

NARRATOR: ROBERT OHKI

INTERVIEWER: MARTHA KAJIWARA

DATE: June 22, 1999

MK: And he is now about sixty years old. Can you tell us about where in Japan that your ancestors came from and what circumstances made them decide to come to the United States?

RO: Well first, today the date is June 22, 1999. Okay the thing about my parents. My mother is from Chiba-ken which is the little town was Mubara where she was born and raised and the reason she gave for coming to the United States is that her brothers were here. She has three brothers living in Livingston farming and they wanted to bring their sister here to the United States. So she came here as a student and when she came here she enrolled in the University of California and she is an alumni of the University of California. My father came here because he was the second son, his name is Zengiro and he is second son of the family and he felt from what I understand that the second son does not get an inheritance in Japan and he wanted an opportunity to for his life and felt that the United States would be the place for him to come. So he came here as a young man probably before he was twenty, eighteen or so. And he is from Saitama. And his family was a large family. I think they had about ten or eleven kids in the family. I was fortunate enough to visit there in 1994 or 1995 is when we went the last time.

MK: Are you finished? Well, —

RO: Well, I have cousins there too that are living and I was fortunate to meet the cousins on my mother's side. And only one cousin from my father's side and he is the son of the oldest brother of my father. So it was nice that we were able to meet and the thing about

him is, he told us he knew about my brothers, you know, living in the United States. He knew about our family quite a bit but I certainly didn't know too much about my father's side because he died when I was eleven and I don't think I talked to him very much about his family. All of these things that I learned was from my mother.

MK: What was— do you recall any of the hard times discrimination or so forth in your family or that your family faced?

RO: Well, I think when I was younger, I think I felt, gee, why am I Japanese and not like the rest of them. On the other hand, I think in Livingston, we were fortunate that we didn't feel as much discrimination in school and teachers and leaders in our community. I think some of them were anti-Japanese but at least, there was, since we had such a community here and it seems that our parents sort of smoothed things out in Livingston and we had some pretty good— well you know people that can smooth things out and that type of things. And it kind of helped the community grow like that and we were fortunate as youngsters.

MK: Now what success or experience have there been in the family or have there been any unusual experiences?

RO: Now this was all when I was growing up but I think my uncles did okay in there—did well in their farming until hard times hit and I think they have gone through all the depression before the twenties I think and they survived. But they were in farming and my sister worked, I have three uncles here and they farmed more and more ground. They owned more and more. In Livingston, we had corporations that they operated under, so that's because they couldn't own property, they were able to form a corporation; they were able to stay in business, get into business and buy property and so forth. But I think

we, in the late twenties, I know my oldest uncle had a stroke so he wasn't able to function too well and then the 1929 Depression came and by that time, you know, and in 1930 or so they terminated the farming operation. But in 1930 though, my father was able to purchase the property that we live on now which is not the same area where I was born because I was born right near town, the city of Livingston, and this was 1919, November 15<sup>th</sup>, and so we—he was able to start us over again on this property that he bought. And it was forty acres of grape vineyards (inaudible) and there was some alfalfa growing there so we could feed our horses to farm with. That sort of thing that we started in 1930, the hard part I think was when my father died in 1931, after he set us up on this farm. And our family, there were four boys and one sister that was the youngest. We were all born within seven years. From the time they were married, I guess that was about eight years so my mother had to take care of all of us and she was not a farmer. So and you know anyway she came here to be a student but in the past in Japan, she also went to college and was a school teacher, elementary school teacher in Japan before her brothers called her to come to the United States. So she was not a farmer but she was—well she came here during the World War, the First World War, so it was probably around 1915 or so when she arrived. And so after my father died, yes, it was very hard for my mother being that she never had farmed and done any physical labor. But I was eleven and my brothers and we had four boys born first so we were, you know, able to help my mother somewhat even then. But I think what helped also was the community, our friends even helped us on the farm, too. Of course we paid them a little bit I don't know, but I know she paid them. And they were good enough to help us when crops needed to be harvested or there was lots of work that we couldn't do as kids, you know. And that's the way we—well

until we grew up in high school and so forth. And so that was hard times all right but I guess we never did feel hungry or anything like that. And my mother taught Japanese school too so, that was part of her, well, stipend you might say she got. And there was also work at the packing house that the ladies would come to pack fruit there in the summer and that was, you know, always ways of earning something helped us survive the depression. Plus the farm, it was a way to get started and as we got older, it got easier actually.

MK: With so many boys, you were lucky.

RO: Well, yeah, we were lucky to have four boys.

MK: What were your reactions when you first heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor?

RO: Well, it was a Sunday and we were at church that day and I was sitting in our car and had the radio on and of course, the Nisei didn't go to Japanese service. So our parents, my mother was in the church. So I heard it. I directly, the first newscast about the bomb, I heard that about the thing that happened and nobody of course, the people didn't know about it until they heard later. But I was there and heard the first newscast about the bombing and thought what are we going to do now?

MK: Do you remember how was it given? How was the newscaster, how did he put it, the newscaster?

RO: Why he wasn't anti-Japanese so much. He was really telling what was happening in Hawaii and you could hear the airplane noise, too.

MK: Oh my.

RO: So, and all the explosions and things like that that was taking place. There was not too much information about how they came or what.

MK: It was right then.

RO: Yes, they were telling us what was happening right there.

MK: That was interesting. You are lucky you heard that. There were lots of people that didn't hear it, you know the newscast. How did the—well you told us how the non-Japanese related to you. They were all pretty good to you. Did you have any discriminations or something ever face?

