

NARRATOR: GEORGE AND JEAN ABE

INTERVIEWER: Izumi Taniguchi

DATE: August 27, 1999

IT: (cut audio) —Izumi Taniguchi, interviewing George and Jean Abe. Today's date is
August 22nd—

JA: Twenty seventh?

IT: Uh, 27th, 1999. First, we're going to cover several periods: life before World War II, and
then World War II and then after World War II. And then anytime you want to take a
rest, let me know and we can pause and take a break. Okay? First, do you know where
in Japan your father came from?

GA: Yes. He was from Niigata-Ken.

IT: Niigata-Ken.

GA: That's about as far as all I know.

IT: Right, and your mother?

GA: And my mother is from Fukushima.

IT: From Fukushima.

GA: Fukushima is kind of close to Hokkaido?

IT: Uh, no, uh Niigata—yeah.

GA: Fukushima.

IT: Fukushima is not too far from Hokkaido.

GA: Because I know later she moved over to Hokkaido, with the whole family.

IT: When did you immigrate to the US and what was the reason for coming here?

GA: I guess they just wanted to see something new, I guess. I suppose it was for economical reasons more or less, I imagine, for bettering their lives and so forth.

IT: What year?

GA: 1904, what month I don't remember.

IT: Do you know where you first settled in the US?

GA: It must've been in—we must have wound up in Oregon, I'm not really sure. This—I didn't ask them too many questions, but I remember him talking about working on the railroad with a lot of other Japanese.

IT: Uh-huh. Do you remember what ship or boat he came on?

GA: No, I do not.

JA: Taigu-maru?

GA: No that was—Taigu-maru was my mother's. That was in 1906. Well that was—see she went back and I went with her, let's see when I was about four years old, I believe, about four or five years old, to visit.

IT: When and under what circumstances did they get married?

GA: I never asked. They were—must have married in Japan, and Dad came over and Mom came later.

IT: Uh-huh, where in Japan—or you did that. What became of your father's permanent occupation?

GA: Pardon?

IT: What became of your father's permanent occupation?

GA: Oh, well he was a—when he first came here, like I mentioned he was on the railroad, and around 1915 or so he was—I believe it was, he was on the Gardlove ranch and there he

was in charge of dehydrating; he had, of course, a number of people under him, one Hindu person and two Japanese. The Gardlove ranch is on Lincoln Avenue, and the whole farm is on Lincoln and McCall, it's close to Del Rey.

IT: Mm-hm, close to Del Rey.

GA: And before that, I believe he was—when he first came—I believe he must've been working in Del Rey someplace. I remember as a kid, a very young kid, there was A.J. Wells' farm and before that when my mother first came she was telling me about Mrs. Sapajian who must have been working there on her place, and she used to tell me that Mrs. Sapajian invited her over to her house and showed her how they washed dishes and so forth, and how they used a washboard to wash their clothes. (laughs) She said that was interesting, and we did befriend them.

IT: Did your mother have an occupation or work?

GA: My mother? No, not that I know of—in her younger days I remember she mentioned something about going to school and it was taught by the nuns, so it must've been Catholic, she must've been in there in the Catholic school. And my father was—well, he had no occupation. He was one of these guys in charge of soda running(??).

IT: (laughs) So he'd go into farming, then?

GA: Pardon?

IT: Did he go into farming?

GA: My dad?

IT: Yes.

GA: Yes, around 19—I believe it was 1917 or '18, he bought the place he was living on, and before that he was renting or working on it, but he thought that was a permanent place so

we could go to school without going from one school to the next school. So it was a permanent residence for raising children, and I was the only child at that time.

IT: Do you know how the Alien Land Law affected your dad?

GA: Pardon?

IT: Do you remember how the Alien Land Law affected your father buying—

GA: The Alien Land Law? Yes. When he bought this place—I don't know how he found it, oh, but probably a (inaudible phrase) more guarantee with some corporation to fix this place and we bought it from them. And to buy this, I guess he must have known that they had to have a corporation that could buy it, and the corporation had to have two citizens and one alien. Is that correct?

IT: Uh-huh. I'm not sure.

GA: Because in this particular place, the neighbor was a fellow by the name of Pete Christiansen—an old Danish family and he was real nice in that the way he said he would be part of the corporation. And myself, that's two. We had to have three, I believe. Oh yeah, I think you—one alien I believe could be in the corporation if I'm not mistaken, but we had to have two citizens. And I was just a citizen, was all, and I was very young, just in my teenage years, maybe not even—yeah, I guess so, I must have been in eighth grade or so.

IT: Mm-hm. What kind of produce would be produced?

GA: Vineyard.

IT: Vineyard?

GA: Yes, (inaudible)

IT: All vineyards?

GA: Yes, and we had just thirteen acres to begin with and we bought ten more later, so ten, eight—no eight, twelve acres I believe adding two more later, so altogether it would be close to twenty acres.

IT: And then what did the grape go for?

GA: Oh, he raised strawberries like most of the Nihon-jins in that time. That's how they started, by raising strawberries and then peddling them around or then later on they had an association. But at that time here, he had to work strawberries.

IT: Were the grapes for fresh fruit or raisins, or—

GA: Raisins.

IT: Raisins.

GA: At that time, yeah, they had no such thing as a fresh market for grapes, mostly all of them. And I don't remember who he sold them to, but Sun Maid was quite strong. They came to urge Dad to come to Sun Maid but Dad said he wanted to be independent.

IT: Were your parents interned in World War II?

GA: Yes, yes. When World War II started I remember very distinctly—I thought I'd go back a little. One of my friends, Yamaguchi in Kingsburg, one of the boys was getting married and I was invited to go to the wedding party, in the reception.

So, I was outside washing my car, and of course this was in 1941 and Jean came out and told me, "Better come in the house, and on the radio—listen to the radio. Pearl Harbor, Japan has attacked Pearl Harbor. They're bombing Pearl Harbor!" And I said, "Don't bother me. I'm busy. I can't be listening to no—" I thought it just a what-do-you-call-it—one of these shows, and she insisted I come in. So, I went in and sure enough they were bombing, and I'm listening to the radio.

So right away I got in my car, and then went up to the so called Nihon-jin town in Selma, and nobody—they were all stunned. Nobody said anything. They were just standing outside and wouldn't even talk. And I asked about it, and they don't know. They were just really stunned. Tori and Kajitani and a couple of others, so that night was the reception and I remember going to this—I didn't go to the wedding. I went to the reception which was right where Aki Store is, I believe, in Selma. Is that Aki Store? There used to be a tall building on the west side, and they had—anyway, I remember Sakamoto talking. He didn't mention anything about the war, but about how the times were just like a river. You have to go through rapids, and there are people who probably have those times of rough times—family wise, and then it always smooths out.

About that—when he was talking, I got a call from somebody who came up to a—and said they were having a meeting at Tommy's(??) house and said, "We want you to go right now." And I said, "I'm busy." It was just "This is very important." And so I went there, and it was—Fred was there; I thought Yoshikawa was there, I forgot, Itanaga I believe. There were about five or six of us discussing about this a—surprise attacks, and as a JACL as a American Loyalty League, said "What can we do?" I said, "You can't do anything. There's war!" So they sent a resolution to document our loyalty so they thought the best thing they could do was send a resolution pledging our loyalty to the United States. At that time—I had joined them, I believe it must have been in the latter part of '29 or the early part of '30.

IT: What kind of economic losses did your father sustain?

