventies, right? Early seventies. I know she came to me and says, "How come you didn't tell me about that you guys were put in a camp, all the Japanese?"
- CC: You didn't discuss it with your daughter?
- SW: No. I said, "You never asked. Why should we bring up anything that was never asked? You know that we keep talking about Manzanar, Poston, all the—"
- CC: You openly talked about it in front of her, but she never bothered to ask?
- SW: No, because she wouldn't know what was going on until a teacher said that this has never been written up in history. Until then, they never knew. Because, unless you take history, you don't know about the Boston Tea Party and all that and all the presidents that have come down unless you follow it, and, if you don't ask, you don't know, because you didn't ask.
- CC: That's interesting that you didn't talk about it with her without her asking. So, when she asked you, then you let her know everything?
- SW: Oh, yeah. We'd say, "You can go over here and find out this thing and go over here because it was never written up in history." So, we just tell her, "Go to the Japanese

community, and they have histories.” So, all the more they have now because they have that Japanese museum and the culture center, which is doing quite a bit.

CC: Is there anything you’d like to add about Manzanar or Children’s Village that hasn’t come to my mind?

SW: No, I don’t think so.

CC: Well, then, thank you, Susie.

SW: You’re welcome.

CC: And feel free to add anything, send me anything.

SW: Well, don’t forget to put your name and Cal State.

END OF INTERVIEW