

NARRATOR: JAMES KIRIHARA

INTERVIEWER: GRACE KIMOTO

DATE: June 3, 1999

GK: This is an interview with James Kirihara, a man of eighty-two years old, at his home in Livingston, California. Today is January, I mean June 3, 1999. James, who we call Jake, was born in Oakland, California, on February 28, 1917. I am Grace Kimoto interviewing James today. We are doing this as a project for the Japanese-American Citizen's League Chapter of the Livingston Nisei Chapter in conjunction with the Fresno State Resource Building Resource for Sociology Department. All right Jake, hi, let's talk first of all about the WWII, before that time, okay? Can you tell us where you were born? Things about you and your family and what the family did back then?

JK: Yeah, I'll start a little bit with my father. My father came to the United States in 1902 and well, the first few years of his life in the United States, he just bounced around all over like so many in the first generation men did. They, most of them weren't married so they just—a lot of them did housework. My father was houseboy for a number of years in the Oakland area. He was also here during, in California when the San Francisco earthquake came about and he tells many stories about how he was in the earthquake and when the house fell down and he went out to Golden Gate Park because they had a tent village out there where people could sleep and had to stay there a few days, and he decided he was going to move and so he walked to the fair building from Golden Gate Park which was quite a ways, I suppose five miles, and he took a ferry to Oakland and he lived in Oakland or around Oakland the rest of his before, you know, he went back to Japan to marry his wife and which was 1913.

In that time he was in Oakland he did an awful lot of things. I know that he went to Alaska to work in a salmon cannery and then in those days, they used to go—they went to Alaska on a sailboat, a big sailing ship. And he tells the stories about going there, very interesting life that these people lived.

GK: Then, tell us about your family then, how did your parent's get together and—?

JK: Yeah, it happened that when my father—my father first came to the United States, he was an illegal alien. He jumped ship in San Francisco and so I guess in 1913 he decided that he would go back to Japan and marry my mother and then both of them would come back in legally. So I think that his legal residency in the United States really starts in 1913 although he was here since almost 1900. So he went back to Japan in 1913 and he met my mother and they were married in Japan and they came back to the United States in late 1913, I believe, because my brother must have been conceived in 1913 because he was born in 1914 so. And they settled, lived in Oakland and I think my father had a cleaning and dyeing or a little shop that did cleaning and dyeing in Oakland and he lived there in Oakland until 1919.

GK: So how much of your family was born in Oakland?

JK: My brother was born in Oakland in 1914 and I was born in Oakland in 1917 and then we moved to Livingston in 1919.

GK: Then how many more kids?

JK: Then in 1919, we were here from 1919, and 1921 my sister was born. And way later, I had a little brother that was born and he passed away. He only lived a year. And he passed away so there were three surviving siblings in the family.

GK: So what did your dad do after he got here?

JK: Well, see, my father had a good friend who had come to Livingston about 1913, I believe, and he was—and he was able to buy a farm so he kept pestering my father to come and farm in Livingston, too. And finally my father made the move in 1919. And this man's name was Mr. Hoshiyama, and one of the interesting things about farming in 1919 was that we had the Alien Land Law which said, in effect, it said the Japanese were aliens and ineligible for citizenship and therefore an alien ineligible for citizenship could not own land so it was kind of a double whammy. They couldn't own land and they couldn't become citizens. But by that time they had—Japanese had invented all sorts of subterfuges to get a hold of land, and my father was part of a corporation called Livingston Orchard and Vineyard Company and he was—we were Livingston Orchard and Vineyard Number Two and Mr. Hoshiyama was Livingston Orchard and Vineyard Number One and I think there was another member of that corporation and I don't recall who it was. It might have been Mr. Sumida but I think there were three entities in this corporation and we had a Caucasian lawyer who helped my father or Mr. Hoshiyama organize this corporation and he was one of the officers of the corporation. And then I think we had—ours was a stock corporation and I think all the children had stock in the corporation and that's how we got around this Alien Land Law.

GK: So you had two other siblings that you grew up with then?

JK: Yes, I have two siblings that I grew up with here.

GK: Tell us a little bit about how you grew up and some games you played?

JK: Well, you know, growing up in those days it was very simple having—we didn't have all the complications that kids today have. And while the life was hard and we did have to work hard, we also had a lot of fun. I guess our pleasures were a lot simpler than the

pleasures of children today. I know we, in the summertime we spent about half of our day out there at the canal swimming and eating fruit, you know, apples and stuff we'd pick off the tree and had a great time. You know, we never did think oh, we don't have anything to do, you know, how kids don't have anything to do. But we always had something to do.

GK: So do you remember some really good friends during your growing up days that were very special?

JK: No, I can't think of anything really.

GK: Okay, what was—what connections did you have with your neighbors, your Caucasian community? Do you remember anything about that?

JK: Yeah, almost all our social life was centered in the church and I know almost all our spare time, especially on Sunday, was spent at the church. We'd go there in the—we'd go there for church and then in the afternoon we'd go there and play. If it was baseball season, we'd play baseball, in basketball season, we'd play basketball. And oh, we did all kinds of things. There was a tennis court there and some of the kids played tennis. I never did but my brother was quite a tennis player. But that, generally that was the social center of our lives. After we started grammar school, of course, we had Caucasian friends and so we had several Caucasian friends who were real close to us. Star Whitten was one of my closest friends and he was about the only Caucasian who ever really visited, and I spent an awful lot of time in his home because Mrs. Whitten was such a sweet woman who just, you know, made us all welcome. And so that is probably the only Caucasian family that I had close connections with.

GK: You have a sister, Ruth?

JK: Yeah.

GK: Now did your parents expect something more differently from her than from the boys?

JK: Yeah, to a certain degree. My parents were very lax overall. They didn't make it—they didn't make it very tough for me so there wasn't that much contrast between the way they treated Ruth and how they treated me. I know that in a lot of Issei family the Nisei boys were really expected to really work hard and also they were expected to get good grades in school and all that, you know, so that they could get into professions and stuff.

GK: Did your family every—parents ever have to discipline you or?

JK: You know, I don't think there were—there were times when my father spoke harshly to me but there was never any punishment, you know, physical punishment. My family never had any of that.