GA: Well, we—well first of all, they came with the order to move anyone who was west of Highway 99 would have to move beyond to the east of ninety-nine. And so Mother, she

said, “We’d better get out, because there is the possibility that maybe they won’t bother us.” And at that time I was selling plants for Union Nursery in Los Angeles, and then they (inaudible) me in tomato plants in particular, selling and hauling and that was quite a confusion there at the nursery.

Anyway, coming back to Dad, and our whole family, they moved across the street, just beyond Highway 99 in Selma town, we had a little house. And Dad said, “I’m not moving. What have I done to deserve it? I may be Japanese but I pay my taxes, and I’ve been doing everything as an American.” And he insisted, “If you want to move, go and move. I’m not moving.” We had a hard time convincing Dad that this is war. It doesn’t mean anything, he’d say, “No guts, no guts.” (laughs) When we moved, he finally moved to join us. So, as far as economic losses—of course. we just had that little farm.

IT: Naturally.

GA: Yeah, we just started a nursery Dad started a nursery in 1939, I believe it was, the reason for that a friend of ours said you go to Los Angeles and my Dad liked plants. He like any kind of plants. And so we had another little small place in town, and we were selling (inaudible) plants and a few trees and grapevines, and a fellow by the name of Lowell Pratt—have you ever heard of the name Lowell Pratt? He was the editor of the Selma Enterprise.

IT: I’ve heard of the name.

GA: Oh, yeah, he was a very, very good person. He would come down about every day, or maybe twice a week and he’d sit down and want to talk to us. He had a picking box, kind of his own grape box, and he’d sit down and we’d tell him this was war, and feelings at that time were against Japanese, because at that time they were having meetings in school

houses or people's homes and he'd tell me their whole attitude was to kick the Japs over the hills. We don't want them in California, they're a danger to our what-do-you-call-it living and so forth, and like they're crazy.

And so when the evacuation order came in, Mr. Pratt—later he was a professor of journalism at San Jose State, but at that time he ran the newspaper, and I asked him, “What's your opinion?” And he said, “George, the one thing I want to impress upon you is a fact of life. When everything's going against you, don't fight it, because you can fight and no one will listen to you and you'll get just a long stream of rough waters and you'll drown and no one's going to come to your help. So, my position is that I'll do what I can, but there's not much I can do.” And this was when the order of evacuation came and he said that, “You might as well go, and when things settle down I'll go and fight for you, your cause.” Which, he did.

When Dillon Myer came to Los Angeles, he went—he met Dillon Myer and told him they have ousted the people in my area, of course him being a (inaudible) he wasn't going to listen to him.

Then after that, again, he went down there—oh, this was afterwards, that's right. After the war, I believe they were deciding whether to open up California and let the citizens come in or not. And he mentioned, “I guarantee you in my area, they'd be no trouble.”

And then later on we had a little dinner for him at the Basque Hotel, with the JACL over there and asked Masaoka to be a speaker, and Masaoka I came down and at that time we presented him with a little watch of our appreciation, a pocket watch. And later on he went to Washington DC again and talked to them and showed them the watch

and said, here and—(laughs) this is what he told me, about how he felt about the Japanese in our area.

Now coming back to the economic condition, oh yeah, there was a lot of turmoil.

They didn't know what to do. So—

IT: Did they come back and start over?

GA: Pardon?

IT: Did your parents come back and start over after camp?

GA: Yes.

IT: Did they resume their—

GA: When Jerome was closed, they—we had to go to Rohwer, because they were going to close the camp. Oh, coming back to the camp life, I've got to mention something about this, because Isseis had all worked hard, and camp, it was the first vacation I'd ever had in my life. (laughs) And they—those Isseis, you know were too old to do anything, they were out chopping wood, making fireplaces, because in Jerome we had no oil, so we had to make our own wood. And I have a picture of the car, that when they—we all sat down, resting, and a lot of us were just playing cards—and when the camp was going to be closed, let's see now, there were some like my brother, Hershel, he was graduate of Cal Poly in aeronautical engineering, and he went to the camp headquarters almost every day—

IT: Oh?

GA: Raising heck! (laughs) He—they had no business keeping (inaudible) so they finally transferred him out. Then he went to Pueblo, and worked for a crop duster there and then he started his own business in Sterling, Colorado after that.

But we were—when the camp closed we went to Chicago, and the JACL had a little office there, trying to help out the evacuees.

IT: Did your parents go with you to Chicago then?

GA: No, no, let's see now.

JA: No, they came back and (inaudible, simultaneous talking) with your parents.

GA: Huh? How would they come back to Fresno?

JA: I would imagine the government must have brought them back. (laughs)

GA: No, but after they came back Mom became sick, I know, and we were still in Chicago. I was working for American Brake Shoe and they came back to the same place and—

IT: And continued the farming?

GA: Yeah, continued the farming.

JA: Until you came back.

GA: Hm?

JA: Until you came back.

GA: Yeah.

IT: And when did he retire?

GA: Dad retired—let's see. I think it was '59.

JA: Fifty-four?

GA: Fifty-four, was it? Well, as soon as we came back—well, when we left, we lent our farm to a fellow who used to do some hoeing for us, and came back and my God, it was weeds this high, all over the place. And hired some—at that time there was no such thing as chemicals to kill the weeds, we had to take them out. So we hired some—three or four guys to take the weeds out. Dad was still at that time—I don't know whether he did

much work, or not. But, I was over working with horses now, at that time, back in the thirties, or forties. We finally bought a tractor, but as far as most of those people were concerned, they all went back to the farms.

IT: Was your dad involved in community activities?

GA: Well, we had the Japanese a—what-do-you-call-that—in Selma, we had Japanese Mission Church, which was started way back before the war. Now we had Methodists in Selma, and I don't know how they got the name of the farm. I think they bought the little place in Selma town, and the name of two or three Japanese, one was Iwamura and I don't know who the other two were.

And they started a Sunday school, a Christian Sunday school, and they had to have Nihon-gakko and they came from Fresno to teach. As a matter of fact, I think they commuted. They did have a place—some of the children lived there. Oh, there must've been a few, I guess, and I don't know anything about how they—the cooking, or anything like that.

But, then there were two factions as far as community was concerned: the Christians and the Japanese were always arguing, you know, about something. (laughs) And this happened until World War I.

IT: Um-hm.

GA: And there wasn't much—what-do-you-call-it? It wasn't animosity, but it's funny how they even played a part in both sides—I remember they—one Issei tell it, I overheard him say, "These persons are like ghosts, they don't know where they are, they just—" (laughs)

IT: Now, what do you believe were your parents' greatest achievements?

GA: Pardon?

IT: What do you believe were your parents' greatest achievements and contributions?

GA: Greatest achievement?

IT: Achievement.

GA: Well, as far as I know, just trying to get us educated and taking care of the kids is about all. They couldn't do much, because their hands were tied, although he did start the nursery and worked there, and sold some (inaudible) vines and trees at that time. And that wasn't much. That was in 1915 I believe, and he had a camp there at the Chandler farm and another one that's the—in Del Rey, Fred—Camel, Camel's place. And so quite a crew, and coming back to the Chandler farm which is on the corner of—northwest corner of Lincoln and McCall, they put a big bunk house and Mom had to do the cooking and making lunches, and she worked until probably 2 o'clock in the morning and get up around—or 1 o'clock I guess—and get up around 3 o'clock and had to make breakfast.

