

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Children's Village at Manzanar Oral History Project

An Oral History with IRA IWATA

Interviewed

By

Cathy Irwin

On August 9, 2007

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Ira Iwata

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: IRA IWATA
INTERVIEWER: Cathy Irwin
DATE: August 9, 2007
LOCATION: California and Colorado
PROJECT: Children's Village at Manzanar

CI: My name is Cathy Irwin. It is Thursday August ninth around nine o'clock pacific coast time. I am in Claremont, California, and I am interviewing Mr. Ira Iwata who is in Lakewood, Colorado. I am interviewing you because you were at Children's Village. Were you at the Shonien?

II: Yes.

CI: You were at the Japanese Children's home called the Shonien in Los Angeles, and we will be discussing Mr. Iwata's experience at Children's Village during World War II. This interview is being conducted for the oral history program at the Center for Oral and Public History at California State Fullerton, and will be archived there as well. Your interview will be archived there, and I will also be sending you a copy of this tape.

II: Okay.

CI: Do I have your permission to record this interview?

II: Yes, you certainly do.

CI: Thank you very much. First of all, where were you born?

II: I was born in Platteville, Colorado back in July, 1931. My father was Japanese; my mother was Caucasian. And she passed away when I was about four years old.

CI: Oh, so you were four years old. Where was your father from Japan?

II: Kumamoto.

- CI: Kumamoto. Is he Issei?
- II: Yes. Of course, he's deceased, but yes, he was.
- CI: When did he come to the U.S.?
- II: I think it was around 1917.
- CI: Oh, wow. Do you know why he came to America?
- II: Well, his mother and father were already over here. They were farming in Colorado. I mean, they couldn't own a farm, so they were sharecroppers, I guess you would call them. Once he finished high school in Japan, they sent for him, and he came out here.
- CI: So, your grandparents were already here?
- II: Yes.
- CI: Okay. So, did he have any other siblings who came with him?
- II: They didn't come with him. As each graduated, they—they were living with their grandparents, and then as they graduated, their grandparents sent them over here or his folks sent for them. He had two brothers and a sister who came over. And he also had another brother who was born here in the States, so his other brother was a Nisei.
- CI: So, your mother is from Colorado? How did they meet?
- II: I guess they farmed together, close by. And that's where they met somewhere along those lines. I don't really know.
- CI: Okay. Do you have other siblings?
- II: Yes, I had two brothers. One passed away, and the other one was adopted by my grandfather on my mother's side.
- CI: What are their names?
- II: The youngest brother, he was with me at Children's Village at Manzanar and the Shonien. His name was Robert. And my brother's name is Arthur James Schmaling. S-c-h-m-a-l-i-n-g.
- CI: And he was adopted by your paternal grandparents?
- II: By my grandfather on my mother's side.

- CI: Oh, your maternal, okay. And when was he adopted by your grandfather?
- II: When we were at the orphanage in Los Angeles, there was correspondence between my grandfather and my father. But he had come back to Colorado, so they were corresponding while he was in Colorado and they finally got the papers. So, I don't know when he was adopted. I would say in the mid-thirties.
- CI: So, you were already at Shonien, when one of your brothers was adopted?
- II: Yes.
- CI: So, you and Robert went to Shonien?
- II: Correct. Both of us didn't know we had another brother because I was four and he was two at the time, when we were separated. It wasn't until when we came back, and we located my father in Littleton, Colorado that he told us we had another brother.
- CI: So, you didn't know you had another brother?
- II: No, I didn't.
- CI: Wow. So, you and your brother Robert went to the Shonien when you were four and he was two?
- II: Uh-huh.
- CI: What were the reasons or circumstances as to why you were sent to the Shonien?
- II: My father, his brother, and his sister—she had already moved out to California, to Los Angeles, and the brothers decided to go out there, too, because he couldn't take care of us. We were shifted around and so forth. So, from my understanding, they had a caravan that went to California, and again I stayed with my various uncles and so forth. My father heard about this Shonien, and he put my brother and I in there.
- CI: And, where was your mother at the time?
- II: She passed away when I was four years old.
- CI: Oh, so your mother had passed away. Do you know the reason or circumstances of your mother's death? I'm sorry.
- II: I would say it was neglect on the part of my father. Living out on the farm, she had to go out in a snowstorm to get wood for the coal-burning stove because we were out of coal and she needed to keep us, kids, warm. This was ongoing for many months. The problem is, I don't like to really get into the personal point about his lack of being a

father and husband because he had certain vices. One of them was gambling, so he used to come into Denver and spend two or three weeks in the winter gambling and leaving us by ourselves.