GK: So your values as far as what was passed on by your family—religious values?

JK: Yeah, you know, there were religious values because my father was quite religious, and also that one of the things that I guess all of the Japanese family taught their children was that they had an obligation—they had to live up to family, that they could never do anything that would ever bring disgrace to the family. The family was a very important thing in Japanese culture and so we were taught that not to bring disgrace to the family.

GK: Okay, you were involved with church. Were you involved with Scouts at all?

JK: Yes, what was that?

GK: Boy Scouts? Boy Scouts?

JK: Oh, Boy Scouts, yes, yes.

GK: Okay.

JK: That was a big part of our lives from about the age of twelve, we joined the Boy Scout troop here and I think most of the Nisei around my age were members of this troop. And Mr. Carpenter was the scoutmaster and we used to go on many, many camping trips and things. You kind of wonder how we got away with the things that we did or the scoutmaster got away with because he would borrow a truck from some farmer and not often these trucks were not in very good condition, brakes wouldn't work and stuff and I remember Yosemite and the brakes wouldn't work and we'd start going down a hill and (laughing) and it was really an experience and you know, they could never get away with that kind of stuff nowadays but we did all kinds of things like that, you know.

GK: Was YPC a part of your life?

JK: Yes, YPC, yes YPC, yeah, Young People's Christian, yeah here—

GK: Tell us what that was?

JK: Now the Methodist—when we became a Methodist Church now we had a—what was it? (inaudible) but before that we just had a young people's group unaffiliated with the Methodist Church but the biggest things in our lives in those days now, that was about when I was in high school, and we had these conferences and we used to go to the Fresno Conference in the spring, I think, and the Berkeley, the big Berkeley Conference in the fall. And that is where you met outsiders, girls, you know, and it was a big, exciting thing for us to go to these conferences. Yeah.

GK: Were you involved in any sports?

JK: Yeah, in high school I was. I played basketball and I was into track and that was my big sport and in fact, I am still proud of the fact that one year I held the championship for the league's triple jump. (laughing)

GK: Now how about the nihon-gakko? Did you do any Japanese language?

JK: Yes, that was during my grammar school years, I guess all the kids were sent to Japanese school. In our case it was usually on Saturday but I was such a bad kid. I didn't learn anything really and I caused such a (laughing) commotion in the school that I remember one of the teachers was an old friend of ours called Masu Okubo who is a Kibei woman, a girl who came back from Japan, and she was about ten years older than I was, I guess, and so she taught the school for a while and since I was a real close family friend, I used to get away with everything. And she would get so angry at me at times she would "James, you go outside." (laughing) But anyway, I didn't learn much in Japanese school.

GK: So what feelings can you recall having gone to the Japanese language school?

JK: I guess at that time we just felt anything to get away was for the good. I never thought of it as we were losing an opportunity to learn the Japanese language or anything like that.

GK: You didn't feel shameful or negative about having to go to Japanese language school?

JK: No, I don't think that I did. You know, we all used to have real mixed feelings about, you know, because our parents even discouraged us really from using Japanese because they are afraid that we would be discriminated against if we did speak Japanese, so it was kind of a mixed thing, you know. They wanted us to learn but they didn't really want us to use it too much, you know.

GK: What about any of the cultural arts you know like kendo, judo, did you have any experience with those things?

JK: You know, I—we were one of the few families that didn't participate in kendo. My father was kind of, you know—felt that ,you know, it was a little bit too nationalistic sort

of thing and he allowed us to not go if we didn't want to, and neither Dave nor I wanted to go so we stayed at home.

GK: Do you have any feelings about that now? Not having done it?

JK: No, I don't really.

GK: Okay, tell us about schooling. How you felt about school and how you treated other kids and the teacher, you know?

JK: You know, schooling was a mixed bag, I think. You know, we had some good teachers that really tried to understand it, and then we had some teachers who were really narrow-minded and gave us a pretty hard time. Some of the kids really had it a lot worse than we did, you know. In those days when we early first maybe three or four years of grammar school, many, many Nisei were held back, you know, just because they went to school without any knowledge of English and the teachers weren't about to spend a lot of extra time with us so, you know, so we were on our own, so to speak.

GK: One of the questions I need to ask you is did you feel you were Japanese, or Japanese-American or did you feel you were American?

JK: You know, I think that when we first went to school, I think I felt of myself as being Japanese. You know, because everything up until that time, you know, we spoke Japanese in the home and we didn't have any American, Caucasian friends until later on in school so at that time in the early days I felt that I was Japanese-born. And then gradually you kind of start to change your feeling and then you become Japanese-American and then all American. And I think uh, pretty much of the grammar school days I thought of myself as being a Japanese-American.

GK: And how do you feel about yourself now?

JK: Uh, partly, I think it has been a long, long haul, you know. Because I think right now I finally feel pretty good about being American but most of my adult life, I couldn't say that. I still have these mixed feelings about being Japanese and being American.

GK: Did your parents have any contact with school and the teacher?

JK: Very little, I think that they did go to a parent-teacher's function once in a while but very rarely. Mostly they had very little contact with the schools.

GK: And were there expectations for you at school?

JK: Yeah, not to the extent that most other families did because I never got very good grades in school and my mother used to wonder every once in a while "Katsu"—Katsu is my Japanese name, and why didn't I bring any books home to study? (laughing) So I wasn't a real good student by any means.

GK: At the dinner table was Japanese spoken all the time or what was the language?

JK: Yeah, at the dinner table I guess the language was Japanese, yeah.

GK: And the conversation was about?

JK: Oh, yeah, I think Japanese families don't spend a lot of time in talk, idle talk say, and most of it was about what we ought to be doing on the farm, yeah.

GK: Okay, let's go on to your teenage years, okay? What kind of problems do you remember and some of the joys that you had (inaudible)?

JK: I never did date and in fact, dating wasn't something I didn't do until I was ready to get married. But one of the interesting things about growing up in a mixed population of students is that until about the time you go to—start thinking in terms of dating, you are pretty well mixed with the Caucasian kids. We used to goof around a lot together but about the time we got into high school, the kids started thinking of dating, and I think that

is when our paths separated and it became rather clear that we were Japanese and they were Caucasian and we couldn't do the things together that we used to do, you know, like double dating, or they would "Hey, let's go out and fool around with some girl over there." And (inaudible) with her but you knew that you weren't supposed to be in that. So we just didn't do it.