IT: Okay, I want to ask you in more pertinent directions to your background now.

GA: (laughs) Okay.

JA: (laughs) He thought he practically did it all, already.

IT: Where and when were you born?

GA: I was born in 1908, on Whittleman Farm, which was north of Adams Avenue and west of McCall, about the third house, I believe it was. July 21, I believe, 1908.

IT: And how many siblings do you have and where do you fall among them? Are you the oldest or youngest?

GA: Of the family?

IT: Of your siblings, yeah, your brothers and sisters.

GA: Oh, yes I am the oldest.

IT: And how many were there?

GA: There's Ben, and Rio(??) and then there's Elaine and Helen.

JA: Mary.

GA: Who?

JA: Your sister, Mary.

GA: Oh Mary, oh yes, Mary. Mary was born in Japan and the reason she was born in Japan is uh, about I must've been four years old, or so, and Mother took three of us to Japan to Grandpa's place.

IT: Where are your brothers and sisters now, and what do they do?

GA: My only, my brother, Hershel, who is about eighty, I guess, huh?

JA: Your youngest brother.

GA: He's retired, and living in San Antonio. As I mentioned before he went to Cal Poly and graduated in 1930, or somewhere in there, and he did his own crop dusting in Sterling, Colorado. And later he took in a partner, world war flier and they both decided that was a risky job, crop dusting, and both were capable of getting civil service jobs. So he got to be an inspector, and told Hershel, "You've got to quit and work for the government." And Hershel said he was a little too old, but he'd try it, and well, he did and he got his license for the what was it—

JA: FAA.

GA: FAA, Federal Aeronautical Agency and retired from them, and after that went to live in San Antonio. And Mary, my sister who was born in Japan, when my mother was pregnant she's still living and she's about eighty, eighty something, and she's also retired, of course. She was a seamstress during the war, and she was married to (inaudible) they

had two or three children. I just saw her once, and about some years ago and Elaine is eighty something, and is married to Matsuyama, did you know Tori Matsuyama?

IT: No.

GA: He was a graduate, graduated from Fresno State, and went to he didn't here to go to camp I don't think, University of Minnesota, and taught there as a bio-chem major?

JA: Yeah, chemistry.

GA: Yeah, and he got his Ph.D. there, and taught later and uh, what school is that in Connecticut?

JA: Is it Wesley—

GA: Huh? Wesleyan. And they're both retired. She went through Asbury College and got a nursing degree, and is living in Fullerton right now. And Helen, my other sister—she's also retired and living in Los Angeles. Rio, I guess next to me was Ben, and he died some years ago. He was a—he had a fruit stand in Selma. And Rio what was Rio doing?

JA: He lived in Japan—

GA: No, no, no, what was he doing in Los Angeles? No excuse me, he died in (inaudible) and—he died in Poston

JA: No, no, that was his wife that died.

GA: Hm, his wife died in Poston?

JA: His wife died in childbirth.

GA: Oh, yes, that's right. They came back to—boy, I get confused here. They lived in Los Angeles, and he died some years ago. I don't know what he was doing.

JA: He was working as a gardener and then—

GA: Oh, was it gardening?

IT: Okay, what schools did you attend?

GA: I attended, let's see it was—first school I attended, it was a prairie school, a little country school in Del Rey. I went to my first grade there, and walked about two miles every day, and another person, by the name of Nelson, used to pick me up while I was walking. First I wanted a bicycle; my Dad would get me a bicycle. I think I must've been seven years old when I started, and after that I went to Selma, oh I went to Walnut School in Selma, which is a school about three miles north of Selma town. Then from the third grade—let's see from first grade I skipped second grade and went to third grade, and then came into Selma School at fourth grade. Then Garfield, Selma School, and then from Garfield I went to Selma High School, and to—what year did I go to Selma High School?

JA: Twenty-two.

GA: Twenty-two? I graduated in '26, and there, as far as athletics I tried out for everything and—(laughs) I enjoyed football, and wanted to try football junior year, and senior year I played, I was—became the captain of the team and we took the first valley championship that Selma ever had, played against Maricopa. I was elected as captain to be part of that. We had no team ever score on us, except Lemoore, and that was six—we got beat by six points in McCall field, but the others: Fresno, Fresno Tech, Fresno High, we beat them by pretty good scores. And had to even play against Kingsburg and Fowler, the varsity group, because they had the lightweight team, and I remember playing against the Caruthers varsity team, and against Don Nakagawa did you know Don Nakagawa oh, he wasn't very heavy but he was a tremendous plunger. (laughs) He could charge us but he could—I don't think they beat us, and I don't know but we played against Fowler, and

Fowler had a tremendous, heavy team. Of course, they beat us there, but it was just a practice. So we—

IT: Who were your playmates?

GA: Playmates?

IT: Yeah. Were they—?

GA: I was the only Nihon-jin on the team, the rest were all Haku-jin.

JA: And night school.

GA: In high school, yeah.

JA: You went to night school.

GA: Oh, yeah, and after graduating from high school, I wanted to go to San Jose State, but Dad needed help, and he told me that if I would help him—he was raising strawberries at that time on the farm that we had, he said, “I’ll send you to school.” Well, the neighbors, Christensen girls who were going to night school, (inaudible) and I thought, after work that’s pretty hard but I’ll try it. So I did, and studied history and Phillips, Dr. Phillips. Was there another one by the name of Gibb(??)?

IT: Yes.

GA: All right, I took one course from him, and another course from Phillips. I’m proud of the fact that I got the highest grade in Phillips’ class. (laughs) And those were the things with our teachers and so forth, you know?

IT: Were you a—did you consider yourself Japanese, Japanese-American, or American?

GA: Well, that was, I was Japanese-American, and it had to be that way, otherwise—and oh, coming back to this, World War I was it? That’s right; I’ve seen World War I, in 1918. And I carried the American flag from Walnut School to Selma, which is about three miles,

I believe—a whole group of us—and that American flag I carried it all through, even Jerome, and I don't know where it is now. But, I was pretty proud of the fact that I was American. As far as Isseis' attitude during the war, they were more or less—I hate to say this, but I think they were more or less pro-Japanese.

IT: In school, did you participate in politics?

GA: Not too much, not too much.

IT: Did you experience any problems or—

GA: Prejudices?

IT: During your teenage years?

GA: Really, I don't think so. We were accepted and treated well. I remember, in grammar school, there was a little resentment against Armenians and I still remember this clearly in my mind—in the seventh or the eighth grade—this fellow by the name of George Gosjarian(??) who was—see we used to have a football team in grammar school, a group of us, and he wanted to play with us and we let him play with us and they were talking about foreigners, and it was hard to live with Armenians, and forgot that George Gosjarian(??) was with us, and we said, “By the way, we don't mean you, George, we're talking about the other Armenians.” (laughs) And that made me feel bad because they could've said the same for me, but they never did.

IT: Did you belong to any of the church or the scouts or the YMCA?

GA: Yes, yes. I belonged to the Boy Scouts of America, sponsored by the First Baptist Church in Selma, and we used to have—this was very surprising and disappointing fact that I found, but the scout master was (inaudible) and I used to ride my bicycle and we didn't have it at church, we'd go to his house, sit in his yard and talk about scouting. I went up

to as far as (inaudible) I forgot what rank and anyway, then I joined the Hi-Y group in high school, we went to the mountains and so forth, and during the school, that's about it, as far as—extra activities, I'll tell you, that coming back to scouting, the same scout master during a parade, the Armistice Day parade in Selma, and this was—the war was on at that time, and I was standing in line watching, and I heard the scout master mention, “We ought to kick the Japs to the hills.” And I didn't say anything, but that just turned me off and since then I quit—he was a Baptist Church member, and I was asked the question about why don't you come back to church, and I mentioned this to it was an ex-pastor, and he really felt bad about it.