Now I also experienced that when we came back—when they located him, and they put us with him to live on the farm. And we moved from farm-to-farm because he was sharecropper. So, I know it was probably neglect; my mother eventually died from pneumonia. My uncle, the one that's Nisei, finally got worried and went over to the farmhouse and found us in the situation we were in, called the doctor and the doctor came. But it was too late.

CI: Now, were you and your brother okay, since you were probably neglected too?

II: Yeah, we were okay as far as I know. I don't remember too much; all of this is heresay.

CI: You were quite young.

II: Right. That was the reason why she passed away, and why they went on and moved to California.

CI: And so when you moved to California, you were sent to the Shonien. Do you remember your feelings or your first impressions or any memories of being at the Shonien?

[00:10:03]

II: Oh, I remember the first day.

CI: What was that like? What were your feelings?

II: It was traumatic for both my brother and me. All we did was cry. *Sit there and cry!* Eventually we got used to it. There was more companionship there at the orphanage than there was at home.

CI: Were there any *otanas* or other children who you remember helping you?

II: Oh, yes. One of the *otanas* was Ruth Takamune. Alice Kaneko. Of course, Lillian Matsumoto, naturally and Harry Matsumoto. And Mr. Kusomoto. He was the one who ran the orphanage.

CI: Any specific memories of them being really nice to you or helping you? Because you were just a child—you were like four or five years old, do you have any memories of them taking you outside and playing or—

II: (laughs) You probably have never seen what the orphanage was like. It was at 1841 Redcliffe Street, and it was expansive. They kept adding additional grounds right

next to it. As far as my memory goes, there was a lot of fun because there were a lot of kids our age, and all we did was play games and things like that. Marbles, kickball, and hide and seek, and so forth. For us, it was a lot of pleasant memories, but we were very structured. You got up in the mornings, you lined up, you brushed your teeth, washed your face, stood in line, went to breakfast, and you sat at a table assigned with one *otona* at each table. You said prayers because the home was run by a Christian church, I think. From there, we would line up, as we got ready to go to public school. So, we went to public school.

CI: Do you remember where?

II: Micheltorena.

CI: Oh, Micheltorena School.

II: It was an elementary school right off Sunset Boulevard. Anyhow, we would line up to go to school, and we all walked. Of course, they handed you a brown bag, a lunch bag, as you left and went to school, and then you traded your peanut butter or bologna sandwiches with the other kids. (laughs) It was a lot of fun. As a rule, the kids from the orphanage did well in the public school.

CI: What was your favorite topic as a child?

II: Geography.

CI: Geography, okay.

II: It was only because I had an influential elementary school teacher who was also into aviation. She was very good.

CI: Do you remember her name?

II: No, I don't.

CI: But, she was your geography teacher?

II: She taught other things. There was one teacher for the whole class. As elementary school kids, you got English and math, and everything from her, from one teacher.

CI: That's right. Did you enjoy being in school? Did you ever experience any prejudice when you were a child at the Micheltorena School? Or did everyone pretty much get along?

II: I would say we pretty much got along. It wasn't until after Pearl Harbor—then it was a lot different.

- CI: Did you enjoy any activities or sports as a child?
- II: Oh, yes. Naturally, when you have a group of kids like that, we played a lot of baseball, basketball. But then in elementary school, I wasn't that keen on it, but just being around the kids, we enjoyed it.
- CI: Did any of your family visit you while you were at the Shonien? Did your father or your uncles ever visit you?
- II: I don't recall my father visiting, but my uncles used to come out every once in a while.
- CI: How many years were you at the Shonien?
- II: I was there '35 to '42, seven years.
- CI: Seven years. Wow! I think that's as long as Mr. and Mrs. Matsumoto were there. I think they came pretty early.
- II: Oh, yeah. Both of them. That's why I remember them very well and vividly because they were always there when I was there.
- CI: Do you still keep in touch with people who were at Shonien?
- II: I do. There's a couple of them, kids. One, Mits Yamasaki,¹ is married to my aunt's sister, which would make my Uncle Lee and Mits brother-in-laws.
- CI: Oh, yes. I interviewed him.
- II: *Oh, you did!*
- CI: I did. He's a really nice guy.
- II: Oh, yeah, a lot of fun. Big golf fan.
- CI: He celebrated his eighty-something birthday this year.
- II: Yeah, he'd be about eighty-two.
- CI: Eight-two or eight-three. I interviewed him a week before his birthday; that's why I remember. He was really excited!
- II: He was one of the older boys there. He looked after us.
- CI: Oh, good. So, you were there until 1942. How old were you in 1942?