RO: Well once in the while we would hear the "J" word but and I didn't like that but on the other hand, we had to take it as lightly as we could. But other than that, I think the school experience and all discrimination didn't seem to be very evident, especially in Livingston.

MK: Being in a small town everybody knew each other and I think that is what is good about it. What did your family do with your home and belongings during the internment?

RO: Well, of course, our community when we started hearing about evacuation, one of the farmers, we decided to have a manager manage our farms because everybody couldn't find somebody to manage the farms. After all, there were about sixty some, sixty-five families in Livingston that were farming you might say. And so there was a group decision to hire a manager. Some of our farmers found their own managers or their own people that they trusted, but in our case, we joined with the group that would manage it for us. So we had meetings to organize this and we were able to and we had friends that became trustees to watch over our operator and in their absence. Fortunately we had three people that were, became our trustees and that was Mr. Winston and Mr. Griswald and Mr. Stringer, who wanted to help us relocate or whatever during our war, during the war and they took care of our business.

MK: Yeah and they were very kind to do that for us. What did your family own?

RO: Oh, what did you we do with our belongings?

MK: Yeah, belongings I guess you did the same thing we did.

RO: Well, I don't recall. We sold most of it, like our automobiles, we sold those kinds of things and the piano, I don't know what happened to it. But the big things you know, they were all, we retrieved them all after we came back. I think we put some of the things in our tank house and shut the doors tight and nailed it down whatever but I think the people still got inside and looked at things. But I guess nobody, we didn't find too many things destroyed.

MK: Was anyone in your family arrested by the FBI?

RO: No, no, none of our family.

MK: We forgot to say (inaudible) brother was, you know. Were you inducted into the military service, how did the internment and how did the internment experience and WWII affect your choice of career in life?

RO: Well, no I think when we were in camp, we were asked to show our loyalty by the questionnaire and I was affirmative of being a citizen and all. But at that time, also or soon after I guess, military service, was, they were asking for volunteers for the infantry. Yeah, I being the oldest I wasn't sure what my role should be but before I knew it, before I could, before much decision on my part, my one brother came and told me he was the second one said that he had volunteered for the infantry. He was going to go. And then in a little while later, my youngest brother came back and said he had signed his name and he is going to volunteer. So I had two brothers that were volunteering for the infantry that was, you know, the regiment they were wanting to form for the Japanese-Americans.

But later on in life, I was deferred because I did, you know—I had deferment things. But you are talking about military, well this is probably after I left camp but my time for induction finally came and my draft board asked me to take a physical exam, which I passed, and this was already about 1944. And so I had my physical exam and they said that I was 1A but on the other hand, I was to get inducted about three or four months later in 1944 but for some reason the draft board said your induction has been stayed. So I was never—

MK: Probably because you are the oldest of the family too.

RO: Well by that time, I think that my brother was killed in action.

MK: Oh I see.

RO: In Italy and then I don't know why, but the draft board, and maybe the war was slowing down, I don't know. They just said don't come to induction. So that is why I didn't—I wasn't in the army.

MK: Well that's good, lucky for you and your family.

RO: Well, I sort of wanted to go for some reason.

MK: Yeah.

RO: For some reason I was ready to go and they said you are 1A and I said okay just tell me when. But anyway I'll talk about this later with my business and relocation.

MK: I think—what do you remember about your family life? Entertainment, hardships you had mentioned some of the hardships but—

RO: Well, the family life I think, our family of five children and of course my mother and the later part of our youth there at home until the war started, we were compatible and I think

we just did the normal things that kids did and just enjoyed whatever we had and my mother was, well—she wanted us to grow up normally so I guess that is what we did.

MK: She did a good job with so many children. It says here, what schools did you go and how did you feel about school? How were you treated and who were your playmates?

RO: Well, I enjoyed school from the beginning. The family were education-oriented and they just wanted us to be Americans really. So we all had American names, too. My mother, our parents didn't give us any Japanese names, which I wish I had many times. But anyway, so that was their goal. And I took school seriously, I learned what I was supposed to learn, I think.

MK: You were always a model student.

RO: Yeah, I had fairly good grades. So I guess I could appreciate the fact of what the parents insisted about growing up and schooling and we tried our best and tried to be, you know, good whatever we did and I think we had so many Japanese kids in our community and in school, I don't know what the percentage was, but other than my class in high school we were one third of the class were Japanese, Niseis, and there were about a hundred and five or so that graduated together with the rest. And about in our number, we had about thirty-three I think of those who were classmates. So we had a lot of common interests and I think we just kind of enjoyed growing up here in Livingston.

MK: Were you ever invited to the homes of Caucasian children?

RO: Not that much, very often I don't think but we did have friends that were Caucasian and I think we felt very, you know, very comfortable with who we were with. So at this early age we didn't feel so much, except I know that when our older Nisei went to college for instance and the thing was, could they get a job? You know and I think there was a lot of



discrimination there. Boy, they couldn't get jobs especially for what they were qualified for.

MK: They were over-qualified.

RO: Yeah, and so I noticed that many of our friends that were older, well, got jobs with Japanese companies, for instance, and they got started that way. But for us, we, to me, I did wonder about gee what is our future going to be like? I personally felt, well, my mother says well set a goal, anyway and all through school I think I was in the pre-med, pre-medical curriculum so I could divert from that and so I would learn the technical subjects as well as language and then she also said, you don't go to school just to do work. There are other things in life like culture and the Japanese have, you know, a lot of culture.