But I did go to the Danish Baptist Church in Selma because my neighbors were the Christiansens, and they urged me to go with them. So, he and his family, and I was just alone with all the other members, and that's where I got baptized when I was thirteen. And when he said “baptized” I thought he would drown me, you know, submersion, and so I had no—I just felt like I was one of the guys. We used to have parties with the member kids, the folks would invite us and they treated me well. I had no such thing as prejudice until war came along.

IT: You said you went to med school at Fresno State. Did you finish up at Fresno State?

GA: No, I couldn't.

IT: You couldn't.

GA: I had to go back to work and so I don't know how many—maybe I stayed a semester.

IT: Did you stay on the farm, and did the farming?

GA: Yes.

IT: You didn't go out looking for a job? Now when did you switch to the nursery?

GA: 1930, oh, I helped Dad some—I was eighteen or so, selling plants, vegetable plants, and working from Lindsay to Fresno, for Union Nursery Yoshida family. The reason I started was in 1930, when Dad moved over to Red Bank, it was in Visalia. They had no plants, and the guys wanted to plant vegetables on the side there and it was supposed to be the earliest vegetable or fruit producing area in Central California. We went—I went over and heard about the plants, vegetable plants in Hanford, thirty-five cents a piece in the can. You could never find any that way, so I went to Los Angeles for a farmers' special. They had herb plants per flat, and I think it was around seventy cents for those plants, so I picked up those plants and worked day and night selling and hauling, and this is when I came back. And I started this little nursery I think in 1939 or 1940. And I stayed on the farm and Dad worked, and both of us were hauling—I had a tough life. (laughs)

IT: Did you have any connections to a Japan Town?

GA: Any connections?

IT: Connections—in other words, did you go to Japan Town or anything like that?

GA: Very little, if any.

IT: There weren't any around.

GA: Pardon?

IT: Were there Japan towns around Fresno, or Selma?

GA: Yeah. Chinatown.

IT: Chinatown in Fresno.

GA: (laughs)

IT: And what about in Selma?

GA: Yes.

IT: There was?

GA: Yes. They had two grocery stores and a barber shop and a little restaurant. Ben Matsui, maybe you've heard of Ben Matsui? He made it very high up in the banks.

IT: Was he the one that went to work for Bank of Tokyo?

GA: Yes, and they had Murishige's garage, and let's see—that's right they did have a boarding house, I think they had two boarding houses. And at that time, when I first started school, freshman year—Ishimuda(??) There were two Japanese ahead of me—one of them I think went to Stanford, I think he went into engineering, a couple of sharp—and the other was Jim Sato and I don't know whatever happened to him.

IT: You attended Japanese language school?

GA: Yes, I attended until I went to high school, and then—I better go back a little, it was after the school that they taught, and I wanted to play football, so I didn't go. Oh yeah, I went a few grades.

IT: When did you get married?

GA: Uh, 1941—correct it, if you—(laughs) yes, a friend of mine introduced me to Jean in Los Angeles while I was down there hauling and selling plants. She's from Norwalk.

IT: And you're from Norwalk, Jean? And how did you meet?

GA: Oh, as I mentioned it was through a friend.

IT: Oh.

JA: A mutual friend.

GA: Mutual friend, he was married at that time.

IT: How many children did you have?

GA: (laughs) Five: two boys and three girls.

IT: And what are they doing now?

GA: Jeffrey and Steven, they both went to Reedley College and they thought that I should retire and take it easy, so they wanted to take over the nursery, work in the nursery. And then the oldest daughter, Arleen, she's an associate landscape architect for the city of San Jose. She went to Fresno State and then went to Cal Poly Pomona, and after graduating she was married and they both live in San Jose—Fremont, and her husband Harry Nakagawai has his own landscape architect office (inaudible phrases) he works for the city now, for about two, or three years ago. And Maxine has been teaching in Selma Elementary School for many years, and Christine next to the younger, is married a Haku-jin when she went to San Jose State. At San Jose State she met this fellow working there while she was going to school, and he's in Fresno right now, his name is Ostoya(?) and he was a big guy and so she was helping him, and keeping very busy nowadays she comes to help with the books at the nursery.

IT: Jean, what was your life like, growing up?

JA: Well, there's nothing, he's probably—mine is very uninteresting.

IT: Did you belong to a church group, too?

JA: Well, I went to a friend's church in Norwalk.

IT: Norwalk, what about in Selma?

JA: In Selma? Well, I guess we went to a Methodist church here once in a while, because his folks were members there.

GA: Yeah, my folks were old time members of the Methodist church.

IT: Well, did you have a women's group or anything at the church that you were active with?

JA: No, not the one in Fresno.

IT: What are some of the activities—when did you join the JACL?

GA: It must've been (inaudible) I remember this friend of mine, he came from Kingsburg, and we heard about the JACL at that time, and he asked me if I wanted to go, and so I said, "Let's find out what it's all about." So, we went to (inaudible) office which was in the old Bank of America building on Third, and he invited us to come in, sit down, we'll talk. "Go ahead, talk. What's the purpose?" But, oh we had to have a Japanese—everything that had to with almost anything had a group that probably would listen to you, and do your wishes, and they kind of forget us unless we have a group, west side group. And I remember him distinctly saying, "We need more lights in town and to bring the redress through our organization."

IT: What year was this?

GA: That year must've been—when would that be?

IT: In the twenties or thirties?

GA: I think it was early thirties, if I'm not mistaken. Was I a member before we were married?

JA: No, you were already a member.

GA: Yeah, it must've been in the thirties, late thirties.

IT: Did you join after Fred?

GA: Gosh, I must've; I don't know.

IT: Because Fred joined them right before the first national organization.

GA: Yes, I think I was a member then.

IT: You were a member when they had the first—

GA: I remember them talking about—you know Tom Nakamura of course.

IT: Yeah.

GA: He was the national—we were talking about him of course—

IT: Yeah, he became the president, in about 1938 or '39.

GA: I think so. I never did—I did want to travel from Selma to the Fresno office.

IT: When did the Selma chapter get established?

GA: Before the war.

JA: In 1951.

GA: In 1951? Oh no, oh no, because we talked with the JACL members and they wanted to evacuate and the possibility and so forth, so it was before nineteen—before World War I, not World War I, excuse me, the last one, the last World War.

JA: No, Selma didn't have it.

GA: No, Selma didn't have it, no, I guess not. They let them join—I don't know, I don't remember very clearly.

JA: In '41, was they started in Selma—

GA: In '41, yeah after we came back, we reactivated, but uh, we were—Masaoka, Mike's brother, he would speak about it after we came back.

IT: Grant.

GA: Pardon?

IT: Grant Masaoka.

GA: Grant? No, Joe. Joe came to—

JA: That was in 1951 that they started. That's what the minutes say.

GA: Selma? Does it say so? Could have, but I was a member of the Fresno chapter way before that.

IT: Yeah, and then you switched over from Fresno to Selma then.

GA: Yes, I guess I wasn't started with the Selma chapter.