¹ Mitsuru Yamasaki, O.H. 3592, Center for Oral and Public History.

- II: In June, 1942, that's when they loaded us on a couple buses and took us to Manzanar. But they let us finish fifth grade, which I was in.
- CI: So, you were about eleven or twelve?
- II: It would have been eleven. In July, I turned twelve.
- CI: Do you remember when you heard about Pearl Harbor?
- II: Oh, yes. (laughs) Like I said, there was Mr. Kusumoto—I forgot his first name—but he brandished his samurai sword. He lived up on the hill, and he came down the steps. They had us all congregated down there, and he was hollering, "*Bansai! Bansai!*" (laughs)
- CI: (laughs) With a samurai sword? Oh my goodness!
- II: Yes. I don't know if he had that much allegiance to Japan, but he was a very good man.
- CI: Is that how you heard about the Pearl Harbor attacks?
- II: Oh, after that happened, then we had to put up dark nightshades. We had to keep quiet during the day because they had a lot of people working up on the hillside there in government war time jobs. We had to be silent. And we got some scares about air raids, which proved to be nothing. We had to walk to school. And if we had a dime or two to go to the store, or if we wanted to walk anywhere in the street, we used to tell them that we were Chinese.
- CI: Oh, really?
- II: Yeah, because the Chinese could walk along the streets, and the Caucasian people didn't know if they were Japanese. That was the only thing I could remember doing during the time shortly after the war. Things changed quite a bit in the schools.
- CI: Did the teachers—
- II: The teachers were okay. There was a big resentment against the Japanese kids from the orphanage for still being there in the school.
- CI: From the students?
- II: Well, yeah. I'm sure they got that from their parents, too. It wasn't blatant. You got snubbed.
- CI: Did they ever name call?

- II: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I'm hard-skinned about that.
- CI: Did the teachers ever intervene?
- II: Well, there was never any fights or anything. I don't recall that much name calling or anything like that.
- CI: Did you have a curfew? I know you were only eleven or twelve.
- II: Oh, yes, I remember curfews. But, we had our own curfew in the orphanage, and we had to be in by eight or nine o'clock.
- CI: So, you mentioned that you remembered leaving. So, you do remember being evacuated and being sent to Children's Village?
- II: Yes.
- CI: What was the day like? Any memories?
- II: Yes, very dusty. (laughs) *Very, very dusty!* You got off the bus and then you got sand in your eyes from the wind blowing all that dust around. There was no vegetation or anything around there. It was all just dust and sand.
- CI: Did you take a bus?
- II: To Manzanar, yes. There were two buses. They had a guard on each bus.
- CI: A guard?
- II: Um-hm. A soldier or whatever.
- CI: How did you feel about that? Did it bring up any feelings? Did you get nervous?
- II: Not at that age. You're so busy talking to the person next to you. They were singing songs and things like that. So, my first impression when I got to the camp was they had these guard towers with a soldier standing in there so that was kind of intimidating.
- CI: What did you take with you?
- II: Oh, I don't recall. I might have had underwear or something like that. As far as clothes, I think the Shonien and Lillian Matsumoto and the rest of the staff, they probably packed luggage with our clothes in it. You never knew which of the clothes you were going to wear from one day to the next because, for all you knew, you could have someone else's trouser. They didn't identify—they didn't put numbers or names on the clothes or anything. If it fit you, then that's it.

- CI: Oh, my goodness. Do you remember the song you sang on the bus?
- II: No, I don't.
- CI: You were really young, but were you told where you were going?
- II: I'm sure we all realized it. I don't recall specifically. All they had to tell us was that since the war, we had to move onto these camps. I'm sure they told us the truth.
- CI: Were you and Robert able to stay together?
- II: Well, there was a two-year difference. I was in a group of older kids, and he in a group of younger kids. As far as being in the orphanage itself, in Children's Village, we were able to see each other quite often. It was a lot different than Shonien.
- CI: So, you were twelve. How old was he?
- II: His birthday is also in July, so there was exactly two years difference. If I turned twelve, he was ten.
- CI: What was the difference between the Shonien and the Children's Village?
- II: Oh, big difference. At Shonien, everything was very structured, like I told you. We got up, stood in line, and did things like stand in line to get your lunches to go to school. And when we went to dinner, breakfast, or whatever, you all stood around and said prayers and then sat down. Whereas, at the Children's Village, there was not that many disciplinarians or whatever to look after you, so we got away with a lot. It was more lenient over there, but it was still somewhat structured.
- CI: Do you remember on the first day meeting children from other homes? Or were you the first?
- II: We more less stuck with the kids from Shonien. And then the others came in from Maryknoll. Well, you interviewed Tak Matsuno.² His dad was considered a threat or something, and that's why their family had broken up. So, he stayed at the Children's Village with us. They were from Terminal Island or San Pedro. Anyhow, within the Village itself, we kind of had little, not fights, but tension. It took a while, but we got over it.
- CI: What was a typical day at Children's—I don't know if there was any typical day at Children's Village. But what was it like? Did you have a lot more free time? More play time? What was it like?
- II: As little boys do, we would go around looking for little gophers and snakes (laughs) and things like that. We'd form a circle and pit one against the other, that type of