GK: What about marriage then? Did you look ahead as to what kind of person you would like to?

JK: I don't think so.

GK: Then what made you happy in those days?

JK: Oh well, I loved to go fishing even then. I used to go fishing down to the Merced River. Every weekend I'd walk down to the river and fish up towards Cressey and then in the evening I would walk back across the field here and none of us had cars so everything we did, we walked.

GK: And do you recall any prejudice feelings or incidents at that time of your life?

JK: Yeah, when I was growing up, there was one incident that really stood out in my mind, and one day my father had a buggy, horse and buggy, and we were one of the last people in Livingston to get a car. And I remember he hitched up the horse and buggy and we went for a ride out toward Cressey. We got about a mile or two from Cressey but the place had an oak tree and it is still standing there by where Sultana and Cressey meet, and under that tree there were a couple of young Caucasian men and when we went by in the buggy, as we went by, they jumped—you know, they got the car going and they just chased after us, and I can recall them saying, "Hey Japs." And spitting at us, I still remember that, and that is about the only thing, real overt kind of thing, that I can

remember in my life. I think that most of us, we had good antennas and we knew how to keep out of trouble. I think I, especially during my younger days, I always worried about when you walked down the street even, you looked down there and is there any rough-looking people? If there was, I would cross the street and go and things like that. You just learned to try and keep out of trouble.

GK: How about later in your life? Was there any prejudice experiences?

JK: What was that?

GK: Later in your life?

JK: Oh, later in my life? No, I never really met any overt, you know, discrimination.

GK: Okay, then let's go to your job and work and what kind of work did you do as you were—

JK: Growing up?

GK: Growing up?

JK: I—I had a lot of jobs around from about when I first started high school, I started working for a man named Mr. Maeda who had a packinghouse in town and he packed tomatoes. And we worked for him every summer for about four years I guess all through high school.

GK: Doing what, what did you do for him?

JK: Oh, we, mostly in the packinghouse, starting with tomatoes, we would dump these green tomatoes into a canvas desk—table and then we would sort them out and packers would be on the other side of that table and they would be packing. And we did that the early part of summer and then the later part of summer, we went over to the Livingston Farmer's Association, it was called Livingston Co-op Society then, and we would work

there in grape-packing which would start about end of August and so I and then even before that, I went to work in the dry yard, one of the packinghouses had a dry yard at Masuda's place and I used to go there and work in the dry yard.

GK: Okay, we are ready for the WWII era. How did you hear about Pearl Harbor?

JK: Oh, you know, that was Sunday morning and I was walking to church. And I stopped at Kishi's, we always, that would be the first stop and we'd go there and visit for a while before we went on to church. And I can remember that one of the kids came running out and said, "Hey," he said, "the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor." And that was when we first heard about this.

GK: How did you feel? Do you remember how you felt?

JK: Oh, you just feel like the bottom has dropped out of your, you know, all of a sudden, you know. Although I always say that even before that we kept expecting that something was going to happen because there was a relationship between the United States and Japan was real bad. And I remember that even from, say, early fall, you know, Japan had sent an ambassador and his name was Kurusu to Washington to try and negotiate peace or whatever. I guess people now say they sent him here to fool Americans into thinking, you know, they were seeking peace when they were really getting ready to bomb but I'm not sure. That is all a lot of—

GK: So did you have any other feelings about what might happen to you?

JK: Well, you know, we start—although we never thought at that time that we would ever be told to move but, you know, we were very nervous about how people would treat us, you know. You know, we always had some kind of oral discrimination and so you were always afraid of what people would do.

GK: And so what camp—so you had the evacuation, what camp did you go to?

JK: Oh, yeah, that was in May. And Livingston got a notice and we all got notices and certain family members were assigned certain days. There were three days that Livingston went to camp and we were assigned for the last day since my sister decided to get married before she went to camp. And a, so the last day she could do it was May—May 12th or something, and here a lot of the Livingston people had already gone to camp by then. And so anyway I went with her to the courthouse and I can remember Judge Moshart, I think it was, that did the ceremony for her and Martha Kajiwara was her, you know, attendant and I was the best man. And that night we spent here in the empty house, you know, because and I felt every eerie feeling that you could have, you know, sleeping in a house that has nothing in it, you know. So the next morning we had to go to, where was it? In front of the Livingston Farmer, I think the busses came to pick you up, and we had sold our car and we drove it up to there and then we turned it over to whoever bought it and then we got into a bus and then we ended up at Merced Assembly Center.

GK: How long were you there?

JK: I think about three months. Let's see, we got there in the middle of May and June, July, August, yeah, it was September when we left to go to Colorado.

GK: So describe a day in Amache, I mean, Merced, you were in the Assembly Center.

JK: Yes, we were in the Assembly Center in Merced.

GK: Yes, describe your day there? What happened in camp?

JK: Oh yeah, it was really I'll tell you, a tumultuous experience, I mean, you know, you get there and all these people were milling around. And we—since we were the last—in the

last contingent to go from Livingston, we got put into a different block than most Livingstons. Most Livingstons were in One A or something like that and I think we were in One B or something like that. Anyway, we were one block over and we were kind of in a mixed group of other people from Walnut Grove and Modesto.

GK: And was it then you moved to Colorado?

JK: Well, yeah, we were there in camp for three months I think and we all got jobs, we all were encouraged to take jobs. And I signed up to be a policeman. And we had a green band on our arms and BP, and we were called BPs.

GK: I see. And how was that experience?

JK: Oh, it wasn't an unpleasant experience. We never thought of ourselves as being policemen, you know, because we didn't have any weapons or anything. We just walked around (laughing) and I don't know, I don't even think we kept the peace. But you know, it was pretty good experience in a way, we got to know a lot of other policemen from other areas and we had our little camaraderie, you know.

GK: Okay, and how were you transferred to Colorado?