IT: Were you president?

GA: Yes I must've been. (laughs)

JA: Yeah about four or five times.

IT: Five times? (laughs) Now, what camps were you evacuated to first?

GA: First, we came to Fresno Assembly Center, and I have some pictures and so forth if you want to see them, and Jerome too, that I have in the car, but the Fresno Assembly Center. The reason for that is that I wasn't going to come in. I was due in Selma, but Bobby Tanaga(?) and Johnson and a—urged me to come in and join the Fresno Assembly Center to try and stick together, because we always got along together.

IT: How did the internment affect your life?

GA: Oh, coming back? All right. Then at that time, we just took it for, well, shigata ganai, can't help it you know, and we wanted to stay in a group. We didn't like it of course, rebelled, what could you do? And so we came to the Fresno Assembly Center, my sister Elaine was going to State, and she was interned, she got picked up and she was sent to the one in Pinedale, and later she joined us in Fresno.

And while I was in Fresno Assembly Center, they wanted to do what—I belonged to an ag group, and they wanted to dress up the containments and I got leave and I went back to Selma to pick up a load of a plants and planters and I was there for a long time, pine trees and so forth. I didn't—in the first group there was an order that they were going to close camp and had to go to Arkansas. And the first group, they had—I don't know what it was, called an inspection group I guess, and she went down there, and then the first big group, they had 500 people move at one time. We had 5000 to start with in

the Fresno Assembly Center, and at that time we boarded the Fresno train, the train in Fresno near the winery on the Church street and I still remember I was appointed the— what they call it—I was under the major, the major that commanded whole train—

JA: Monitor?

GA: Monitor, was it they called me? (laughs) And I was going back and forth because we weren't allowed—anyway, there in that particular train car, you had to stay, you know you couldn't leave. So, my job was to go up and down to see if there were any hardships, if there was any really bad complaint and so forth. Which, and so I asked the major, what kind of—you can't be sitting in this car all the way up to Arkansas—and I didn't know how long it would take but we were going to recreate and once a day, maybe fifteen, twenty minutes at the most we'd stop and let everybody out for exercise, and Isseis were, all the Isseis—the bachelors were stuck in one train, in one car and I asked the major, “Hey,” after the first or second day, “We've got to get out from camp; we're behind schedule.” And a train loaded with soldiers came by, they were sightseeing, they sidetracked us and it took so long that we were losing time.

I said, “Listen, we're going to have trouble if you don't do something, the bachelors are really getting fussy (inaudible) and their getting uneasy.” He said, “Okay we'll stop.” And he said, “You'll have to get off yourself and take care of their needs.” And I said, oh no, these bachelors are wanting (inaudible) or cigarettes or whatever, and the rest didn't count see, but these guys were really complaining. I remember this happened, and no one stopped at all until we get to Texas, and I had to get out and buy—take a couple of them with me. Oh yes, we had to run from each car to get out and take

care of their needs, and they were overwhelmed at this little station, you know, we bought everything there! (laughs) and they were put out and they had to make change.

Anyway, then the major came along, “Get back in the car, get everybody back in, we can’t do it.” So, one of the fellows wanted his change. And so the train started going down, and I told the fellows, “Hey, fellows, gosh, we’ve got to get going here—time to go.” They said, “If we don’t have our money, we’re not going to get back in the car, and we still want to get our change.” And the train must’ve gone about a hundred yards, and the major got excited and he was whistling and yelling, and finally they had to stop.

And when we arrived in five days—six nights, and five days or something like that and that was the only stop we ever did get to go out. We arrived at Arkansas toward evening, it was a beautiful sight with fall colors—it was October now. And the, there was talk down there that we better watch a bunch from Los Angeles, called them yellow names, and they were out looking for trouble, and so they definitely warned me what to expect, and well we arrived there, and sure enough there were a bunch of guys kind of sizing us up and we were all ready for battle, for a fight—we had to be. But, no fight, and we stayed there, and it was the hottest—it was—have you ever been to barracks? Well, you never were in a barrack, were you?

IT: We were in Gila, Arizona.

GA: Oh, were you? Oh, I didn’t know about that. But, I think this must’ve been the hottest day or summer of the year. Everybody was sitting down at the mess hall, in a pool of water up to my elbow. And then the coldest winter we ever had I believe, with icicles about like this hanging off the buildings, I still have pictures. I remembered to take pictures of Dr. Taira there.

IT: You had a camera?

GA: Yeah. We weren't supposed to, but I smuggled one in. And then we had a photographer in there, and we started this Jerome co-op, and I was the coordinator and I have pictures of the people working there. A fellow by the name of Urkula(?) was a very well-educated person, and he studied co-op and came out in management.

IT: Did you stay in camp all through the war?

GA: Through the war?

IT: Uh-huh.

GA: No. No, we got—I forget what year we got out and went to Arkansas—I mean, to Chicago. And Johnson—no uh, it's all coming back now—I was in the soil survey group. They wanted a soil survey; they wanted to start a new farming project in the evacuee encampment. And I knew something about soil since I studied it in biology, and Charles Nishi who graduated in California and went to Denver School of Mines and he was a soil expert, an expert in soil, and then there was Tom Shimasaki you know Tom, and Johnson Kebo and Nishi.

There were about five or six of us, and we would go out and walking, and Tom wasn't even in our group, and he would come out looking for us. And I can remember him yelling, "Oi! Oi!" (laughs) So we'd sit down, and he'd say, "Baka ta re," "What are you guys doing, working?" And here working for sixteen dollars a month "Sit down; let's talk." And good idea, so we'd sit down and talk, and here between Johnson and Tom got in a big argument, you know, would always pick on something. And there was news about Japan, I don't know how they must have had a shortwave in there 'cause they confiscated everything, and would talk about how the Japanese soldiers were giving the

Americans one hell of a battle. And so, we'd talk about prison times, and our feeling, and this Thomas hated us, if Japanese laid down their armor and surrendered they would be nothing. But, to give them a good battle, I think we'd get respected longer. So, it was kind of pro-Japanese talk.

IT: (laughs) Were you—did you have to go through the loyalty question twenty-seven and twenty-eight?

GA: Question? Yes, yes. They came to recruit and there was this loyalty question, and on there I distinctly or definitely remember, what would it say? Oh, "Are you willing to renounce your loyalty to the Japanese government" and so forth—

IT: Yeah. That was twenty-eight.

GA: Twenty-eight, was it?

IT: Twenty-seven was "are you willing to serve?"

GA: I wrote down on it, I crossed it out and put a big question mark. How can you ever say this to me this question is completely out of order. I'm an American citizen. (laughs) And turned it in. And that would cause quite an issue.

And in the camp, also, they had a group there that was pro-Japan, and in the morning I understand, but I never saw it—they put this banner on their head and marched through the camp—I didn't see this now, this was in our block, and we tried to point them down, but house, somebody was going to have it their way. And there was talk that all the JACL members—that after the (inaudible) they probably got beat up, they would have come beat us. The JACL was said to be the cause of this. They would seek out the JACL, and the, I had my wood cutting crew to help, we all had to make our own decision and somebody was going to get his head chopped, but nothing happened.

By that time, I remember Kebo said we'd better get out of there as soon as we can, and he got out and went to Chicago, left the camp, and he urged me to come out. So we went out and worked American Brake Shoe. And this was—who was it that told me there was an opening? One of my friends, Kimura told me there was an opening at the uh, opening in the American Brake Shoe and he said, "I read this in the paper, so why don't you go check on this?" And we had the JACL office to help out the evacuees—

IT: Um-hm.