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

thing. We were mean kids. (laughs) Anyhow, we also chose up and chose teams, chose sides, and played baseball, football, whatever. We played in the sand. That's all there was, just sand. Then they had orchards. It was in the Owens Valley, and they had pear orchards. We used to pick green pears. In our Children's Village, there was a special barrack and we had a place where we could store tools and so forth. It was a lot cooler, and we could bury them in the sand in there. It was like a cellar but not a cellar. And we would bury the pears for a week or two and then dig them up and eat ripe pears. There were several things I remember. Oh, and scorpions! We'd look for scorpions and snakes.

CI: So, you mentioned it was cold. Did the weather affect you because you came from Los Angeles? What was the weather like for you? How did it affect you?

[00:30:00]

II: It was hot. I remember we got there in June, and it was hot and windy and dusty. In the winter, it did get cold. We were snowed upon a few times. As kids, you adapt to things and situations. It wasn't all that bad. The biggest thing, or the biggest problem I had was the school at Micheltorena. At school, at Micheltorena, for the most part, the kids from the Shonien were all getting good grades for the most part. But, when they put us all there in the village, they had all Caucasian teachers, and it was very disruptive. In other words, we used to call the kids from San Pedro and Terminal Island *yogoreis*. They were very aggressive and loud. The teachers could not handle them. They used to throw sand at them and all that.

CI: They used to throw sand at the teachers?

II: Oh, they did anything. I mean, at sixth grade at the camp was a total failure. I did not learn a thing. In fact, half the class failed. We had to go to summer school, like a month. That didn't do much either, I guess. Eventually, we got people, college graduates or ex-college students who had a couple years of college. They had them teach us. They did the best they could without certification, but I had problems starting seventh grade. course, I went to school for about a half year or six month or so before they sent me to Littleton, Colorado. And when I got there, I was so far behind. There was no such things as remedial courses, and I just barely hung on.

CI: So, how long were you in Children's Village?

II: I was there from June of '42 until November 15, 1943.

CI: Okay, so you were there long enough it seems like. It sounds like the schools were not adequate at all.

II: Apparently, they got better, but I wasn't there to see any of it.

- CI: Another student interviewed someone named Dennis Tojo Bambauer,³ and he's *hapa*. He said he was teased a lot. Were you teased a lot for being mixed?
- II: No, I wasn't teased as much as he was. He was a few years younger than me, maybe four years younger than I am. But yeah, because his last name was Tojo—Bambauer came later. There were some people that adopted him. He was ridiculed more for having the name Tojo. My brother and I and he, as far as I knew, were the only *hapa* there.
- CI: So, he was teased a lot, but you never experienced—
- II: Yeah, we were teased, too.
- CI: Oh, you were? For being *hapa*?
- II: Yeah, the last time I talked to you, about a week ago, I said that they called me *keto*. We didn't know what that meant. I just thought that was derogatory.
- CI: Yes, K-e-t-o. I don't know what that means either. I should look it up.
- II: We just assumed that they were talking bad about us. I don't recall being called nasty names like that. Just *keto* got in my craw. Then when we moved to Littleton and they called us Japs, so—
- CI: Oh, my goodness. Before you move to Littleton, can I ask you a couple more questions about Children's Village?
- II: Sure.
- CI: What were your impressions of the food there? Was it okay?
- II: I was told that we got the same kind of food as the food at the hospital. Our barracks were just like the hospital barracks. Lillian and Harry Matsumoto⁴ had to go to the Army and request barracks just like the hospital or barracks for the kids. Apparently, they built barracks just like they did at the hospital.
- CI: Oh, I see. So, the food was good, then, if it was similar?
- II: Well, the food was a lot better than they were getting in the mess halls in the camp, I think.
- CI: Did you eat all together, or was it disorganized?

³ Dennis Tojo Bambauer, O.H. 2335, Center for Oral and Public History.

⁴ Lillian Matsumoto, O.H. 2492, Center for Oral and Public History.