JK: Well, we went on a train. They were—no, they were just regular chair cars. And I think most of the time we had the blinds down and it was long trip for not a very far distance. I know the first night, it seems like all we did was go forward and back, and forward and back, and the train would stop and go and come back, and I remember getting up in the morning and we were still in Colorado or California. You know, all night long and we were right out of Barstow because I remember we went a little ways and we looked out in the distance and took the blinds up and looked off in the distance and we saw this green strip in the desert and that was the Colorado River. So we hadn't even got out of

California until late in the morning, I guess. And then I remember we got to somewhere in Arizona and they let us off the train. All the guards and soldiers were standing out along the perimeter and they let us get out and walk around a little bit so we got out.

And then—

GK: They were guarding you?

JK: They were guarding us, yeah.

GK: Were the guns pointing towards you or the outside?

JK: (laughing)

GK: The guns were pointed to you?

JK: Well, they didn't point it at you but they had guns, you know, so then we got back in the train and I think it was late that night, almost midnight, when we got to Colorado. So it was what, about a two day trip.

GK: Can you remember how it felt when you arrived in Colorado?

JK: Yeah, you know, it was confusing. I don't know, it was pitch dark and we got out of the train. I think we got on trucks, army trucks, yeah. They took us out to the camp and we ended up in 9H, I guess.

GK: Do you remember how you felt?

JK: Uh-huh, yeah, oh yeah.

GK: What are things you had to do when you arrived?

JK: Well, I know that we had to go and with our mattress sacks, bags that you went over to where they had straw and you filled up these bags with straw and then bring it back and you used it for a mattress.

GK: What kind of room did you set up? How many rooms?

- JK: About the size of this room, I guess, but not quite. Yeah, we had two—one room, there was just myself and mother and father, the three of us.
- GK: Twenty-five by fifteen or something?
- JK: What?
- GK: Twenty-five by fifteen?
- JK: Yeah, something like that, yeah.
- GK: Do you remember this loyalty question that people were talking about?
- JK: Oh yeah.
- GK: Loyalty number 27 and 28?
- JK: Yeah, I—I remember that ,and personally I didn't have any trouble with the question. Just like everybody else, I thought I was kind of really expecting a lot of us to answer yes, yes to both the questions even after they had to put us in the concentration camp. But personally I had no trouble with swearing loyalty to the United States, and what was the other question about, oh, swearing allegiance to Japan? I never had any allegiance to Japan so it was no—no big thing.
- GK: So it really didn't affect you?
- JK: No, it didn't affect me.
- GK: So about camp life. How did your family function? What did they—how did it affect your family relationship?
- JK: I think since I was already grown up or pretty much grown up, it didn't affect my relationship with my parents to the extent a family with small children, and they were really the family that were broken. You know, family life was broken up completely. The kids would get together and eat together and do everything together and mom and

pop didn't have very much to say about any of that stuff and I don't think they had very much to say about what time you come home. All they could probably say is be home before midnight or something but I don't think that they—the family life just went down completely in camp.

GK: Did your parents—how did they feel?

JK: I think in the families that had children, there was quite a feeling of lost control. My parents, being that I was already a grown, I don't think that they really noticed it so bad, you know, to that extent.

GK: Were there any problems in camp? Either in the family or the community or—?

JK: No, I didn't have any problems. I eventually ended up working at the firehouse and spent, oh, part of the time there. We slept there and stuff like that.

GK: Were you a fireman?

JK: Yeah, I was a fireman. My parents, being I was already grown, I don't think they noticed it to that extent.

GK: Did you have any problems in camp? In the family or the community?

JK: No, I didn't have any problems. I eventually ended up, you know, working at the firehouse and spent, oh, part of the time there. We slept there and stuff like that.

GK: Were you a fireman?

JK: Yes, I was a fireman. So no, so it didn't, you know, affect the family life at camp.

GK: So other than your working, what other activities did you do?

JK: Most of it was centered around the firehouse. We would spend a lot of spare time there. We had a pool table and weight bars and stuff like that, we had all that stuff there so we

spent a lot of our time there. I don't recall much of a social life, you know, outside of that. I wasn't in camp too long anyway so but—

GK: So were you in touch with any of your friends on the outside?

JK: No. I think that was pretty—pretty obvious that most of the people that we knew on the outside didn't want to have too much to do with us. So, and in the days in Merced Assembly Center we did have a couple of people who did make an effort to help us. In fact, there was one Portuguese man who really went overboard to help us, and he would come to the camp every week and then take, you know, orders. Asked what we needed and we would tell him and he'd get it and then bring it the next week. A fella named Joe Rodriguez and he was wonderful man that did this for us. But most of the so-called old friends in Livingston, never saw them or heard from them when we were in camp. That was it for them, you know.

GK: And so when did you leave camp and how?

JK: I was in camp—oh, in the fall, see, about October we had—we found there was a job a temporary job that was open up in Milton (??), Colorado, and they wanted people to come and pick potatoes. I think the job was supposed to last three weeks or a month. So I signed up for that and I went out to Julesburg, Colorado, with quite a bunch of kids from Livingston, there were about six or seven of us. And then there were a bunch of Nisei from Los Angeles and most of the them were the (inaudible) we used to call them, kind of tough kids and they all did weight lifting and things, bodybuilding and stuff. But we got to know them pretty good and I made some good friends among those people. So, you know, it was an interesting experience to go out, you know.

GK: Did your brother go with you?

JK: No, no, no, my brother was already in the army.

GK: Oh, I see. And so were you keeping communication with your sister and father and mother and—

JK: Yeah, but of course that was just a short term and then I came back to camp and spent the rest of the winter in Amache. And then in the spring I decided I was going to go out permanently. So I went to Boulder in May and worked there, oh, until about the fall at the University of Colorado, I was a janitor and stuff like that.

GK: And how—when—about this time then did you to into the military?

JK: Yeah, see, quite a bit happened in between that time until that time. In the spring—let's see, I went there in the spring. In the fall, it was about September, I decided I was going to go to Iowa.

GK: That is 1943?