MK: Yeah.

RO: That we tried to remember I guess. We have tried to remember and I guess that was part of our life, too.

MK: Yeah, you had a very educated and strong mother so you got along pretty well even though your dad died early.

RO: That's the thing in pre-war, my father died before the war but I didn't get to learn too much from him. All I know is that he was a good worker. He came and got married here in Livingston to my mother. I don't know how they met but I think it is through friends, not through third party so much, not through the Japanese (bishiyaku-nin) process but more through friends. Of course he lived in Fresno so, the Fresno people, my mother had a classmate or school mate from college in Japan that lived in Fresno so we were in touch with Fresno people somewhat.

MK: Is that how you married Julia?

RO: That's kind of a good question? My in fact, I'll bring that up later.

MK: You don't have to answer but then I was curious.

RO: Yeah, well you know, during school years we didn't date much I don't think I dated anybody that I know of. I was kind of shy about that.

MK: I think we just went with groups of people.

RO: Yeah, we had a car you know and there were mixed groups. But I think some of them that stayed in the community did have boyfriends and girlfriends you know that I can remember so. But I didn't do that. But anyway I guess I was a little shy.

MK: Right. You and Eric were shy I think.

RO: Yeah, some of us were a little shyer.

MK: Yeah, he was at (inaudible) and I used to tease Eric all the time.

RO: Well good thing you didn't tease me but it was all right, if you did, I guess.

MK: Well we knew you too well and we didn't know Eric.

RO: But you girls, you know, growing up you helped us too because you encouraged us to do some things we wouldn't do on our own, you know. Be a little braver and teach us to dance. And participate so I have to thank all you girls.

MK: Oh you are welcome. As a child did you consider yourself Japanese, or Japanese-American or American?

RO: I sort of thought of this before but I thought I was American first and so we didn't have a—I know my mother and father didn't list us as Japanese citizens so we didn't have a dual citizenship thing at all in our family.

MK: Oh, uh-huh. Yeah.

RO: So, and so I had I guess I always felt I was American but I always wondered why I was Japanese and I was in this category but on the other hand, there was nothing we could do about it. But I don't know if I regret it or not but later in life, I think I felt that I was in the right spot.

MK: But what can you do if you are born.

RO: Japanese yeah.

MK: I know you had good relations with your mother. I don't know your dad too well but then it says, did you date? What did you do on your dates?

RO: I know, like we said before I think we probably enjoyed each other like in groups or we would go to swing parties and we all had fun together, kind of communal thing or youth thing.

MK: Youth group.

RO: Yeah, fellowship group at the church.

MK: Yeah, I don't know what it was called.

RO: We kind of participated with the other sex that way. I think more than individually.

MK: Now here is an interesting question. What qualities did you look for in a husband or a wife in your case? Did you look for certain qualities or was it (inaudible)?

RO: Well, I'll tell you, my mother, my mother was a, you know.

MK: Yeah.

RO: She was particular who I married. I think a lot of Japanese parents were that way. But one thing and they felt never marry out of the Japanese race.

MK: Is that right?

RO: That was one of her commands, you might say.

MK: Well at least you had commands. I don't think my parents said anything to me.

RO: So I don't know. During the time I was away after camp I did meet some, you know, Caucasian girls and I really liked them, you know. And it was maybe because I met them at church and all that.

MK: Outward, much more outward.

RO: Yeah, yeah and easy to talk to I might say.

MK: Yeah.

RO: And I felt I want to be your friend and something like that and I enjoyed that, you know. Outside of that, of course, finding a spouse is a lot. To me it was one of the most important decision that I was to make so it took me a long time. I was twenty-eight, I think, before I got married.

MK: Well Butch and I were from high school days so.

RO: Well some people were courting in high school, you might say, but I didn't do that and neither did I do that in college so like you say Martha, I think I had to look. I had to look over the field and just thinking and I thought more and more about my families' friends. And I thought, gee, maybe there is somebody among them, you know. And there was a family that my mother—her classmate that came from LA, you know? And they had a family. And I worked with one of them in camp, in the office, so I got acquainted with the family you know, the mother and father. And siblings and there were two girls and a boy in that family and I thought gee, that was a possibility. But anyway I think after I started doing conferences and things post-war, I knew I had to decide and I finally decided on a family that I think I could trust and had a good background and that's the

kind of thing that my mother taught me and my faith. And so I think, it kind of went that way.

MK: That's good. It's good that your mother taught you certain you know characteristics or characters or attitude to look for in people.

RO: The way it happened though is I married somebody from Fresno. My father lived there as a bachelor and my mother knew some of the people in Fresno, too. But and she talked about these families in Fresno so I was familiar with the family somewhat. And then I found out later that they are the, what do you call them, in the church, and we were still in the church there. So anyway I finally decided, I got to make up my mind and I said okay I am going to ask this girl if you would be interested in getting together and getting acquainted. I don't know. Only way to put it, I knew I had to get serious.

MK: Well that's good. At least you had a certain, what do you call it? Certain kind of a person in mind so you just don't go flirting with anybody.

RO: Yeah, you know and I know there was all kinds of opportunities for youngsters then because most of them were not married yet.

MK: A lot of Japanese around.

RO: And there was a real close family friend in Fresno that my mother, that was her class—her schoolmate and we used to visit Fresno to go to their house and stuff so. Oh yeah so gee, that would be a good choice too, you know, but anyway I finally regretted that one but like I say, to meet Julia and things went our way so I was fortunate.

MK: Well that is good.