- II: Oh, we ate in groups, just like at the Shonien. You had a bunch of boys, and we sat with the boys or pretty much our age group.
- CI: Was there anyone at the camp, a particular person or event, that really stands out in your mind? Was there anyone who made life bearable?
- II: Oh, yes, there was two. There was one, John Sohei Hohri.⁵
- CI: Can you tell me a little more about what he did for you and the other kids at Children's Village?
- II: Yes. Again, he wasn't a certified [staff] or an *otona*. My understanding is he was finishing up high school or finished high school, and here was one of the jobs that paid \$17 a month, or I don't know what they paid. But, he was definitely an influence on most of us kids out there because he read us books, the classics. *Les Miserables*.
- CI: Wow, he read you *Les Miserables*?
- II: Yeah! Jean Valjean and about his life and so forth. He had us intently listen to a chapter at a time. The next night we would be in for another chapter. So, he made it very interesting and he was also there for help. Then there was another man; he had polio. His name was John Nagayama, I think. I should remember his name, but I'm not sure. But he was one of the *otonas* there, and he had polio. He had a definite limp. He read stories to us. He was into religion. I do recall he eventually left the camp and became a reverend or something, I'm not sure. He was one that was also influential.
- CI: Did John Hohri—was he at the Shonien before or did you—
- II: Yes, he was at the Shonien.
- CI: When he went to Manzanar, did he live outside in the barracks or did he live with you guys?
- II: He was there. Apparently, his family got together. I think one of his parents had a severe illness. Maybe it was cancer or something like that. He and maybe one or two of his brothers were in the Shonien for a while. He was one of the older ones, when I was there.
- [00:40:00]
- CI: Okay, so he was in the barracks, and he would come visit you?

⁵ Sohei Hohri, O.H. 3786, Center for Oral and Public History

II: He was a big brother type. I don't think it was voluntary; he may have gotten paid for it, whatever little pay he got. He would come and assist by reading stories and things like that.

CI: Were there any other activities or clubs that you enjoyed that made camp bearable?

II: As far as an organized club of any kind, no. At eleven or twelve years old, we just wanted to go out and play marbles.

CI: Was there anything you disliked about camp?

II: Not having anything to compare it with—I know my wife was in one of the camps and she definitely disliked it, but that is because it was disruptive to the family life. She was telling me about blankets separating the siblings. Her brothers lived in one end, and she lived in another. Her parents lived in partitions separated by blankets. In something like that, it would be very disruptive, but as far as our structure, there was nothing really that bad about it.

CI: Did you ever have to do chores or work at camp as a child?

II: I can't think of that many at the camp because there were so many other people that did the chores around there. There would be a lot of older people who would make little ponds and bridges and things like that. As far as kids, we didn't do anything but sit around and watch them, play our own games, and so forth. There was really no chores. Well, the older ones probably had dish washing and clothes washing and ironing, and things like that, but they didn't entrust that to us kids.

CI: So, at the Shonien, did you have to attend to chores?

II: Oh, yes. It was mostly pulling weeds, combing leaves out, and a lot of the gardening processes had to be done. We helped in the laundry room, hanging up clothes. They had a big machine that they did sheets and so forth. So, there were little chores that we did.

CI: Did you have to attend church when you were at Children's Village?

II: No, but we attend church on special occasions in Los Angeles. I think it was the _____ church or something they called it. We had *otonas* who were semi-qualified to teach the Bible, and every once in a while a reverend would come to the Shonien. We had Bible classes. I know I read the Bible twice. I never knew what I was reading, but I read it twice. (laughs) We had Bible classes. We had church services every Sunday. We put on Christmas programs for the board.

[recording paused]

CI: How about Children's Village? Did that happen?

- II: Oh, we had our own informal church services within the Children's Village barracks.
- CI: Was it Christian?
- II: Uh-huh. The kids that were in the Catholic school, I don't know how they took to it, but it was still Christian.
- CI: Yeah. So, you were there until November, 1943, so you got to leave early. How did that happen?
- II: I don't know if it was the War Relocation Authorities who located my father or if it was Lillian Matsumoto and that group who located my father in Littleton, but when they located him, apparently, they made arrangements to send us back out there to Denver, Colorado. They gave me an identification card that said Citizen's Indefinite Leave. I still have it. It's got my picture, with my name on it, and then I was fingerprinted.
- CI: Oh, you're kidding?
- II: No!
- CI: So, you had a picture and it said—sorry, I couldn't hear you.
- II: It says, Citizen's Indefinite Leave, United States War Relocation Authorities. I'm leaving Manzanar and going to Littleton. I had this with me on the train.
- CI: Really?
- II: They sent an adult with us. He was going to Chicago. So he took care of us until we got to Denver. In the meantime, we had to keep the window shades down. I remember that.
- CI: And so, they found your father, or he found you?
- II: They found him. If it was up to him, he would have left us and okayed us being adopted by somebody else.
- CI: Wow. What was he doing in Colorado? Was he still working?
- II: Well, he was doing sharecropping. He would work on somebody's farm, and that's where he was. He was in Littleton, Colorado, and they had a little chicken coop place for us to stay.
- CI: You stayed in a chicken coop?