JK: 1943, yeah. So, I went to Des Moines and looked for a job and I found a job on a farm way out in the boonies in Iowa and so I went there and I was there all winter and you know, winters are cold in Iowa and really and I can remember it being so cold and miserable and pretty soon I was getting kind of tired of all this stuff. And I got so lonesome, you know, there aren't any other Japanese around and all, and finally spring came and I said, "Oh heck, this isn't the kind of life I want to lead." You know, so I told my boss I think I'm going to go into the army. So he couldn't say much about it. He said, "Well, as long as you stay here, I can get you a deferment." But I was what, 1F or something, and I said, "No, I think it would be better if I enlisted in the army."

So, I left there in the spring and before I left, I wrote a letter to my draft board here saying that I was leaving the farm so, you know you might want to change my

classification. Well, about two weeks I got a letter saying you were 1A now and we will draft you very soon. So while I was waiting for that draft notice to come, I came back to Colorado and by then my brother-in-law and sister had gone out to a farm to farm north of Denver. So I said, oh, I'll come out and help you until I get my notice. So I went out to this place called Kingsburg, which is about forty miles north of Denver. And I worked there for my brother, my brother-in-law and waited for my notice to come and about summertime came and I got my notice and to show up in Camp Carson in Colorado Springs so.

That is when I got into the army. Then we were sent to Camp Blanding in Florida and that was seventeen weeks of basic training in Camp Blanding. And all the Japanese, you know.

GK: And you said Camp Blanding was where?

JK: Camp Blanding, Florida.

GK: Oh.

JK: So we were there until October and then we got shipped overseas to and I joined the 442nd in December in the south of France in Maritime Alps.

GK: How about your experiences in the army?

JK: Yeah, it is kind of interesting to join an established company of soldiers because, you know, you are a replacement and you just go there and you are pretty much on your own, you know. They have their little—they've been together all this time, you know, during the war during the fighting and everything and so they don't waste an awful lot of time on the replacements, you know. So, they never—nobody ever told me what to do, you know. I just joined—I just went there and at that time we were in a kind of defensive

positions in the border between Italy and France. There wasn't supposed to be any dangerous place because it was kind of a stationary line and there was no fighting but the Germans did have artillery across on their side and they would shoot. Every day at a certain time they told me, they said, "Don't go out between twelve or two and four because they always shoot the artillery over here at that time." And they always did, you know. It was just routine. They would fire at our position and then our guns in the back would fire over us at their position. You know, every day they'd do that.

GK: 1944?

JK: What?

GK: 1944?

JK: That was in '44, yeah. And so we were there—we were there in these positions until about 19--, until about March of that year and then they said, "We are sending you to Italy." And so we got shipped to Marseilles, the port there in southern France, and got on these big ships and the ship took us around to Leghorn in France, in Italy. And I went to these little camps that they had set up before you go into action, there are little areas that they have, and so we went to this area and spent about two or three weeks and kind of getting ready for action, you know. And then I think in April we were taken to the front lines and up the mountain and down the mountain.

GK: Were there any special battles?

JK: We got into a battle first—yeah, the first day we got—you know, it was about ten o'clock at night and we were trucked over to the front lines but we got out of the truck and came to the mountain, the big mountain there and said you are supposed to go up this mountain and the Germans were at the top, you know. So it was pitch dark and you couldn't see a

thing and this little goat trail we are going up is just as steep as can be, scramble, you know and we had to go up several thousand feet and that's a long way to climb, you know.

GK: That is a mountain and the name of the mountain?

JK: Mt. Folgarito, yeah, and I was in the heavy machine gun squad and so one man—the first gunner, it's called, and the sergeant, buck sergeant, and he carries the heavy machine gun on his shoulder. And the second gunner is the corporal and he carries the tripod, which it fits on top of his pack, and then the rest of us are ammunition carriers. There were about seven of us in this squad, the gunner and the second gunner and then about five of us carrying ammunition and these boxes weigh twenty pounds a piece and you carry one in each hand as you are going up this goat trail, you know. Boy, I'll tell you, it was the hardest work I ever did in my life (laughing). Yeah,

GK: And—

JK: And on and on and on up that mountain, you know, and then boy pretty soon dawn came and you look out over there, the big valley here and another big mountain on the other side and bullets coming, flying across this valley, you know. It's the funniest thing to see tracer bullets from the machine gun, you know, they look like fireflies come flying across that thing and you think, gee. But they weren't shooting at anyone special. They were just shooting across this big canyon, you know. So, you know, there wasn't any real danger but they were shooting toward us but, you know. So we got up to the top and gee, I don't know, midday by the time we got up to the top and they already the rifle company, see, we were heavy weapons and the rifle company had already gone into action all along the top of that mountain. I guess they were pretty successful. They took

this area and drove the Germans back, you know, and so that was my, you know, experience in the. You know, there were a couple times after that that we actually got fired on and it scared the daylights out of me (laughing). But—

GK: Did anyone get hurt?

JK: No, not in our group, no. Yeah. You know, one of the things that—one of the things about being in action in wartime is the—well, actually, the total confusion that seems to exist, you know. You know, you are always, when you read about wars and battles, you think that they are all well planned and everybody knows what they are doing and everything and the reality is that you never know. Nobody knows what's going on, you know, and everybody says, "Where are the Germans at?" They could be behind us or they could be out there and nobody knows what's going on, you know. But you just do what the officers tell you to do (laughing).

GK: Oh dear. I guess the officers knew what they were doing, huh?

JK: I doubt it. I don't think they knew either. Some of them maybe knew, the colonel or the general, but then they would send the word down to these different guys and I don't know, I don't think they knew much about what was going on.

GK: Okay, so those are some of the experiences you had during the wartime?

JK: Uh-huh.

GK: Is there any other events that you want to make sure that you want to remember during that time? Are you writing letters home or?

JK: Yeah, we'd write letters home. In fact, I think I got a letter from you (laughing). Yeah, once in a while the mail would come up, you know. You see, while you are in action you don't have any connection with the rear except every once in a while when you come to

a—you see, most of this action took place on these mountains. And we'd go up one mountain on a path and then go down the mountain on a path and then we'd come to another small village in the valley. And when it was possible, the company would send a jeep with food and some and mostly ammunition and they'd send it to this place and we'd pick it up there and then we'd go up the next mountain and down the next valley, and then if there was another road in the next valley, they'd come around again and meet you there again. So most of the time you don't see anyone else, you know, except that and we had a jeep that was assigned to our platoon and then he would always meet us somewhere if he could.

GK: What are you doing for food?

JK: They would bring up food when they could, otherwise we were eating the K-rations is what they are. Little packages about this big that has a can of some kind of meat and a package of crackers and some cigarettes and some candy. Yeah, that's about it, that is called K-rations and one package is one meal.

GK: So you always had enough food?

JK: No, we never ran out of food.

GK: How about clothes and bathing and—

JK: You never bathed. You never bathed and you never take your clothes off and what you do when you are in action is, you carry a—you carry your raincoat, raincoat and a shelter half, which is half of a pup tent. It is about one half feet by seven feet long, I guess is a pup tent. And then you carry that with you. And we carried, most of us carried half of an army blanket and so that was all our bedding. And when you get to—as soon as you get to a certain destination, the first thing you do is dig a foot trench. That's the first thing

before you do anything else, is dig a trench so if they start firing on you, you jump in that trench, you know. And so at nighttime you get in there and you wrap yourself up in that blanket and wrap and then wrap that shelter half around you and then put the raincoat on top of you. You wear everything you got because it's cold. It was so cold. (laughing)

GK: My gosh. Very interesting.

JK: Yeah, it's really—you get to appreciate sunlight. Boy, when the sun came up you just felt, oh my, I lived through another night, you know, because boy, nighttime it is dark and you never know what patrols were wondering around and so almost every night you just kind of sleep scared, you know. And then sun comes up in the morning and you see the sunlight and oh boy, you know.

GK: So do you remember your friends or buddies at that time?

JK: Yeah, see—

GK: Are you in touch with any of them?

JK: Yeah, well, the thing is, until we got overseas all my friends were the people I trained with. And I had some pretty close friends in those days but once we get assigned to a company—the heavy weapons companies never stays together as a company. They divide you up into gun squads and then they assign you to a rifle company and so you never get to see any of the others in your company, very rarely.

GK: The group?

JK: It's a group of about section is twelve men, I think, fourteen men, fourteen men, two machine guns is a section. And you are usually just by yourself with one gun and seven people and you spent most of your time in action with just those seven other ones that you always see.

GK: So tell us about towards the end when you were coming home? Or how did you find out you are coming home?

JK: Oh well, we spent—I spent about one year in Italy after the war ended. Yeah, the war ended about the end of April. I think that was the actual fighting. And by May, by the first week of May, everything was pretty much settled and the Germans were and our company—our regiment was sent to an area in northern Italy and we processed German prisoners there. I think that was about one month we spent there while all the German units that were in northern Italy funneled through this area and we processed them. And some we sent back to Germany and some were taken to prison camps in the area in northern Italy and something like that. And then after that we were shipped down and ended up way in the south of Italy, Naples, right outside of Naples, and that's where I spent almost the whole year guarding prisoners and stuff like that. And that was really, you know, you really have fun then because the war is over and you just pretty much on your own. You just do what you want to do. We didn't even have officers with us in this unit that we had. We just had sergeants that were sort of in charge of our group and so we just made our own rules, you know. We had a little encampment out in the country and no officers and so, you know.

GK: How did you hear that the war was over?

JK: Oh, we heard that the war was over on the way down to Naples. I remember looking at the *Stars and Stripes* which is a GI's newspaper and it said "War is Over." And that was what July, August, was it August here. And so—

GK: How did you feel?

JK: Oh, you feel pretty good then, you know, yeah. (laughing), I think everybody was celebrating.

GK: How were the German people?

JK: You know—you know, American soldiers and German soldiers got along pretty well. It's a cultural thing. I think the Germans are close to Americans in their culture, you know. You know we are both very highly technical sort of civilization and we rely a lot on mechanical skills and stuff like that. And Germans were the same way so I think that one of the odd things about relationships between soldiers is that we had a better feeling towards Germans and Germans towards us than the Italian soldiers, you know. We always, we were terrible in some ways and we had a lot of racial prejudice and we thought the Italians were just a bunch of macaronis, you know (laughing), and we'd always stick up for the Germans.

GK: Were you in any contact with the local people?

JK: Yeah, see, since we were—had our own unit way out in the countryside near Naples, we were out of the city of Naples out in the country and we had a little camp, encampment there and we had about six or seven tents and the cook was out there with us and he cooked our meals and stuff like that. And the local people—the women and children took to coming to our camp and they'd hang out there all day long in order to pick up laundry. We'd have them do our laundry for us and, you know, maybe one package a day would go out and they would hang there all day long and sit there outside of our camp under trees and we got to know them real well. They are just peasant women and children would come.

GK: So how did you get home?

JK: Oh, it's a long story. See, that was all that summer we spent around Naples and then we got our assignment to guard an ammunition dump and that was in a little further north from Naples. So we moved to another camp and stayed there until spring. And then—and then the word came out that they had a formula and they'd give you points for all kinds of things, you know. How many months you had been overseas and if you got any medals and they totaled up and if you got over so many points, you would go home on the first contingent, which was the contingent that went to Washington and paraded in Washington and got that, President Truman made that speech and everything. Well, that was the first 442nd, as a 442nd a lot of us, the old timers went back way before then but they went individually. And then I think it was oh, was it about springtime, the 442nd as a unit went back to Washington and then disbanded. They got sent back to different places and they broke up then. There was no more 442nd and we were assigned. We were still in Italy and we were assigned to different other organizations and so we spent the rest of the time there until finally I got the word about midsummer of '45 and said that I could come home. And so—

GK: How did you get home?

JK: We went to Leghorn and got onto a troop transport there, a ship and—

GK: Do you remember your feelings from the—

JK: Oh yeah. Yeah, it was a pretty good feeling, you know. And it—one of the most amazing things about when a bunch of GIs get together, the crap game is the center of all social life, and the thing that always amazed me is that black soldiers are real—they are always in the forefront of the gambling—they set up the gambling games and it's quite complicated. You know, playing craps is not as simple as all that, you know. You have

to keep in your head all these different things, you know. How much this guy has put down? How much this guy has put down? And who bet what and these guys, these black soldiers were so good at that, you know. I was just amazed. I watched these guys playing and they keep track of all this stuff, you know, and I think the house—the house takes a percentage of the, you know. And these crap games were going on all the time that we went and I never did gamble and I don't remember ever doing that but.

GK: And where did you arrive?

JK: Oh, I don't remember exactly where it was. It was, oh, wait now. I got out in July so it must have been in June that we arrived in—and I remember the Statute of Liberty, oh boy.

GK: The New York Harbor?

JK: Yeah, yeah, we came into, you know, New York Harbor and saw the Statue of Liberty and I went out there and looked at it, you know. And then we went to Camp Kilmer I think is where you land.

GK: Is that?

JK: New Jersey.

GK: New Jersey.

JK: And then got on the train. We didn't stay there very long. And there was one trainload of us and we were—we were dropping men along the way until we got to Camp Beale, Marysville, and that was the end of the train ride. We went to Beale.

GK: And this is?

JK: Marysville. Yeah.

GK: California?

JK: Uh-huh, and they didn't waste any time. They gave you all these things, your papers and stuff and honorable discharge and one uniform, I guess it was. And then we got on a bus and came home.

GK: Is that on a bus at Marysville and came home to Livingston?

JK: Yeah, uh-huh.

GK: What did you find in Livingston?

JK: You see, the family was already back in this house, you know. They came back early in '45, I mean late in '45. And for a while they stayed in the church because they couldn't move into these houses. And then they finally were able to move into the houses and I think they started farming a little bit that next spring, the spring of '46. And I got home in about June of '46.

GK: And that brings us to about the time you get married?

JK: No, I didn't get married until later.

GK: '46, and then you farmed then with your brother?

JK: Yeah, yeah. See, we had this farm and then my brother had the farm down the road there. But there was no house there so we all lived here together until '48. Was it '48 when we got married?

GK: Who did you marry and how?

JK: What?

GK: Who did you marry and how?

JK: Oh, in 1947, I guess, I started to court Francis Yugi and she was living in San Francisco with two other friends of hers and I used to go up there and visit her and finally we decided to take the step and that was 1948 that we got married. I believe it was '48. I'm

not very good at that and that is the source of a great deal of dissatisfaction with my wife.

Because she says I don't even remember half my—yeah.

GK: Your brother was married?

JK: No, I was the first one in this family—I wasn't the first because my sister married—

GK: That's right.

JK: Early in '42, yeah. So I got married here and then I decided—we decided that we would live here because this was my farm and Dave would build a house over there at the other place. And so they built a house there and they moved in over there. And then he got married next spring, forty—

GK: Now your wife and his wife knew each other?

JK: Yes, they lived together.

GK: Oh.

JK: Yeah, they lived together in San Francisco.

GK: Is that how he met his wife, then, Mary?

JK: Well, I don't recall whether he was actually courting her about the same time I guess.

GK: Okay, and then you had a child?

JK: Yeah, then in 1949 Mark was born, yeah.

GK: Your parents are still alive, aren't they?

JK: What?

GK: Your dad and mom were still alive?

JK: Yeah, they were and we fixed up a house over at my brother's place and there was an old house that we added to and they lived in there from that time until they passed away.

GK: So this was a source of good times, wasn't it, with your parents still alive?

JK: Yeah, yeah, we had some good—

GK: Family?

JK: Yes, and my family, my folks were in good health most of their lives. And so, you know, I can remember taking them camping. In fact, not too long after we came back, we took—we took my mother and father to Yosemite and set up a camp and left them for a week there and they had a great time.

GK: A week?

JK: Yeah, they went to—they were there for a week and my father loved the mountains and he'd go every chance he got, he would go to the mountains. He used to go with us to Tuolumne Meadows and—

GK: Can you tell us any incidents?

JK: Huh?

GK: Any incidents about camping with them? What did they do? What did you do? Fishing?

JK: I don't recall anything special. We started to go camping in earnest when Mark was about five years old I think, we started camping at Tuolumne Meadows and we'd go there every year. He had a lot of fun. He used to make friends with the kids in the camp and they'd go hiking and fishing by themselves, you know. They would just go up and—

GK: So then after you came back and resettlement time kind of worked itself out, do you feel?

JK: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, we, you know, farms, luckily the farms were still, you know, ours. We were lucky in that respect because in so many other communities people who left their farms lost them and here we didn't because we had the three co-ops, there were two in Livingston and one in Cortez that set up kind of a management team situation

where they hired a land manager to manage all these properties and he did a pretty good job. And he was able to keep—I don't think anyone in that setup lost their land, you know. So.

GK: Who was your planned—your parents' plan to come back and all? Who was in charge of the Issei?

JK: I don't really know how that was done because, I think what it was, is that the authorities at the camp just told them, "We're closing up the camp by a certain time." And so you should make some arrangements to go to wherever you want to resettle, and I think that the authorities did help them to arrange, you know train fare and stuff like that, I think.

GK: Do you have any inkling of how they were received? What were the problems when they came back?

JK: I heard—I heard a lot of the things that went on and a lot of strange things went on even in this community, and the earliest people who came, like Bob Morimoto, Fred Kishi, anyway, those two I know had several incidents of night riders firing at their homes, you know. So, it wasn't that pleasant to be one of the first ones to come back. By the time I came, everything was pretty much settled.

GK: Did you parents say anything about how they felt? How do you think they felt?

JK: You know, I think they never really expressed this thought to me but I know deep down in their hearts, you know, it was a real blow that this whole evacuation was the worst blow to the first generation than to anyone else. I think they actually lost a good part of their lives because, you know, when they went to camp, they were right in the prime of life. And but since they were not citizens, they could not do the things that were required to make the plans for the farm and stuff so the Nisei took over, right then. And of course,

by the time we came back, the Nisei were in, you know, in the saddle, so to speak. We were running things and so the best part of their life was just gone. They just sat in camp for four years with really basically nothing to do and so, you know, I really feel that they were the ones that took the real—

GK: And you feel they kept all this in?

JK: They kept it all to themselves, more or less to themselves, and they didn't complain that much and all that but I think it really was real blow.

GK: So did you miss your chance? Did you go to college at all?

JK: Yes, yes, I went to Modesto Junior College in 1938, no, 1935 I started Modesto Junior College and instead of going through in two years, I stayed out two semesters so I graduated in '38.

GK: From 1930—

JK: Yeah. '35 to '38. And then at that time I had to make a decision, what was I going to do? I could continue on, probably to Cal, or I could start to farm, and I was, the company that had taken over this ranch, made me an offer. They said, "Why don't you buy the ranch?" You know, and I thought about it for a while and I thought, well—at that time there wasn't much future in a college graduate, Nisei college graduate. You could end up working in a market, fruit market, or something like that. And I just thought, well, professionally there isn't that much future for me going to college so I thought I might as well—since I had the chance to buy this farm, I said, well, okay. I will buy the farm. So in 1938 I bought this farm and farmed a couple of years before the war came.

GK: Did you discuss your war experience or your camp experience with Mark as he was growing up?

JK: No, that is one of the things I think that we really didn't do. We didn't do enough of. It might have been in passing that we would talk about it but I don't think we ever really explained to him exactly what went on during that time.

GK: Why do you think you didn't?

JK: Well, I think—I think I'm a typical Nisei and I don't talk much about my life and things, and I think that that's—I think that's the part of being Nisei is that you just don't do those things, you know. It is very hard for us to really open up—open ourselves up and, you know.

GK: Do you think any of those kinds of traits went down to our children?

JK: I don't think too much of it did. I guess there are really some Sansei that really made a point of finding out about it. And because of them, I guess that things were a lot better for us but, you know, that was a pretty special group of people that did those things. Mostly they didn't know too much about what went on and I don't think they cared too much about it.

GK: What do you think about, did Mark experience any prejudice of anything? Mark, did Mark say anything about any prejudices that he experienced?

JK: Oh, I don't think so. I think almost all his friends were Caucasian kids.

GK: Okay, so let's come on to today then. What is your biggest worry now or what makes you happy today?

JK: I think with me, my biggest worry is being able to do something about the farm, you know, because we were—we got into this situation where we had always planned and Mark, my son had always planned that he would run the farm and he had a separate business that he was doing and that was the way it was going to be.

GK: And then what happened?

JK: And then when he suddenly passed away, it just threw all of our plans into disarray, and at the present time we don't have any real concrete plan on how we're going to solve this thing, so that's a real source of worry to me. Especially since we are farming organically now and I would really hate to see myself having to dispose of this land in a way that it would not continue the organic type of thing that I started. And I'm in a real quandary right now as to who would take it over and, you know, in that fashion.

GK: So what really makes you happy today?

JK: Oh, a lot of things make me happy, you know. Friends, you know, and going on trips and things like that. I always look forward to that. And my needs, see, are very simple. We don't do a lot of heavy traveling or anything else so, you know, simple life. You know, is my joy really.

GK: You are an avid reader?

JK: I'm an avid reader, yes. I read—

GK: What do you like to read?

JK: Oh, I read almost everything. I'm a mystery fan and I always like to have one mystery book that I'm reading. And I—I'm a great fan of a series of books on a seafaring captain and his doctor friend, and there are nineteen books in that series, wonderful books. I've read them over three or four times and I always just get such a great pleasure out of that, you know. There are some books that you can just read and make you feel good, you know. And other books that you read because you want to find out what is going to happen like a mystery book. You read because you want to find out who did the dirty

deed. But this book just makes you feel good when you read about the relationship between two friends and it is a wonderful feeling.

GK: And you are a member of the nature?

JK: I'm a member of the Sierra Club right now and that's the only conservation that I'm really in. I used to belong to the Audubon and the Wilderness Society but I dropped most everything except the Sierra Club.

GK: And what is the Sierra Club?

JK: Well, they are a national organization that are dedicated to preserving the natural wonders of the world and, you know.

GK: Why do you belong to them?

JK: What?

GK: Why do you belong to them?

JK: Because I believe that is one of the most important things that we can—to leave a world that is not totally wrecked, you know, and it's a—it's almost coming to that right now.

GK: Sure—what would you most like to pass on to the next generation and the future of our country?

JK: Oh, you know, I don't have any big hopes anymore but just—well, if my son was living, I would just think to be a decent human being and to be concerned about other people and to be concerned with nature and wild things and I think I would be happy if that went, was passed on to the generation.

GK: What do you think the Nisei men, the Nisei people, the greatest thing that we, you think, might have passed on?

JK: Yeah, I think Nisei as a group have an awful lot that we can offer to the population at large. It is a dedication to doing what's right and making the most of the environment about you and to work hard and we always say be honest. Of course you know, to be a decent human being and I think the Nisei have learned a lot of that from their, our parents and things and pass that on to the future generations if we could.

GK: How do you feel about the redress that we received?

JK: Oh, I think that—I think that was a good thing. I never held to that idea that we shouldn't take money from the government because my own feeling is almost everything that we do today is based—has a monetary value. And it's kind of—it's a kind of a grasping sort of idea maybe, but that is what we value. We put price of value on monetary things, and if they just said please excuse us for having done this, it wouldn't have meant much, but to actually come out and set a value on that, I think it means a lot more.

GK: Has it affected you any in having the apology?

JK: Yeah, yeah, I think so. I guess doubly so since it was Reagan who actually signed that apology and things and I never had that much use for him (laughing).

GK: Okay, so today how are you spending your time and are you active in the Japanese community?

JK: I have—we have not been active with the Japanese-American community. We have tried to be active in certain organizations that I am affiliated with, and one of them is the Family Farmer's Group here. We have been concerned about the University of California, the new University of California in Merced and its impact on farmland, and especially our group has really been meeting with the people of UC about that. So it would put roads in the right place and that they don't do too much developing out there

on that site which they are going to do so. And then I'm associated with Merced County Farmland Trust which is an organization that is trying to make it easier for farmers to be able to keep their land in farming through different kinds of different processes that we have to do that.

GK: What political issues interest you or political?

JK: Now, I think the latest is this Yugoslavian thing that is a—is a problem that I haven't really come to grips—it is hard for me to figure out exactly how I should feel about this. You know, I oppose military action in general because—

(tape ends)