RO: It just—it just said okay and let's be serious about it a little bit and I think it was through work that we had youth conferences and we worked together to prepare for these conferences and that sort of helped.

MK: Yeah.

RO: That we got acquainted of course Julia said that is when she first knew me. (laughs)

MK: Yes. That is good then. It is a good combination then and it ended up very well. Let's see. Let me see, were you, did you work out beside your farm when you were younger?

RO: Yes, well, yes well after high school you know and I wasn't able to go to school after the junior college but I had a cousin that lived in Berkeley and my uncle moved to Berkeley also after he left the farm. He became gardener.

MK: Rosies?

RO: Doing okay so, my aunt said sure come to the city and I could stay there and go to work in the Bay Area. So I guess this was after that, about 1940 or so that I did that. Around 1940 and I was able to get employment there but, so I didn't work on the farm for anybody else after college, after two years. The reason I was able to go only two years is my brothers had to go to school.

MK: Oh yeah.

RO: See, my brother was two grades under me and my mother said I don't expect you to go to the University this year, but I want your brother to go to junior college where I was after I had graduated. So I said okay, we'll take our turn, and we went to, he graduated from there too by 1941 and so I guess I came to help on the farm but my other brothers were old enough to—take and work on the farm to maintain the farm. And I said okay, I'll go and whatever I make I'll just give it to the family.

MK: Oh I see.

RO: And that's how we supported each other. And far as work going when we were kids being my father had died, to support the family we worked in the summer time whatever jobs there were we worked at Okuye's cutting peaches and doing dry yard work in the summer. Harvesting things like that well our grapes were not ready that early in the summer and they were ready later to harvest in September so. Early summer we would work and support the family. Our aim was to have enough until summer came so we could work out and earn our way until we sell our grapes.

MK: I see.

RO: But anyway that is about the kind of work I did. On the farm work before I went to school.

MK: Well you are reaping your harvest now. It turned out well for you.

RO: So I went to work in the Bay area at Singer Sewing Machine Company.

MK: Oh I remember, I vaguely remember that.

RO: And you were still at the University of California at that time and I got a job there they didn't pay a lot but I was, my aunt helped.

MK: Did you stay at Rosie's?

RO: Yes, my cousin. I was fortunate to see what the world was like and get a job and I became the kind of the warehouse person there and repairman for the sewing machines and you know I had tinkered with automobiles so this was very easy for me to do and I repaired those things and got them ready for the salesmen to take out to sell. And that was my job. So, we talk about the job and the relationship there too was very good. The boss was, you know, considerate and appreciative of what I did. And I told him before I

started I said gee I think being the way that things are developing, I probably can't stay here and work much longer. And he said, "Why not?" And I said well circumstances on the farm tells me that I need to go back. So that is the kind of work that I did as a youngster.

MK: They were so considerate, huh? Lots of people were nice even though?

RO: In California, especially in California. Opportunities were there, but we just couldn't have gotten real fancy jobs.

MK: No, no, no.

RO: But I was, you know, still young yet.

MK: Let's see. It says what happened to you and your family? Did you go to camp? Which Assembly Center and which camp and describe daily life in camp? Were you in camp very long?

RO: Well you know we all went to camp. We, of course, prepared ourselves to go and when the day came we had a bag, a big duffle bag of stuff and all we could carry. And we went to our church yard and there was a bus there and get on and take us to Merced. So we just went with the rest of them, when the time came. And like I said, we just stored stuff in our tank house and sold whatever we could, and left.

MK: Now when you got into camp did you keep in touch with friends on the outside?

RO: Well, yeah camp life was something else. Yes, well I think we did, mostly was for business reasons, I guess.

MK: I see.

RO: I don't think too many classmates or?

MK: Friends?



RO: Friends came or the war, after all, war was going on. A lot of them were gone to the military and so forth so. I think some friends even came to visit us but not very often though. But we were in Merced for about three or four months I guess. And right away you know they set up jobs for us and I became a post man and mail, mailman so I enjoyed doing that. It was a good kind of a job of being able to take mail out to people and that way, we got acquainted with other people in the camp, too. That was neat.

MK: Yeah that was good.

RO: Because you know, they were from other towns all around which we had never met before.

MK: You married after you got out of camp, didn't you?

RO: Yeah, yeah. As far as camp and then we left for Amache and Colorado in September and immediately when we got there, we had to settle and make some furniture and things like that but then we had so many job offers to go to so. I went to work on farm in Rocky Ford which is maybe less than a hundred miles away and we harvested sugar beets and worked on this farm until we finished that job. And it was—I think that was good experience too because we learned about people in Rocky Ford, you know, and there was a little Japanese community there, too. I think I went to church there. But, so and then the job was done naturally so then I came back, but there were about five or six of us working together there.

MK: It says how do you feel about being put into camp because of your Japanese ancestry?

RO: Oh yeah, that's a question. Well it's something like we say in Japanese, you can't help it.

MK: Yeah.

RO: And because of the circumstances yeah and racial and nationality, I felt oh we can't help it so I would rather do that than fight the Americans here.

MK: Yeah, yeah.

RO: You know and I guess we would have suffered less abuse.

MK: Yeah.

RO: Because I can remember my mother telling me that during the First World War, the German people that she was friends with.

MK: Friends with?

RO: Had a very hard time. They were really prejudiced, people prejudiced against them and gave them a bad time. So I felt gee, is that going to happen to us? And so I—I didn't think just that we couldn't stay and do our thing. But, camp life—well it was a necessity but I didn't think it was—it kept us away from other harm.

MK: When you left camp you went to farming then?

RO: Well yeah, leaving camp was a real (inaudible) and when they opened it up in the spring time of 1943, I guess it was, the opportunities were so much that people were recruiting us out of camp and things we could go in so I was and in college, too I studied in agriculture and got my basic things that I learned there. So I said gee I am going to go to one of the best farming areas in the United States. And I didn't know that corn and stuff but anyway I was Midwestern so I went to Iowa to farm, to learn to—to work on a farm and I stayed with a family, I was single and they fed me and gave me a room and took me to town once in a while.

MK: Well that was nice.

RO: But anyway I went to work on his farm which was cattle and we had some pigs and we had lots of corn. And so we fed the pigs and a couple of cows but they were beef cattle.

MK: They are not so hard.

RO: So it wasn't difficult as milking so many.

MK: So in the meantime, where was your mother? Was she in camp then?

RO: Yes, my mother never left camp and my sister stayed with her.

MK: Oh Annie huh?

RO: And I know my two brothers left with the army right away and then my other brother stayed for a little while but he left and went to work I think in Chicago. So—

MK: Well Annie was still in high school then?

RO: Yes. She graduated.

MK: She was like my sister Ruth.

RO: Yeah, she graduated in Amache.

MK: She was with her mother then?

RO: Yeah and are we talking about relocation now yeah. Any questions?

MK: Resettlement it says.

RO: Oh.

MK: When did you leave camp?

RO: I left camp well. I left camp with some of my friends like Fred Kishi and Tach, no it wasn't Tach, my cousin Elsa and another girl. I can't think of her name now. So I rode the train with them and I got off in Kansas City and they continued on to their destination back east.

MK: Oh, uh-huh. And that was kind of sad, huh?

RO: Yeah.

MK: You had to go by yourself.

RO: I had to go by myself to there but we were rode across Kansas in the train together and of course, that was good. And then Fred went to Maryland to college, University of Maryland. Elsa and her friend went to Michigan. I think it was Detroit and so we departed at a certain point and I went north into Iowa and of course, in Iowa the hostel there was waiting for us there. We had a friends church, friends, actually they are Quakers. They befriended us and they had a hostel in Des Moines.

MK: Like in Detroit, we were in Tanabe. Do you remember him?

RO: Yes.

MK: He had a little hostel and we stayed there until we got into our jobs.

RO: Well those were helpful for our settlement and they also provided—we were always welcome to come back and so on weekends many times I was able to be there with some of the other Nisei folks in Des Moines.

MK: Since you were going to a farm, you didn't have any trouble getting a job then?

RO: No, we, this was already selected.

MK: Oh I see.

RO: We had correspondence. I was in fact they came to the station and got me.

MK: Oh I see.

RO: And so first thing we did is; we went to the hostel. They knew that the hostel was—you see the hostel I think they were able to recruit us, too.

MK: Oh, recruit you.

RO: Apparently, so they were kind of connected with that somehow and I met the director and—

MK: Really, so they really didn't have any discrimination then, huh? They were all prepared for most of us.

RO: They were—they were very much so and I found the Iowans didn't have any inkling of who we are but they also didn't have much prejudice either. They didn't have any prejudice to speak of. I—so I enjoyed the, the, you know.

MK: I guess it's the way that Japanese or Nisei are, that it is appealing to them. You know, you are not too over bearing and always kind of, you know, quiet and not too—

RO: Well, you know, we grew up knowing our situation, I guess, and we had to adjust to things and I think we adjusted to the fact that you didn't want to get anybody mad at you. So, I think we had some training in that. And it wasn't too easy, it wasn't too hard. I wasn't too afraid of people so I was happy to be there alone more or less even.

MK: Now you weren't treated roughly or discriminated or anything or racial prejudice.

RO: No.

MK: That is amazing.

RO: No, there was only one incident I could talk about but in Iowa, I went to work on this farm and it wasn't long before I knew this little town called Cummings was a Catholic town. So I wasn't a Catholic so I knew so kind of just a little further distance but it was a neighboring town I was able to go to the---in a little while I was at the church there, a community church and they welcomed me like anybody else.

MK: They must have prepared their constituents about this because I never felt discriminated against either, never had any problems.

RO: They were curious about us and about our promiscuousness or whatever because they didn't want us to bother their girls or sisters, I guess, because I went to camp one summer camp and the first question they asked was that, about that.

MK: How did they put it?

RO: Well he said are you—have you—what is that word? Scattered any seeds? I didn't know what that meant really. So I said, no I don't think I've done that.

MK: You've planted alfalfa.

RO: Yeah, right I've scattered seeds that way. But—

MK: That is interesting.

RO: That was very—he was to the point. He wanted to know my character.

MK: My goodness.

RO: I said, okay and after that I was okay. You know.

MK: Isn't that funny. I wonder if they thought that all Japanese were that way?

RO: No, he wanted to make sure that I wasn't one of those guys that—

MK: Go after the girls.

RO: Yeah, and were promiscuous.

MK: Promiscuous yeah. Did he have daughters?

RO: I don't know. But this was a camp, a youth camp and I was older than most of them.

MK: Oh okay.

RO: I was already twenty-two, twenty-three and most of them were, you know, high school age.

MK: That is interesting. I'm glad I asked you. It would be very interesting about that.

RO: So anyway, people adopted me there. I have very happy about that.

MK: Yeah.