II: Oh, yes. It was converted into livable quarters. No electricity, no running water, no telephone. (laughs) That was one of the most miserable times of my life because he was doing the same thing he had done with my mother. He would leave my brother and me for two to three weeks at a time, and we had to rummage on our own.

CI: How did you survive?

II: I don't know either. I don't know how we survived. There was a grocery store in Littleton that we were able to charge. He used to charge over there, and the owner was kind enough to let us charge. So, in that way, we were able to do a little bit. But, when it came time to pay up—I remember the last year we were there, he did not pay it. He just took off and moved on to somewhere else.

CI: So, you and your brother were basically on your own?

II: Oh, yes.

CI: From the time you were twelve or thirteen, how did you stick together? It must have been hard. Did your father live in the camp for a while or because he was in the West—

[00:50:07]

II: No, he was in Colorado at the time the war broke out.

CI: So, he didn't have to go to camp. Was it more difficult outside the camp than inside?

II: Very much so. The problem was the neglect, in his case. But then, shortly after the war ended, my uncle, the Nisei, came home and the first thing he did was visit us. And naturally, his brother, our father, wasn't there. He got concerned with us being by ourselves so long, he eventually brought us into the city and found us a job as houseboys. So, that's how we survived.

CI: Which uncle was this?

II: Uncle Lee Iwata.

CI: Could you go to school at this time? Or were you going to school at this time?

II: No, I was on the farm living with his other brother. I missed a year-and-a-half of school. But my brother was staying with my other uncle, and he was able to go to school. But it was too far for me because I started high school. I was high school eligible. So, my other uncle, the Nisei, he came out and brought both of us back to the city, and the first thing he did was find us jobs as houseboys. So, we lived there, ate there, went to public school, and that was it.

- CI: Were you really behind in high school for a while?
- II: Very, very much so.
- CI: Were you able to catch up and graduate in time?
- II: I eventually did. Like I said, I missed a year-and-a-half of school, so I graduated in the same class as my brother and, eventually, *my wife!* (laughs)
- CI: Oh, was that how you met your wife?
- II: I met her at school, yes. In high school.
- CI: Oh, in high school.
- II: When I graduated in January, I was nineteen years old, and they graduated in June. And when I graduated, I didn't have anywhere to go. That's when I went into the Army.
- CI: Oh, you went into the Army? At nineteen?
- II: Yes.
- CI: How long were you in the Army, and did you serve in any of the—I guess it would have been the fifties?
- II: I was in the Korean conflict. I spent some time in Korea and Japan, but became ill. I was totally paralyzed. I spent some time at Fitzsimons Army Hospital here in the Denver area, and I was there until about June 1954.
- CI: Oh, my goodness. That was a long time.
- II: I spent about eight or nine months in the hospital.
- CI: You were paralyzed?
- II: I had Guillian-Barre Syndrome, GBS. You become paralyzed, but eventually things start working back and you get use of your extremities.
- CI: And then when you came back, which state were you in?
- II: Colorado. I graduated from high school in Denver, I went into the service, and when I came back, I was staying with a friend.
- CI: Did you ever experience discrimination in Colorado after the war?

- II: Oh, yes. More so than anywhere.
- CI: Did they call you names? Or did they—
- II: Yes, when I first started school—of course, I was a dumbbell because I didn't get an education at camp. So, I was so far behind, it was pitiful.
- CI: So, you were a houseboy for four years, when you were in Colorado?
- II: No, not that long. It was about two-and-half years.
- CI: Two-and-half years. So, you had to just go to school and then go straight back home to work?
- II: Oh, I did play football.
- CI: Oh, you played football. Did that help you make friends?
- II: Oh, I made friends in school, sure. But I suffered two concussions and that was the end of my football days.
- CI: Oh, wow.
- II: I was able to spend more time with the people who took us in as houseboys. They were very nice.
- CI: Was it a Caucasian family?
- II: Yes, it was. She was from Louisiana.
- CI: Oh, really. Do you remember the names of your—
- II: Yes, her name was Mrs. Tempest. T-e-m-p-e-s-t.
- CI: Oh, Mrs. Tempest. Did she have a southern accent?
- II: Oh, yes. She was also one—very refined. She came from a very cultured family.
- CI: And when you played football, what position did you play?
- II: I played center and linebacker.
- CI: Did you have any memorable experiences on the field?
- II: Yeah, getting knocked out. Two weeks in row, and the doctor said, "No more."
(laughs)

CI: Oh, dear! *Two concussions in two weeks!* So, you went into the army and then when you came back, you were in the hospital for eight to nine months. And after that, did you get out of the service?