GA: They would have them go in—and people who would type or some other position. And I had no training in either. Except that they said they had an opening at the nursery, big nursery, so I went to apply for the job, and they asked me what I could do and I told them—we're not interested in boiler men, who keep the hot water on and the heat in the nursery, not interested. (laughs) But, I tell you, taking the heaters, and so forth.

Anyway, coming back to this American Brake Shoe. Have you ever heard of American Brake Shoe, huge company. And then when I first went there, they said you'd better apply and fill out this—and okay, you talk to the lady but first have dinner with us in the big mess hall, and I remember the ox tail soup—the most terrible tasting thing I ever heard of, and later on I asked what was it? Oh, these are boiled with ox tail. I stopped eating!

Then in my interview, I remember they took me into a shop, and they had nothing but small, very close-tolerance work, a milling machine and lathe and so forth. And they did allow us an exact fitting, and took the (inaudible) and "Now, George, you did apply for machinist." And "Yes, I did." And "Which one of these machines are you familiar with?" Said, "First time I've ever walked into a machine shop." And "What? You came

here to apply for the machines?” and “Yes.” And “How do you expect to get a job here?” and I told him, “First of all, all these people working here, it’s a big group, and they must’ve learned on the job because they’ve been working here a long time. And I’m here to learn.” He went on with the interview, and called the foreman of the shop and told him “We’ve got a young guy here, who first time he’s ever walked into a machine shop, and he wants to be a machinist, and I asked him what can he work, and he said none of these machines—what can we do with a guy like this?”

And so I told him, just like I told the other guy, I told him they must’ve learned on the job, and I’m here to learn, so I want you to teach me. And he said, “That makes sense, and I’ve had them come in here, and telling us that the machine is a form of a machine and first thing you know they tear up that machine, and but you’re willing to learn, we’ll teach you.” I guess I stayed there more than two years, as a milling machine operator.

IT: Okay, I’m going to—okay start with, you did not serve in the Army.

GA: No, I did not.

IT: Your age, right?

GA: Yes, it was that I received a 1A classification, for assistance in the lower camp in Chicago, and even I could go for a job interview, to get out of the camp more or less, and working for American Brake Shoe I got a call from the draft board in Chicago. I guess that was in 1945, and it was during the time before they dropped the atomic bomb. And I went to the draft board, and that’s because I told the draft board I got two deferments and third time I would not ask any further. And I went to the draft board and they asked my age, and I was thirty-eight, and he says, “I think you won’t have to be brought—“you’re too old and he said oh, and I said “I’ve got 1A” and but then I went to the company and

told them, and went to the draft board and went through the interview, and I said, “No, I’ve got 1A,” and they said, “Listen, you’ve got some training to do to where you’d amount to something, and we’re losing too many men. We can’t hold you to deferment.” And I said that’s okay, I’ve had two deferments already. And so I went to the draft board.

And in the mean time they said, “We’re going to have to put a stop to this, because we’re losing too many men.” And this is one of the very vital parts of the industry. It was the war effort.

And they—in Springfield, they came back and told me they called up to Springfield to Sacramento, requesting a deferment of a very important part of the war effort, and I don’t know what happened there, but they probably did.

But anyway, when I went to the draft board, too, they said, “You’re too old.” We can’t, we think the war’s going to end, and we can’t be wasting money on you. So, I said, well, sure that’s okay with me. (laughs) And then just a few days later, I believe, they dropped the atomic bomb. And this is one thing that—a lot of those people at the shop didn’t know what an atomic bomb was, and so forth, and tremendous heat which created it. Later on, they went with Hiroshima to check this area—ever been there? They have a big river right there, and only one—Oh, there were still a building standing that was the only one, and I remember going to meeting at Fowlerr when a minister came over with a sample of—it’s a ball like this of the terracotta roofing that just melted and made a ball? This is the type of heat that created—

IT: Did you stay with American Brake Shoe until you left Chicago?

GA: Pardon?

IT: Did you work with American Brake Shoe until you left Chicago?

GA: Yes.

IT: And when did you leave Chicago?

GA: Well, it was 1943 or '44?

JA: Well, it was '44.

GA: Forty-four.

IT: When you were in Chicago, where did you live, in an apartment?

GA: Yes. We stayed there—when we first moved there Johnson asked us to until we found a place to live, would just stay in this apartment, at this place.

IT: Jean were you—

GA: Jean, too. All we had was—Jean was looking for an apartment, so we found one just a block or so away, and then that was—I forget what street that was—and we didn't like that place because it was a dump of bed bugs. (laughs) So we moved to another place on Whipple Street and it was a better—that was much nicer. So every Sunday, Johnson and Tom would come over. (laugh)

IT: Tom Nakamura?

GA: Nakamura. And we—did Mae come too?

JA: Yeah.

GA: And sit down for talk, you know. They would bring beer, and we would like this and line up the big quart bottles— (laughs)

JA: Drink your beer.

GA: Yeah, we'd sit down and talk.

IT: Did you have any get-togethers other than two or three people?

GA: Not too much, I went to a JACL meeting there, once I believe, yes.

IT: Was there any church group there, or—

GA: No, no. No church group, no—Sunday we were pretty tired, and we rest and drink—
(laughs)

IT: So, what year did you come back to Selma?

GA: 1944, maybe it was?

IT: Right after they admitted—came back to California?

GA: Yes, Mother and Dad beat us coming back home and Mom became ill, sick. And so that's when—I kind of enjoyed working there, and used to go out on the town—I remember basketball games we used to go to and saw one football game, but then with Mom not feeling well, we came back. I think it was in '44 or '45 or '46, pretty sure in '44.

IT: Okay, when you got back, when did the JACL—

GA: Pardon?

IT: When you got back, did the JACL reactivate here?

GA: In Selma or Fresno?

IT: No, in Fresno. You were still a Fresno member.

GA: Oh, yes, yes. I couldn't become a member if there was no JACL.

IT: And you know Johnson Kebo you don't recall when CCDC was organized?

GA: Gosh, no guess I don't.

IT: When the Fresno chapter broke away from Northern Cal?

GA: No I really don't remember.

IT: You don't remember. Then when you got back here, you went into the nursery business?

GA: Yeah, let's see now, we had some friends Haku-jin friends would come over and say, "George, go back to your nursery business, we need trees and we need vines, and so forth and so on." And talking with Nihon-jin friends, I wish I would've gone into real estate, but (inaudible phrases) and so I remember talking to Johnson Kebo, let's get a place in Selma here, and "You have insurance" and said, "You start the insurance, and I'll start my nursery."

Oh yes, I bought a place at that time (inaudible) it was a bigger office, and you can have the second office to work out of, and so anyway, the haku-jins would come down and sit down and talk—most of them were happy to see us come back. I don't think I know any resentment. And so, we started the nursery, and at that time I remember going to the bank and no loans. They gave me a little loan all right, no collateral to amount to anything, but it's an awful long time to work to make the tractor loan, and I respect that, and so I contacted the wholesale grower, and about three or four of them, and they were all willing to help out. No money, but they set me up to get started, and then for seven or eight years, we were busy. The trees, I was selling trees clear to Lindsay and Selma and Kingsburg, around there (inaudible phrase.)

IT: What kind of trees.

