

Densho Digital Repository
Naoko Wake Collection of Oral Histories of US Survivors of the Atomic Bombs Collection
Title: Paul Satoh Interview
Narrator: Paul Satoh
Interviewer: Naoko Wake
Location: East Lansing, Michigan
Date: August 23, 2015
Densho ID: ddr-densho-1021-9-18

[Mr. Satoh's son Gordon Satoh was present at the interview, and when he speaks, he is denoted as GS]

<Begin Segment 18>

NW: Do you have any reactions or any immediate thought about how they struggle to be recognized by the U.S. government? As well as by the Japanese government. There are actually still ongoing lawsuits, uh, between U.S. survivors and Japanese government. Because after 2003, Japanese, actually, U.S. survivors started to be recognized by the Japanese government and so they can get uh, survivor's health benefits for instance, and some monetary support. Not exactly on the same conditions as Japanese survivors, but up to a certain point.

PS: Hm. Hm. Yeah.

NW: So there is definitely increasing recognition by the Japanese government, but nothing at all by the U.S. government. And in being a U.S. citizen, I mean they try to make a difference early on, but they were not successful. So, to them, it's a disappointing history in that it was a time period when anti-nuclear, you know, movement was really on the rise. And then—and yet, um, they failed to get recognized.

PS: What was—what was the situation? Um, when the Truman—uh, the President Truman said, even in 1954, uh, the—after the bo—the uh, ten years after—it was 1955 I think—he mentioned that it was the right choice, the right decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And uh, that actually prevented many deaths of many Americans. And I think that whole thing was probably . . . uh, still major ideas of the American citizens. Uh, I don't think a percentage of people that, you know, that were—they are asking questions about that—is probably, I don't really see much difference now, than uh, 1954.

NW: Mhm. You mean American people in general?

PS: Right. The whole Japanese . . . You know, the first ten years, and then General MacArthur had con—as I mentioned—control—controlled—complete control of the media. And therefore they—the media would never mention about the detail of the survivors and how the uh—that affect the whole society. And uh, so media control actually delay the information to Japanese people. Even people who live in the northern part of Japan didn't know about the nuclear bomb, in similar cases like in Fukushima. And uh, Fukushima's disaster was actually the industrial disasters. And uh, they knew that they shouldn't have built a reactor there, but they did. But, uh, the—these people did not know much about Hiroshima people. So . . . I think . . . you know,

the—it was nice to know that there were people doing something about it. And uh, is there any statistics available that I can study? The thing that I most worry about is, how many of these uh, victims or the victim's family, are still suffering from the effect of the atomic bomb? You know, because . . .

NW: I think it depends on how you define the effect of the bomb. So, it could be—

PS: I know, probably like me . . . [talking at the same time]

NW: —medically defined, but also it gets to include things like, people really worrying about their future possibilities that may not be as, you know, bright and healthy as they hope them to be.

PS: Right.

NW: But also things like lack of recognition, I think it—it does count as a problem or maybe even suffering in people's lives, in that you witness this and then you were affected [by] it, but nobody wants to say yes you were.

PS: That's true because the stigma was attached to it.

NW: Mhm.

PS: Yeah. But this year I'm—I'm you know, really glad that the uh, victims of Korean, peoples—that they were now recognized by Prime Minister Abe. And, I think that was very nice. But, is that—the monument is still outside of the park, or ins—allowed to put the monument inside the park? And, I—I think that was very bad for . . . for the—if the Japan want to live as a good neighbor to the neighboring countries, they should come out and say I'm sorry, this was not supposed to be done that way. And then, bring these, you know, people back into the park. It doesn't cost much to the people. And uh, the—even for, the uh, you know, the um, the comfort lady stuff—that the issues of the comfort lady in Korea. The Japanese government itself is doing—revising a textbook and things like that. They should come out and say, that is a mistake we have made in the past, and they say, well I'm sorry to apologize to people. Uh, and not to justify. I think it's very important that they haven't done that.

NW: How about the U.S. government? Is there anything that the U.S. government should be doing, in your perception?

PS: You know, it's interesting. The U.S. government . . . should be or should not be doing because it's a—the war. The uh, like an insurance company, war is not counted as an event. Even the pollution, the controls. The war is not counted as a possible pollution. But, I think the U.S. — U.S. government—what the U.S. government would have to do is to work with Japanese government. Try to keep that—you know, even the small part of the world, keep the pea—you know, peace and safe. Because, that I think is most important than beginning compensation to the people. It, you know . . . talking about what has happened in the past will not bring back anything. Probably, the monetary compensation—No. The—if you recognize, so what? Um . . . however though, on the basis of the knowledge, if you can keep that world much peaceful, much safer to live, it is idealistic. But they should really work on that. But . . .

NW: But do you think the future planning would be possible if you do not think about the past? Meaning, the people who . . .

PS: I don't think that people have ever learned from the past. You know, if we learned from the past, the World War Second would have never happened. Uh, the World War First was so tragic war . . . never—the people never learned. And uh the—any other wars . . . they . . . the uh, European have a many wars. They never learned. And uh, for them, these—if the people learned from the past, they'll be fine. But then, being historians, probably the reason for you to study history is to learn something from the past. But, probably . . . I'm very pessimistic maybe. But, the—if you look at the history, proba—people, does the people learn from that? Um . . . they—I'm not so sure about that. That's one of those things that the—um, human nature. Uh, being aggressive nature, in some place. Is different from what [?]. They even have a war themselves, but you know, human would probably not learn anything typically from the past mistakes we've made.

NW: Mhm. To me, just talking with people who are very much affected by the bomb and still remembers a lot about their experiences, uh, the bomb is not really the past. They are still living . . .

PS: I know. It's everyday. You know it's interesting. I had a nightmare, uh, until even when I was married to my wife. And she used to wake me up because I had this ni—because we have to run fast enough. And um, so . . . those nightmares were true. But, uh the—maybe my personality or something—my life becomes so busy. My degree and postdoc and the company life. And so . . . actually, I—the nightmare actually eventually went away. I remember, but it doesn't bother me much. So.

NW: Mhm.

<End Segment 18> - Copyright © 2015 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.