II: Yes, I had a medical discharge.

CI: And then what did you do? Did you choose a career? Did you go to college?

II: I tried to go to college. One year, I went to University of Colorado at Denver. I wanted to take an engineering course, which was a mistake. I was failing two courses. I was going on the GI Bill. And they called me in, and said, You are failing these two courses; let's give you an aptitude test. So, they gave me an aptitude test and told me my highest score was in social work. They told me, There's no money in that. (laughs) The next highest score was art or visualizing things, so they said, Why don't you go to drafting school? And that way you'll stay in the engineering area. So I went to drafting school and then got a job as a draftsman.

CI: So, you became a draftsman?

II: Yes.

CI: What was the training like? How long did you have to go to school?

II: The training, it was a vocational type school. It was only about a year-and-a-half or so.

CI: So, after that you went to work as a draftsman because of all your experience in the camp and in the Army, what became really important to you after all these experiences?

[01:00:11]

II: You mean—

CI: Like in terms of your ideals, your ideas about life, your values? What became important?

II: The first thing that I would say, I would never turn out to be a father like my father was, but I did not know how a husband should act or how a father should act. So it was a little difficult, but I never tried to be mean to my kids. It was the most important part, I guess.

CI: You said that you met your wife in high school. When did you marry your wife?

II: Well, shortly after I got out of the hospital! (laughs)

- CI: Oh, really! So, in 1954?
- II: Yeah.
- CI: Wow, you've been married for a long time! (laughs)
- II: Yeah, I think the last time I counted it was forty three. Fifty three years! I lost ten years there! (laughs)
- CI: And how many children did you have?
- II: Two girls.
- CI: Two girls!
- II: I didn't have any boys, but the girls have been a blessing.
- CI: What are their names?
- II: Rebecca and Deborah. We gave them Jewish names because we thought they'd marry into a good Jewish family or giving them good Jewish names would get them money.
- CI: Did they? (laughs)
- II: No, no. (laughs) They both married Caucasians.
- CI: Do they have children of their own?
- II: Yes. One has a daughter going to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and her son graduated from Penn State. He's in New York City trying to be an actor. Their other daughter has four children.
- CI: Do you know what their names are?
- II: Sure! I know what all their names are. There's Emily, Katie, Paul, and Sarah [Miller].
- CI: And do they all live in Colorado?
- II: No, they lived in Omaha for a while. Now they are in Spokane, Washington. He got a job there as a professor at a college.
- CI: And your wife's name?
- II: Sumiye.

- CI: What is her maiden name?
- II: Shiramizu.
- CI: And did she have to go to camp?
- II: She was at Poston.
- CI: Oh, she was at Poston? And do your children and grandchildren know about your camp experience?
- II: Yes, my children want me to write about it. But, as I said before, I think the last time I talked with you, I think her name was Deki, D-e-k-I, her last name. Whether she was a psychologist or not I don't know, but she was writing about my experiences.
- CI: What was her last name? I'm sorry, can you spell it again?
- II: Her last name is, I think, D-e-k-i.
- CI: Okay. I'll look it up and see.
- II: Maybe that was her first name. I'm not sure. Anyhow, so the kids asked me to write about it. I started it, and then I came to a road block or something. But they wanted to know about my experience.
- CI: Have your children or have you ever returned to Manzanar or gone back to the Shonien?
- II: I went to the Shonien, and my brother also did, and he got one of the little booklets that he found in the crawl space. So, I got some pictures in there from 1935 or 1939. Anyway, we celebrated on of their historical moments. So then, when I went there, it wasn't there anymore.
- CI: You mentioned that you still are in contact with some former orphans. In the 1980s or 90s, did you have any political involvement in attaining redress?
- II: No, I didn't.
- CI: Did you get a letter of apology?
- II: Yes.
- CI: Did you feel like that made up for everything you had to go through, the letter of apology and the redress money?

- II: For me, I'm sure it did, but I know for my wife's family, there was no amount monetary dollar that could replace what they lost. I'm sure they feel it was insufficient, but we know people that lost hundreds of thousands of dollars. As far as I'm concerned, since I didn't have nothing, I didn't get anything. (laughs)
- CI: (laughs) When you got the money, do you remember thinking about what would do with the money?
- II: Yeah, put it in savings! (laughs)
- CI: Put it in savings! Good. (laughs)
- II: Well, we helped one of the kids out.
- CI: I've interviewed and listened to many interviews, and a lot of them said they gave it to their kids or helped their kids out. So today, or in the recent years have you been involved with the Japanese American—is there a Japanese American community in Colorado, a big community?
- II: Well, it's a relatively small community, but there are people involved in the JACL. Some friends of ours are in that.
- CI: Are you ever involved?
- II: No, I'm not one to get involved.
- CI: Are you retired now? I assume you're retired now.
- II: Yes, I am.
- CI: What do you enjoy doing today? What are your activities?
- II: Bowling is one. I get involved because you meet a lot of people there, and we are all senior citizens. It's a senior bowling league. It's called the Nisei Bowling League, and I got involved with that. I used to be in golf, but I'm not anymore.
- CI: Are you able to spend more time with your family, your children? Do you ever see your grandkids?
- II: Oh, yes. Well, right now, one of my daughters moved back to Colorado. In fact, she lives only a few blocks from us.
- CI: Oh, that's great!

II: So, she's got another job here. That's the one with the two kids, one at Michigan and one at New York. She's just here with her dogs and her husband. I'm not considering him as one of the dogs. (laughs)

CI: (laughs) So, if you were going to give advice, or if you wanted to say anything to young people today, what would you tell them about—it seems like you've had so many different experiences. If you had to speak to a classroom full of high school kids, what would you tell them?

[01:10:18]

II: In fact, when they used to live in Virginia, my older daughter that's here now. She had a son and a daughter and he was a senior in high school; and the daughter was in middle school, and we were visiting them. We got off at Dulles, and she said, "Hey, you're going to be our show and tell!" Of course, we came to find out that our grandson was studying somethings about that era, and he said, "Would you guys come out and talk to our class?" So, we did. We went and talked to his class, and the next day we talked to her class. There was a question about our experience. We didn't have any advice to give to them; just don't get involved in another war or whatever.

CI: Did you enjoy that experience?

II: Not really. (laughs) I'm not into public speaking. It was pretty rough, the first one. The second one was easier.

CI: I'm sure the kids really loved it though. They must have enjoyed having you.

II: Of course, they knew about it. Yeah, it was good to see. I know when I went to high school, I never had one paragraph in our history books about the relocation camps and so forth.

CI: I didn't either, so we are trying to change that now. Is there anything else you would like to say or anything you would like to add to this interview?

II: No, not really. (laughs)

CI: (laughs) Well, thank you.

II: I'm surprised you talked to Mits, though. You did talk to him?

CI: I did. He's wonderful.

II: You probably got a lot of stories. He's very gregarious person. Did you see him in person or talk to him on the phone?

CI: I drove to his place in Gardena and met his wife and his dog. (laughs)

- II: It's a _____ (inaudible) dog. We used to have a _____ (inaudible) dog.
- CI: Now, it's a tiny dog, but it likes to bark. (laughs) He was really sweet. I guess he's really popular because, during the interview, one of his friends came barging in and wanted to talk as well. He had to tell him, "I'm in an interview." So, he's really a good guy.
- II: Did you talk to his brother, too?
- CI: I think someone else interviewed his brother. I just talked to him. He was on the football team at Marshall High School.
- II: Oh, yeah, Marshall High School! I knew that.
- CI: So, he talked about his experience getting his letterman jacket. He was really proud of that.
- II: Yeah.
- CI: Well, thank you so much for your time, Mr. Iwata. I really enjoyed listening to your story.
- II: Oh, no. Well, it was nice for you to interview me.
- CI: Mr. Matsuno said that I had to interview you, so I'm glad I did.
- II: I'll remember that.
- CI: So, what I'll do is make a copy of this tape so maybe I'll make two copies so you can give a copy to your children as well. And, I'm going to try to get all these interviews transcribed so you'll also have a written one, but I have to raise some money for that.
- II: Oh, wow.
- CI: (laughs) Yeah. But yeah, I'll try to get it transcribed as well, but I'll definitely send you the tape.
- II: So, the phone, the transmission, it didn't go out?
- CI: No, I have the recorder on, and as long as it's blinking it should be recording.
- II: Okay! Because I don't want to go through this again.
- CI: I know! (laughs) No one does. This is a long interview. It was over an hour.
- II: Oh, yeah. I enjoyed it.

CI: Well, thank you so much. I will send you the tapes.

II: Thank you!

CI: Bye.

II: Bye.

END OF INTERVIEW