GA: Fruit trees, and plum trees and peach trees, and so forth, and vines, all kinds, thousands of—whole big truckloads.

IT: Did you start the trees here?

GA: No, my Dad started growing vines, but that's too slow; that's too much work. My mother would grow on the farm (inaudible) so everybody helped us so much, and no trouble selling. In seven years or eight years, not one single day off. Can you imagine? Saturday,

Sunday and I really used to keep the old books for awhile, but I couldn't—and most of them—and as far as credit—a lot of it was on credit. And there was a guy at the bank, by the name of Mertz (inaudible sentence due to low audio) and I remember clearly that oh, at Bakersfield, one area that was rich, and early, that barrel had some real early fruit and so in that area there I asked for credit at the bank, and they knew I was good for it—so everything went along quite well.

IT: Did you ever sell citrus trees?

GA: Yes, not too many. But, I did. There was one place in McFarland and I sold semi-dwarf and I don't know if it is still there or not, but I used to go by and see it.

IT: I remember, you used to distribute at the fair, the Fresno Fair. When did you start doing that?

GA: When was it? Gosh—

IT: And you got awards for that?

GA: Pardon?

IT: You got awards? I mean, blue ribbons?

GA: Yes, yes, that's right. Those were the first blue ribbons I— (laughs)

JA: And you got the sweepstakes going, too.

GA: Yeah, we got that—sweepstakes several times.

IT: Seven times?

JA: Several.

GA: No, several, not seven times. But, I was president of the San Joaquin Chapter Nursery Association and that helped me, people got to know me. And I remember this first sweepstake that I would receive. I forgot about that—my brother-in-law—son-in-law,

Harry Nakagawa, the one at Cal Poly Pomona? Anyway, “Don’t know much about landscaping,” and I told him, “Let’s fix that; give me an idea.” So, he drew up an idea, and I remember we had a big fountain there, and water dripping in a stream, and trees and little plants and it was pretty nice. And I remember—I got the top award. (laughs) and thereafter that I was in charge of the nursery display, that pretty little thing. The supervisor of the fair—

IT: Let me turn this off a minute, and (pause in tape) okay, go ahead.

GA: Like I mentioned, happy-go-lucky, and oh, always singing and very kind and had no care in the world, and we’d sit together, he’d sit down in the garden and talk. And whether he volunteered or whether he was drafted, I don’t remember.

But, then I remember him telling me they got a letter from this guy (inaudible) and sometime later again got a letter and saying that they had one hell of an artillery fire. A big shell burst right nearby and made a big hole in the ground, and the first thing he did was he dove into the hole, and another guy dove in the hole, and there was a lot of dust in there and couldn’t see through the dust and said, “I looked at the guy and the guy looked at me, and he was a German, and he saw me,” and said, “he jumped out and started running.” And so that—

?: (someone at door interrupts) You’ve got some beautiful nectarines, Dad— (mumbling)

JA: Okay, we’ll see you then, all right, bye bye.

GA: Have a good day!

So the fellow said that he was very much surprised to see a German just—he said really staring at each other—and he said the guy took off and really ran, and said, “I

didn't have the heart to shoot him." (laughs) And it was about oh, two days later, we got word that he was killed in action.

IT: Oh. Now, locally in the community—were you active in the community in Selma?

GA: Selma? Yeah, I kind of think I was, I joined the Chamber of Commerce, and one of the board of directors came to talk and wanted to start a tree program for the city, in the sidewalks. So, we're talking about it and, you know, talked about the trees and whether it was a good idea, and they said, "George you plant the trees in—(inaudible)plant the trees." So, at that time, wooden tubs, they didn't think about drilling a hole, and so I went over to Modesto someplace and checked that out, and Watsonville and they all had wooden tubs. So, I suggested we put wooden tubs, and some of them—one tree was still standing until just the other day, from many, many years ago. Of course, there are still trees that have been taken out of the bucket and planted into the ground that are still there.

But, I donated my time and I had one Mexican person who planted, too, and soil from the cemetery. They have the best soil, and I used that. (laughs) And I had a fellow by the name of Wells and he was very friendly and he helped me and the Chamber of Commerce directed me and also there were parties, home parties that I was invited to, you know, and treated quite well.

And oh, let's see, and then I remember Slokum—did you ever hear of a fellow by the name of Slokum. He came to speak to us about social security and so-forth, something anyway, and we met and I was sitting down and talking to him, and I said, "Hey, Toki You're a Mason, huh?" And he said, "Yes, I am." And "Where did you join?" And either it was Minnesota or (inaudible) someplace, and that time he was really going, and he asked me, "Are you interested, George?" And I said, "I just heard, and I

don't anything about it." And he said, "Well, you're not supposed to know too much about it, but are you interested?" And "Well, yeah, I guess I'm interested to know more about it." And he said, "Okay, ask for a petition." So, I went to the secretary and told him about it. And I was turned down. And a friend of mine told me, who was a member too at that time, was—oh yeah, I found out that the reason I was turned down, was the guy who examined it, he said he bought trees from me, a whole lot of trees, and he wasn't there, and I asked one of the Mexican fellows who worked for me to deliver them and he just dumped them off in his yard, right out in the yard and just left. And he thought that was a very irresponsible thing for me to do, which I agree, I didn't know this, until I found out later what happened, and I apologized to the guy.

Anyway, a fellow by the name of Davis and he was a schoolmate of mine from high school, and he heard about it, and he came after me (inaudible phrase) and so then there was the Ponderosa Lodge in Fresno. And he's a member of Ponderosa Lodge, and says "I want you to join the lodge." And I said, "Well, I was already turned down once." And he said, "That's a wrong attitude." So he sent an invitation. So, I did, and I was accepted. So I got my first degree and—

IT: Second?

GA: Yes, I got all three degrees there. That's all the memory of it I've got, and I still remember that as a new member, you're supposed to make coffee for the coffee break. And I don't drink coffee, and I'd never made coffee. So, "Who in the hell made this coffee?" (laughs) And that was interesting, and anyway, I never worked the kitchen after that.

But that was my experience at this lodge, but then some of the fellows from Selma, said we need you to transfer to Selma Lodge. And, “Nope, they recruited me once, and had a bad attitude, made a mistake.” (inaudible) But, they accepted me in Fresno and (inaudible phrases.) And they didn’t want to make that mistake, and so went down and talked to them and said, “Try” and I said, “Okay, I’ll try.” And I was accepted and ever since then—I think that I was about sixty-three or four years old. And went through both degrees there, and (inaudible.)

After I joined though, they became pretty friendly except they didn’t allow Armenians, either, they turned one Armenian down. And I thought that was wrong, and one guy, just because of something he did, some little something and for personal reasons that were pretty small. And he, I told him—he was (inaudible) friend of mine. And I asked, I told him there was another lodge if he wanted to come down there, but Armenians had hard time getting in. Kingsburg I think accepted him, after Selma turned him down he went over to Kingsburg. But, now I don’t think there’s any such thing. Oh, coming back to Toki Slokum. He’s a pretty (inaudible phrase) and then he became quite ill—he was in Fresno, or Sanger someplace in a hospital (inaudible phrase) and “want to go Thursday?” and I said, “Sure, let’s go.” And “I’ll go with you.” And so he died soon after that, but he was really respected.

And this Slokum he was with a Sgt. York—did you hear about that Sgt. York of World War I?

IT: No.

GA: He said he was in his regiment, and he saw a big battle at the (inaudible) he was there but he almost got killed, so that was interesting talk. But, World War I you know, that was a long time ago.