RO: Okay, the only experience about prejudices, one day a lady asked me—she saw me on this bus and what type of bus they had in Des Moines and before I got off, she said something about, are you from Japan? And questions like that you know and of course I spoke English just like she did and I said, “No, I was born and raised here and I’m a citizen of this country and all that.” And she was trying to question my loyalty, I think but I told her that my brothers were serving in Italy and one of them had just died or was killed in action there so our family is part of this citizenry and part of the people here. And so we are, you know, and so she didn’t say anything actually after that. But I’m glad somebody asked me something like that because I wasn’t able to say anything else like that to anybody.

MK: Yeah once you say it you have it exactly you know what you are going to do and say if somebody else asks you.

RO: Well, yeah but sometimes it was hard to put the question and I think the church people also wanted to—they must have tested me a little bit about and I accepted things in their church and I think I even—when they had a big gathering where they asked if you were children of God and you wanted to be part of it and you know something, I had never been in my life but I did go with the others and said, “Yes, I am.”

MK: Child of God?

RO: Yeah, I am a believer in Christ and all that stuff, you know. They weren’t very fundamental but yet they had this occasionally, they did this.

MK: Hmm, let’s see. You weren’t a student huh? It says how were you treated by other students?

RO: Well you mean. That is maybe before the war. But I had, you know, Caucasian friends in college. They became my closest friends.

MK: Oh, this is resettlement so.

RO: Oh this is resettlement but I mean going back a little ways I remember that. They were my buddies.

MK: Yeah, do you get to see them a lot now?

RO: No, one of them died in the fifties and the other one I saw in the fifties, but I haven't seen them since though.

MK: Who are these? Do we know them?

RO: Well he's Italian.

MK: Oh okay.

RO: He's Italian too you know and the United States was in the war against them and I didn't get to talk to him about that. He was selling Real Estate in Modesto.

MK: Oh.

RO: I need to talk to him and it is unfortunate that our friend died. We played tennis together that is how we knew each other. But, you know I don't think I felt much prejudice. The students were –I think the students our age were friendly, especially in this valley.

MK: Yeah, yeah.

RO: In the cities maybe not, but here.

MK: Yeah, all the friends that we had you know they never did get mad or dislike us because we were Japanese.

RO: I don't think so.

MK: Yeah.



RO: So we grew up in a very congenial place and I think it showed that we didn't have those kinds of fears so much.

MK: I would say. Compared to what you hear you know it was pretty nice like my major teacher, my major in Cal she sent me a book that she wrote you know, afterwards and she was so nice and I guess she is gone now.

RO: Yeah, we do remember our teachers after we came back.

MK: But she didn't say much about you know the government and denounced the government for doing such a thing and she was always good to me and gave me her book, you know. Let's see.

RO: Well yeah.

MK: You told me why you went to different places. In terms of your children, were they part of extended family? No, you don't need to answer that. Japanese community, they were?

RO: Kids, oh yeah. But even before I met—in Iowa I was—I should talk a little bit about what happened there for history's sake. You know my boss, he was kind of a gentle farmer so he expected me to do the tractor work and in Iowa, that was what it was. You didn't do much hand work fortunately and that kind of thought that was better than truck farming or so. So he kind of used me to do, till the soil and this and that. And the first year that I did that, but in the harvesting of the first crop when I was there in September or so, we were harvesting corn for other farmers because he had a corn picker. A corn picker and there weren't that many and they were short so they needed a corn picker. Well, we went from farm to farm or a few of them and finally came to a farm of an old couple that was leasing the ground to one of the neighbors. And they wanted to push the

lease because I don't know what—I guess they knew another person that wanted to quit the farm or something and they came and asked me about it, “Do you want to farm here?” And I said gee that is a strange question or a good question. And I said, “Yeah, I'll talk it over with my boss and we'll see what we can do.” So together we decided to take on another hundred and sixty acres of—

MK: With your boss?

RO: With my boss and we were partners in that operation. So to do that, you know, I had to buy a tractor and you know plow and something else, I think, three items I think it was. So, anyway we had to—we decided okay it's a good farm and nice and fairly flat and a good crop so we said okay. I said you know I think we can manage it, he and I, and he had something in town that he had to go to pretty often so I didn't see him that much. But the tractor was not too hard. So I bought this tractor from one of the neighbors, somebody there had one for sale and but I asked, I got, I asked our manager here in Livingston to send me eleven hundred dollars I think it was for this tractor and equipment and I needed to buy a car so anyway I asked for these items you know, and he said okay, you got enough money but don't ask for any more. So, anyway I was able to buy this tractor and we farmed together for three seasons. And so, we split (inaudible) the profits and I paid my expenses, whatever and, you know, and I came back—I came back after the crop was harvested so he sent me some more money for me to use over here which I thought but anyway, that was successful and I appreciated that. It was good experience in farming. And so relocation to me and the way Nisei got around after we left California, was something that I think everybody says this, something we never would have done if we stayed here. And this way, yeah.

MK: Yeah, like I never would have the experience of running a nursery school and then Butch went to work with an Orthodontist and so he knew a lot about that, too.

RO: Isn't that interesting? And so I had—I really don't have much animosity against them.

MK: That's right.

RO: Yeah, we lost profits but that is money only.

MK: Yeah and you had your farm.

RO: And we had the farm when we came back and were able to continue on so life turned out so different than what we thought when we were kids. And I never forget how I appreciate during relocation what our boys did in the military.

MK: Yeah overseas.

RO: Overseas because that was in the news and even coming back to California, this was something later but I knew we did our part you know.

MK: Yeah, that was the best thing to happen to have the Japanese soldiers together because that seemed to show off the courage and things they did. If they were scattered among all the other kinds of people, you wouldn't have noticed you know the group that worked so well during the war so.

RO: Well—

MK: It was funny thing to do to put all the Japanese together but maybe it was good, too.

RO: Well that is the good part of it, we had some hardships there but it wasn't all that bad.

MK: Yeah.

RO: And yet, yeah, I don't know who's wisdom that was.

MK: Well I kind of think it was people that kind of doubted putting them together or something. I don't know.

RO: But I, you know, of course, I give someone like Masaoka a lot of credit as a JACL—he was a director, national director of helping us through our ordeal. And there were so many people against him on the other hand I don't know if our Sanseis and the future generation could appreciate this but it took somebody to guide the whole herd. I really appreciate that.

MK: Well that was very interesting. Thank you Robert. I don't think I need to—do I need to ask you anymore?

RO: Well there are some things about you know afterwards but the relocation was something else and you know coming back to Livingston was another thing. I told my mother that gee I would just as soon stay in Iowa. I got some things back in Iowa and yeah I said I know I'm the oldest and I'm expected to come back so I'll do that. So—

MK: Well you know it would have been hard for Isseis in different.

RO: Yeah, they still had to finish their life and we have they have some family responsibilities so I felt this was something but it was okay for me to come back and a little more profitable for me maybe. So, I had to leave Iowa again another place that I sort of liked and start over here. But starting over, it was a challenge, and I think opportunities opened up here and you know, our community came back here and almost everybody got their farms back.

MK: That was really good.

RO: And we farmed cooperatively and finally we all got together as one cooperative and after that, we made pretty good strides in our business. We were able to you know enlarge our businesses and really all the things I dreamed about came true. You know.

MK: That's good.

RO: It's funny. I remember when we were in a Boy Scout meeting one time and our Boy Scout leader Mr. Carpenter said, "You know in your lifetime maybe your gross income for all that time might be somewhere around fifty thousand dollars." I said, "Yeah maybe that is right." And I was only twelve or fourteen then and then, heck, came back and I used to make that much money and I mean so I said, God. So a lot of dreams changed and the post war for our good and—

MK: Yeah, good things happen if you look for it there is something good out of it.

RO: Yeah.

MK: That is my philosophy.

RO: If you look at it negatively.

MK: Yeah, then it's all bad.

RO: I think we learned that like we said when we grew up here.

MK: Yeah.

RO: So, we are positive about things. So anyway, so like I say many things that I thought I dreamt about maybe but things came to reality and gee, how nice it was that we grew up in this generation.

MK: That's right, yeah.

RO: And we are different but then on the other hand, we became a, I don't know, a group that really I think we are professional people that went into big things. I think really proved what we were made out of.

MK: Yeah. Yeah, I remember.

RO: Yeah.

MK: Like you know we used to hear that people from Cortez didn't like the Livingston people and stuff like that. And when I started to go around with Butch, well Butch was in the hospital and they found a spot so he had to stay with the rest of us that were in camp and he used to always be out there, he was—he was in the hospital a while too but he got out and we used to sit in the sun or squat on the ground or sit on a box and got to know him real well but when I was saying good-bye to him, he was still in the hospital with Butch you know and he made me promise to marry him. So at least he liked me, I guess. You know they used to think that Livingston girl. And I think they really had a doubt about Livingston people because we were so much more advanced socially.

RO: Some ways socially. I don't know.

MK: But anyway.

RO: Well.

MK: Funny experience but I'll never forget that time, promise me that you are going to marry Butch, okay, okay.

RO: Well that happened early for you. That was nice.

MK: Yeah.

RO: And so see I didn't and like I said I had to make a decision and that was kind of hard.

MK: Yeah.

RO: You know and I think life did turn around for Nisei in post-war. I think the pioneers never could have dreamt that things like this could change so much.

MK: That's right.

RO: So we developed with all our attributes and were able to do stuff. You know I was in JACL cabinet for a number of years and I used to go to meetings and I know that these

guys are professionals over there, you know. My God, they had responsible jobs and you know I always thought it wouldn't happen unless we proved ourselves. And we proved it in many ways and we left when relocation started and it changed our prospective about what life was about and we just developed and blossomed out. I felt that.

MK: We learned a lot by being put in a new situation and having to make a go of it.

RO: There you go. The challenge was there and the challenge to come back and restart but you know I never thought that I'd be worth much or anything.

MK: Me too.

RO: But I'm still not that rich but it's enough to sustain us and I really am happy that we were able to come back.

MK: Yeah, when we were in Detroit what was it, three years ago I think and we went to the place where I used to work you know and I didn't know anybody there anymore, but I talked to the director and said I was here and everything and she was so happy you know. Yeah, and I don't think any of the sisters knew we were there because it has been years now.

RO: Yeah, so you know I think in my case I started going outside of the community. Well I had church conference responsibilities. And so I used to go to the annual conferences and then you know in the late fifties we started the Lion's Club. And you know our friendship enlarged after that.

MK: Yeah, that is right.

RO: And with that I knew so many more people.

MK: Keep talking?

RO: Well I don't know how much time we've got. So, you know I was able to do other things and I was fortunate to get on other boards. And they were all those organizations that served the community and helped other people prosper or whatever. And be a school trustee and you know that they let Nisei do that in Livingston. And they were an influence in our educational system here. You know like Buddy Iwata you know, he was the trustee of the first school and he started the college and he wanted to retire so he asked for somebody to help and so I said oh I'll help you. And so we were able to contribute and so you know we were able to travel, Martha. We have been with our class on travel trips and you know those things really added to our life. And there are a lot of fulfilling experiences. We all had so to this day I am happy like you said.

MK: Yeah.

RO: And like my family you know we had five children and three girls and two boys. The girls left home early, after high school they wanted to be more independent. Boys stuck around and they are still here but they are farming our properties that we wanted to retire so, somewhat so we left them do the farming.

MK: Yeah.

RO: And they are getting along okay I think although not as good as I'd like them to but they are getting along good I guess.

MK: Oh yeah, they will make it. All the kids are. They have good common sense and they do what they like and what they want to.

RO: Yeah.

MK: You know they are not unhappy or anything.



RO: And I'm happy. Like Father's Day the girls send me their little notes and tears come to your eyes and they say, "Gee, you are the best father I could have had." You know or something like that. My God, how can that be, but it is possible. And they appreciate us. The boys don't seem to say those kinds of things.

MK: Yeah, yeah uh huh.

RO: But lately though we get along much better.

MK: That's good.

RO: Trust each other more and stuff like that.

MK: Well when they get to a certain age, they get pretty sensible. Judy is probably the best mother of the two of them. Of course she has several different fathers maybe but you know she is a good mother and the kids are fine and so they go through their mistakes but they end up okay.

RO: Yeah, it seemed like they had to learn through mistakes and so gee, we just have to say okay, let them learn. But it hurts the parents to watch this go on. But so we had one divorce in Michael's case and yeah. But it's, but he has custody so he has responsibility for his family. He takes care of them.

MK: Yeah, those kids are so good though, so cute and smart and everything else.

RO: Well I don't know. Did we cover the subjects Martha?

MK: Yeah, I think so. You could look at this and see. Yeah, I don't know you did it quite thoroughly. I didn't do it as much but that's okay.

RO: Well coming back to my uncles were farming here as partners you might say. But you know and maybe I didn't go through enough about him but so my father wasn't into the picture but shortly after he came, within ten years they were having a hard time, really

hard time. So and they, the corporation they had to sell, not sell I think actually the banks had to take over. But, but he survived on his own and he died but he left the place for us so. And it was up to us to do the rest which I guess we managed some way.

MK: How old were you when your father--?

RO: I was eleven.

MK: Oh is that right.

RO: And I was the oldest so.

MK: Yeah, I know it. So your mother sure did a good job. I have to tell you this but you don't have to put it on, but one time Annie was over here and playing with my sister. They were good friends you know. And I think we still had the shack and things and she, my sister said that Ruth said later that Annie told me that I don't have manners because we don't have a mother. And I think Annie was kind of a good, good girl. And everything was—

RO: She didn't have a father so what you know. She didn't have a father though.

MK: Yeah, but that's what Annie said.

RO: You didn't have a mother's, a lady's point of view in your life.

MK: Yeah. But you don't have manners. My mother said that you don't have manners because you don't have a mother. That made me so mad.

RO: (laughing)

MK: But I think Ruth appreciates me quite a bit because after all, I was kind of her mother substitute so. And she was I don't know how old was she when our mother died? Her mother died? I think she was in kindergarten or something so she has been motherless for a long time. Wait a minute. Yeah, she was quite a bit younger than I am but anyway.

RO: Well anyway. You know even post-war with travels we were certainly fortunate to go and be with our cousins that we never saw before and I met—and I went to see one of my aunts and she died shortly after that but she was the wife of my mother's, one of her favorite brothers living in Japan.

MK: Oh I see.

RO: So she married into the family but he was an architect in Japan and he built buildings in Komoto as an architect.

MK: So the boys were just three boys I had one in Mexico an uncle and one and my uncle and my father so there were only three of them. And—I think we had aunts but I don't know who they are.

RO: Yeah, and they, one cousin in Komoto doesn't speak English so it was difficult-well I was able to speak Japanese to him and then I met his sister too and that was a bonus to me because I didn't even know that she was around.

MK: Oh.

RO: And that was real nice.

MK: How long ago was it, you were in Japan?

RO: What?

MK: How long ago did you go?

RO: Well the first time I met him was 1969.

MK: Oh I see. Boy that is forty years ago.

RO: Yeah.

MK: I mean almost.

RO: I went on a tour then. So, and then I stayed and visited their home the first time I was there and visited my aunt and that was very nice. So we had ties with cousins there and I thought how nice but I haven't met all of my father's side because I only met them since about 1995. But I hope we get to go back and see them, too.

MK: Well my sister stayed in Japan until she was about sixteen so, my older sister so she was raised by her cousin's family I guess. So anyway, so you know but she doesn't—I guess she writes to them all the time. That is my oldest sister Mimio.

RO: Well the Japanese did do well in Livingston. Even the Issei folks owned quite a bit of property here. In fact, your father was doing what they had now, a hundred and sixty acres? Well my uncles well there were three of them and my father they owned well into the two hundreds. I don't know what it was. And I guess they kind of went overboard a little so when hard times came up, I guess they couldn't make it, cash flow and pay off, whatever they had to do.

MK: Yeah, and so we lost the other side but we had this forty acres thing so.

RO: Yeah right and so my uncles, they lost all the property so my father started on his own which was fortunate. Well, we are going to conclude that. Have our cameraman shut it off.

MK: Honey, can you turn.

RO: Well Martha I can go back and push the button.

MK: Oh. Well what do we say? Just say.

RO: This terminates our—

MK: This terminates our discussion.

RO: Thank you.