IT: Yeah, right. How did you feel about redress?

GA: Well, I don't know, I thought that yeah.

IT: Did you have any thoughts when we first started out on the redress campaign?

GA: Any talk?

IT: Any thoughts, yeah, did you feel—I mean there were a lot of people who opposed it at the beginning.

GA: Why?

IT: Well a lot of people didn't want to rock the boat.

GA: Oh, no. I thought that was more than just—in matter of fact I was (inaudible) and of course, the apology that was sent to us—I still have that someplace. No, I thought that was a much—I remember it was a pots and pans apology.

IT: Yeah, so what do you think was the greatest contribution of the Nisei to the American society?

GA: Greatest contribution? Well, the greatest contribution was volunteering for the Army, when their parents were locked up like this so forth and so on, to go on recruiting I thought was—of course there's a lot of controversy over that now (inaudible.) But, Fred and I, we talked about this—and this was before this came about, and I remember Fred telling me, "They're really sincere about that, and I think it's a just cause." But, then I think his position was to go and try to evade the draft. I don't know; I haven't talked to

Fred about that. But I remember him saying that they were really sincere about that, and it's against the Constitution and it's wrong. But—

IT: What do you think the role of the Nisei women was—do you think? What was the contribution of the Nisei women?

GA: Well, I don't give it that much of a thought. That's housewives' work. (laughs) They take care of the husbands. (laughs) No, I think the Nisei women—

JA: Let me mention—

GA: There's no objection now that they have that they can go as far as they can.

IT: What about in terms of the Nisei, do you think they were—they accomplished what they set out to do for the Nisei?

GA: Look at yourself, contributing to—you talk of contributions concerned—I think they have—they exercise the rights of—I don't think there's such a thing as prejudice. I don't know, maybe. But, I think I never heard of—

Oh, coming back now, back in the 1950's, was it? The police chief in Selma, Davis asked if I wanted to go visit San Quentin prison. I have a picture of it by the way. And he said, "If you do, I'd like to invite you." So I said, "Sure." And so I think about thirty of us—one busload anyway, a whole bunch of rowdy guys, and we (inaudible) we went to the airport in San Francisco and had breakfast and went to San Quentin, and had a little lunch there at San Quentin. And there—you know, is it Enomoto?

IT: Yep, Enomoto

GA: Enomoto okay. I met him there. He was sitting and having lunch with the group and that was quite an interesting—here, I didn't talk to him. But, anyway they had a little interview place where people came in to see the prisoners. They came in and there was a

little hole in the wall, you might say, and talk. Anyway, we were taken through the prison. They'd guide us, and say, "These are businessmen and so forth and so on, from Selma." (inaudible)

First we went through there, took the Golden Gate and stopped at San Quentin and there was a little check station, for guns or whatever, and of course the chief was with us (inaudible) and after the mess hall, I'm having lunch at the mess hall, and they guide us to the kitchen. And there, I thought there was a—I don't know, there were a couple of, two or three inmates just standing there glaring at us, and one of them was saying, "I'd like to kick (inaudible) off of this guy." (laughs) And I said, "Hey, what kind of talk is that?" At least, that's what I thought.

Then they invited us for a little coffee break, or something. They must've divided into several rotations, but we—the inmates had a break, and I said, "Hey, this is looking like they're pretty quiet, and I see it's sectioned off." And, "Yes, we had trouble last—" I asked, "How did the trouble start?" And "I don't know, but some guy threw one of those metal pans, and threw it across the room, and then the whole pandemonium started, and I had one heck of a time." So thereafter that, they broke up into different sections and closed the doors.

And then we went through this—where they keep them, the cells. And you could hear the doors just clang shut, and all of the bars, and all they had was just a bed and a toilet. That's all they had. And there weren't too many (inaudible) they had a garden section and they seemed to be—not so, they didn't seem like they were suffering. Some of them were even whistling and some of them smiling and we discussed this (inaudible) and then they took us to the gas chamber. And that was something to look at. Metal,

copper that you could push the whatever, the starter, and then some of them they had a little pad there—the gas chamber—you could see the little blue flame or the blue smoke or whatever they called it, and they stayed there and first thing you know they knock their hand on the door and—this was dangerous. I will never forget that gas chamber.

IT: Hm. We're at the end of the interview. Is there anything else you want to say?
Anything else you want to state on the tape?

GA: Mm, not especially, but I think we've come a long ways. I think there were freeloader inspectors you know, and the one I think casualty the (inaudible) had is they showed responsibility. We take our work very seriously. We're all working, and training and bringing our character (inaudible) but I do think it's partly a casualty. It's instilled in us way back from in our parents' day: responsibility.

IT: Do you have any questions of this interview, or anything?

GA: Tell me, what is this interview for now?

IT: It's just—we have a history project, and this tape is going to be deposited at Fresno State—

GA: Oh. (laughs)

IT: In the Asian American Study Program, so that researchers and historians can get a view of the Japanese American experience, the stories of different family stories. You know, that way, we would like to work the Japanese American experience into the school curriculum, because the kids in the schools, they learn about Europeans and nothing about our background, our heritage and so on. And so these tapes will become available for teachers and so on to look at and incorporate it into—and then our teachers, our children will feel more at ease and relate to our background, rather than just Europeans.

GA: Because—that's very good. The reason is—I've never heard my children ask me about my father, or Dad and Mom and the history of these people. Otherwise, it would be lost.

IT: Well, thank you for sharing your story with us. Many stories such as this are very important to record in history, especially because history books in the school system are only about the white family history.

GA: The which?

IT: White family history. And there is nothing about the contributions of Japanese Americans in American society, so we hope to keep the Japanese Americans alive in contributions into the history.

GA: Izu tell me, what do you think is your opinion of the greatest contributions the Japanese have made?

IT: (laughs) That's off the record.

GA: Couple of years ago, distinguished service—

JA: The Chamber of Commerce—

GA: Yeah, the Chamber of Commerce they made a great, silver plaque about like this, and they put it right up, and a lot of letters came (inaudible) and Dooley was it Dooley?

JA: Why you served, you were on the board of this and board of that, and you donated a lot of trees and all that to the city, and—

GA: That's right; I did help the city out. But—

JA: (inaudible)

IT: So you're one of the real prominent citizens of Selma.

GA: (laughs) Yeah, I even got—rode in the parade by the Rotary Club.

IT: Uh-huh.

GA: (inaudible) Italian at that time.

JA: Mayor of Chinatown.

GA: Mayor of Chinatown. (laughs) The guys were kidding me, there.

IT: I guess, they sometimes they often confuse Chinatown with the Japan Town.

GA: (laughs) Yeah, they never say Japan Town.

IT: There's always a group that—you're from Chinatown.

GA: Yeah—

JA: Selma did have a Chinatown. Remember?

GA: Right now, I'm still a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and a trustee for the hospital foundation, and I remember (inaudible) oh, I don't know how many years (inaudible phrase) my feeling is kind of—it seemed like they, I don't understand that if the (inaudible) hadn't taken over the Selma hospital wouldn't have existed. It was a big, big deal and I've seen the books, and yeah, I helped with the memorial of one of the loyal doctors of Selma Hospital—he was a very dedicated doctor, and I do a little of that, whatever they—if they need help and they ask for help, well I guess I just have to help (laughs) and be glad to help if I can.

IT: Okay, well thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW