

[Begin CD-1 Track One]

0:00:02.2

Interviewer:

Now what about where as far as where you live because I thought there were some covenants that stated that Japanese couldn't . . .

[End CD Track One; Begin Track Two]

0:00:01.9

Interviewer:

Okay, it is 1 o'clock on November 23, 2003. My name is Diane Tanaka, and I will be interviewing May Minami today as part of the South Bay Oral History Project. The audio equipment recording this interview is being monitored by Ray Shibata, and the interview is being cataloged by Lily Nakatani. All copyrights, title and any other rights arising out of this interview, whether or in its entirety, part, or derivative form, and whether in audio, written, or any other format, shall belong to the South Bay Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. Copying of this interview recording whether in its entirety or part is strictly prohibited without a written authorization from the South Bay Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. This is the first CD of the interview of May Minami beginning---or being recorded on this date. Let's begin with the interview.

Okay so, good afternoon, May.

Minami:

Hi.

Interviewer:

So, first I'm just going to ask you some questions, and I'm trying to go chronologically. . .

Minami:

All right.

Interviewer:

. . . but you feel free to talk to me however you think. Let's see; if you could state your name for me.

Minami:
May Minami.

Interviewer:
And what was your maiden name?

Minami:
Yamauchi.

Interviewer:
Okay; and when and where were you born?

Minami:
In Oxnard, January 26, 1914.

Interviewer:
Okay; and where did you grow up?

Minami:
In Gardena.

Interviewer:
Okay; and what are your parents' names?

Minami:
My father's name is Toshinori Yamauchi and my mother's is Tsune Yamauchi.

0:02:01.7

Interviewer:
Did your father have a nickname?

Minami:
Yes; he went by Frank **[Laughter]**. I don't know where he got that name. He used to sign everything F. T. Yamauchi.

Interviewer:
Okay; and where did they come from in Japan?

Minami:
They're from Kagoshima, the southern part of Japan.

Interviewer:
And when did they come?

Minami:

My father came--1909, and my mother around 1911.

Interviewer:

Were they married before in Japan?

Minami:

No; but they knew each other before. They were married in San Francisco.

Interviewer:

So where did---so where did your father come in---from what port?

Minami:

My father came in at Seattle and my mother in San Francisco.

Interviewer:

Now why did your father--your parents come to America? Do you know why?

Minami:

Why?

Interviewer:

Why?

Minami:

Oh well let's see; I guess they heard **[Laughter]** America . . . well Japan was very poor then, and so they just--my father decided to come to America, make his fortune, and go back like most Issei felt.

Interviewer:

Let's see; so when your father came to America, did he come alone?

0:03:53.7

Minami:

Yes; I think he came alone. But, quite a few of his friends came around the same time.

Interviewer:

And what did he do in Seattle?

Minami:

After he got married, he went to Lompoc and he started to farm there with his friends. And, my mother had to cook for them. And, she said that was really hard. She was homesick because she---I think she didn't like that.

Interviewer:

Now, are you---do you have any siblings?

Minami:

Yes; I have an older brother named Tateishi---George Tateishi, and I have two younger sisters, Mari and Sumi.

Interviewer:

Okay

Minami:

I should say, "I had," because they've all passed away now.

Interviewer:

Oh okay; and you were the oldest daughter?

Minami:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Okay; now you said your father was a farmer?

Minami:

He was a farmer in Lompoc, but he didn't too well. And there was a pastor in Oxnard, Reverend Baba, and he used to go to the outlying district and talk to the farmers and everything. And he told my father, "Well, why don't you come to Oxnard? There's an opening in---at the Japanese Association who needs a secretary." And so, he decided to go to Oxnard. And this Japanese Association---it was on the church . . . no; I don't know where that Association building was. But, our home was on the church property. So we lived there.

0:05:57.6

Interviewer:

How long did you live there?

Minami:

Let's see, about five years.

Interviewer:

And then?

Minami:

And then we came to Gardena. My father's good friend was an agent for New York Life Insurance, and he was from the same prefecture, and he said, "Why don't you become an agent?" So my father came down here, and we lived just about a block away in East Gardena.

Interviewer:

Now where---can you tell me where then you lived in East Gardena or what the address . . . ?

Minami:

Yes; it's---it was on Wilmington Road between Redondo Beach and Rosecrans, and north and south, and then Avalon and Main Street---Wilmington Road.

Interviewer:

Okay, Wilmington Road; now is that---today that's---there's no Wilmington Road is there?

Minami:

Gee, I don't know what that street is now.

Interviewer:

But, it sounds like it is close?

Minami:

It's turned into . . . let's see; what street would that be? I don't know what big street---Figueroa?

Interviewer:

Yeah; it sounds like it's close to Figueroa.

Minami:

Yes; I think so--- Figueroa; uh-hm.

Interviewer:

So it's probably now closer to Carson-Gardena Border maybe; huh? It's closer to that---Wilmington.

Minami:

No, it's still . . . let's see. I don't know what they call that, but it's still

Interviewer:

It's an industrial area; yeah---or something; yeah. Oh okay; and then you lived there and then that's where you grew up?

0:07:56.5

Minami:

Yes; I lived there until I was about 14, and my folks had built the house next door. And, we moved there.

Interviewer:

Can you tell me the name of the street and where we---where your house is---was?

Minami:

You mean at Wilmington Road?

Interviewer:

Oh no; over here.

Minami:

It was still Dalton Avenue.

Interviewer:

It was; okay, okay. Let's . . . now your father was a life insurance . . .

Minami:

Agent . . .

Interviewer:

Agent.

Minami:

... for New York Life Insurance Company.

Interviewer:

Okay; and what did your mom do?

Minami:

My mother taught Japanese school in Japan before she came. And then in Oxnard, she taught Japanese school at the church--- Oxnard Methodist Church. Then when she came to Gardena, she went

to Los Angeles on the Red Street Car every day for I don't know how long to learn tailoring. And so she did sewing at home. She did sewing for other people and then she would teach the women--whoever wanted to learn, how to make patterns. And then, much later, she went back to teaching Japanese.

Interviewer:

Where did she teach?

0:09:25.0

Minami:

First she taught at Gardena Japanese School for just a little while, and then she taught at Hawthorne High---Hawthorne and Palos Verdes.

Interviewer:

Excuse me; so did you speak English or Japanese in the home?

Minami:

We spoke Japanese . . . among my brother and sisters, we talked English, but to our folks we talked Japanese. My folks didn't send us to Japanese school because they wanted us to learn English first. And then we started Japanese school when we were much older.

Interviewer:

Now as your---when your father was a life insurance agent, did he sell life insurance to . . . ?

Minami:

Yes; he sold life insurance to the Japanese people around; uh-hm. And he, also he had a lot of friends up north so in the summer you know we would go up there and stay with their friends. And he sold the insurance to the people up there.

0:10:57.3

Interviewer:

So did he do very well?

Minami:

He must have---he did well at the beginning until Depression set in.

Interviewer:

So can you explain a little bit of what happened to your family then during that time?

Minami:

During what time?

0:11:18.4

Interviewer:

The Depression---well you said, "The Depression."

Minami:

Oh, the Depression? Oh, we were still living in East Gardena. My father had to drive around quite a bit, and so he didn't have any---at one time, he didn't have much money for gas. And so, he asked my brother and I to give him money from our piggybank. And, I think gas was around 6 cents a gallon then. And then, that part of---I don't know how long that Depression lasted, but it must not have been too long. My father was able to build this house.

Interviewer:

Yeah; now what---about you a little bit; what elementary school did you---where did you go to elementary school?

Minami:

We went to Gardena Elementary School. The bus used to come after us. So we went on the bus.

Interviewer:

Did you like school?

Minami:

Yes; I liked school very much.

Interviewer:

And what kind of friends did you have? I guess I mean, like, where they Japanese like you or were they Caucasian?

0:12:54.1

Minami:

Well, mostly Japanese, but I had some Caucasian friends who stayed friends for you know---for a long time until they moved away from Gardena.

Interviewer:

Okay; now I know---what Japanese school---when did you start going to Japanese school?

Minami:

Let's see, I must have been in junior high.

Interviewer:

Oh, okay.

Minami:

I had heard that the teachers---I won't mention names---but the teachers at the Gardena Japanese School were very strict and the male teacher would throw chairs around when he got angry [Laughter] and that scared me. But, my folks thought it was about time I went to Japanese school; so I went. And the wife was very nice. I took the test from her. And then I went home. But, I was so frightened that I told my folks I wasn't going to go back to school, and I never did until new teachers came.

Interviewer:

Oh.

Minami:

And it wasn't too long after, we had a---my father evidently interviewed the teacher because he and his wife came to our house and we were peeking through the door. And they were a young couple. He had graduated from Stanford University, and his wife was a very cute woman. And then, so I started school when they started to teach. And, I stayed in touch with them until they passed away.

0:15:05.5

Interviewer:

Wow.

Minami:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Did you like Japanese school?

Minami:

Well, I guess so. I was much older than the students that I was with, but I liked the teachers and all my friends were going there. So, I enjoyed it.

Interviewer:

Okay; good. Now what---you said, until you were in junior high . . . what junior high?

Minami:

I shouldn't say, junior high, because at that time we didn't have junior high. So, I must have been six---this is sixth grade; no, seventh grade, I think I started. And then, when I finished high school, I just went to Saturday school. They had Saturday school, too.

Interviewer:

For?

Minami:

For people who didn't go daily.

Interviewer:

Oh, so you didn't go to high school daily?

Minami:

Oh, I mean Japanese school.

Interviewer:

Oh Japanese . . . okay, okay; Japanese, okay. Now what junior or---I don't know---middle school . . . ?

Minami:

No, grammar school was from kindergarten to sixth grade, and high school was from seventh to twelfth . . .

Interviewer:

Oh.

Minami:

. . . at that time.

Interviewer:

Now . . . and what high school then?

Minami:

This was Gardena High School.

0:16:45.1

Interviewer:

Now, as you got older in high school, did you still have the same friends?

Minami:

No, the Caucasian---there were a few Caucasian friends who I was with in Gardena, but the Japanese friends had moved away, but I made new friends.

Interviewer:

Were you involved in any clubs or anything?

Minami:

I'm a shy person, but in school, I must have been kind of outgoing. I don't know what I did, but I did belong to quite a few clubs.

Interviewer:

Can you name them?

Minami:

Let's see, the Japanese Club, the Spanish Club, Girls Athletic Association, World Friendship Club, and Scholarship Society.

Interviewer:

So, did you play sports?

Minami:

Evidently, I wasn't good at it, but I liked the sports, especially because I had a good teacher. She was my homeroom teacher. She had graduated USC when she came as a seventh grade homeroom teacher. But soon after, she changed to a gym teacher, and she's another person that stayed friends with me until she passed away.

Interviewer:

Wow; so you really seemed to have good relations with your teachers?

Minami:

I think I did. Some years . . . I forgot what reunion it was; but another homeroom teacher---she was an art teacher, but she--

-I went to the reunion and she remembered me---called me little May because I was so short [Laughter].

Interviewer:

Let's see; was your family active in community or things---clubs?

Minami:

My father, especially, was very active in community affairs. He was active in the Japanese school, the church, and the Japanese Association. There was a judo group here and he was active with that. And, let's see; he was also active with the Los Angeles group that Kagoshima Kenjinkai, and the Japanese Association for the New York Life and the church. Well, my mother was also active. She belonged to the Japanese Women's Group---Women's Federation in Los Angeles, the Church Federation in Los Angeles. They were both very active.

0:20:53.7

Interviewer:

So would you---do you think that your parents maybe helped you know---maybe you learned to get more active in things because your family was?

Minami:

That could be it because I was active in both Japanese school and the church and the high school. And also, at one time, there was one year I helped take the census in Gardena.

Interviewer:

Oh.

Minami:

And I wrote for the---I wrote news for the Rafu Shimpo from Gardena. And also, we had a local paper, and the man who was writing for the local news was the Caucasian advisor to our young people at our church. And he was a missionary to Sendai so he and his wife spoke fluent Japanese. But he said---he asked me whether I wanted to do the writing. And so, it was just news around Gardena Valley, but I wrote and I got paid for that. They paid by inches and very little, but

Interviewer:

How much would you get paid?

Minami:

I can't remember.

Interviewer:

Okay; now what was the name of this paper?

Minami:

The Gardena Valley News.

Interviewer:

Oh, oh.

Minami:

Only they called it something else at that time.

Interviewer:

And you also wrote for the Rafu Shimpo?.

Minami:

The Rafu Shimpo. The Rafu Shimpo was just voluntary.

Interviewer:

Was this in high school, or . . . ?

Minami:

Yes; high---well, I think it was---I think I must have started after I graduated . . .

Interviewer:

Okay.

Minami:

. . . because I wasn't doing anything then.

0:23:07.2

Interviewer:

Okay; now what was the name of church that you went---your family?

Minami:

Japanese Baptist Church.

Interviewer:

Okay; Japanese . . . is that still . . . ?

Minami:

Well, it was just located right around the corner here, half a block down, on Dalton and 162nd Street. But, during the war, we were supported by the Los Angeles Mission Society; and so they owned the buildings and everything. So, when we came back, the church was no longer there. And, we found out that they had moved it to Los Angeles someplace.

Interviewer:

Okay; and that was the Japanese Baptist Church?

Minami:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Okay; oh why don't we---sorry. Why don't we take a short break?

Minami:

Oh, okay.

Interviewer:

Okay.

0:24:08.9

[End CD 1-Track Two; Begin CD 1-Track Three]

0:00:00.0

Interviewer:

Okay; now did your family own the home?

Minami:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Now how did---because I had thought there were laws that prohibited Issei from owning homes.

Minami:

No; or I mean that was land.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Minami:

But that was---gee, I know at one time they couldn't, especially the farmers. They had to just rent, lease; but I think that---I don't know when that changed, but my father bought this---that property. He also bought this property.

Interviewer:

Okay; can you describe, you know we see Gardena today, or---but can you describe what it was like when you were growing up?

Minami:

It was a quiet town. Everyone was friendly. We could leave our windows and doors open at night. But, there were quite a few Japanese living here. So there were quite a few Japanese stores on Gardena Boulevard, and much later Western Avenue, there were quite a few Japanese stores there, too.

Interviewer:

So would you say the majority of people who lived in Gardena before the war were Japanese or growing up?

Minami:

No; not the---the majority still were Caucasians, but there were quite a few Japanese. I don't know how many, but a lot of farmers and professional people.

Interviewer:

Now, were your doctors and dentists . . . ?

0:02:24.4

Minami:

They were Japanese; yes.

Interviewer:

Can you name your doctor who you used to go see when you were growing up?

Minami:

Doctor Tashiro, one of the---even now, one of the famous doctors in Los Angeles, lived in Gardena. And then later on, Doctor Kobayashi, Norman Kobayashi, who used to work with Doctor Tashiro, started his own practice---had his own building. Those are the two Japanese doctors that I went to. There were---dentists were Doctor Ono and Doctor Hori. My children went to Doctor Hori. And let's see---the optometrist---I don't think there were any optometrists in Gardena then.

Interviewer:

Now, how did you get around, your family get around in Gardena?

Minami:

Well . . .

Interviewer:

Car, walk?

Minami:

My father had a car; other than that, the feet. They had a Red Street Car going to Los Angeles you know that we could take. But, I was driving when I was 13 years old [**Laughter**]. They didn't license that early. One time, anyone who wanted to---not anyone, but I guess you had to be 13 or over, went to the Japanese Association or someplace I remember we all went there. I don't remember taking any test, but I was able to learn to drive; so I was driving when I was 13.

Interviewer:

And your father allowed you? He didn't mind you going?

Minami:

No, no; because I had the license. My mother had a car, too, because she was teaching Japanese school. So, I used to drive her car.

Interviewer:

And where would you go? Oh go ahead; I'm sorry.

Minami:

It was a used Pontiac without rumble seat, which we liked. Well, I just drove to Japanese school, but much later I drove to San Clemente, San Diego, and up north to San Luis Obispo, that far. But, I don't know [**Laughter**] what nerve I had to drive, but then there were no cars then---not many cars and it was all surface street---no highways; so [**Laughter**].

Interviewer:

Wow; you've been driving a long time.

Minami:

Yes; I have. Well during the war I didn't drive because I didn't have any license.

0:06:11.8

Interviewer:

Okay; what did you do for your---for fun growing up?

Minami:

Well we had---the Japanese school had once a year they had sort of a picnic and athletic meet and we looked forward to that. And, the high school, we had quite a few socials. And then, at our church, we also had socials and summer time---well both the Japanese school and the high school---the church, we used to have weenie bake at the beach. That used to be Brighton Beach. It was someplace near Terminal---Terminal Island, and the Japanese always used to go there. It's a beautiful beach.

Interviewer:

Yeah; that's right. What other---did you go to---you mentioned earlier, the break movies, things like that.

Minami:

Oh yes; and aside from school, socials, and church socials, our family used to go to movies a lot. And then---and my father liked sports, so he would take us to watch the Japanese boys play different sports and usually basketball was played at Lincoln High School in Los Angeles. So he would take us there. Let's see what else; and the movies---they used to have Japanese movies and they were shown under a tent at our Japanese school. And, there used to be a narrator who would take all the different parts and because they were silent movies and that was interesting. But, around the 1930s, we had Japanese---a regular Japanese movie house on Western Avenue then. And they used to show Japanese movies. By then, the 'talkies' had come in.

Interviewer:

What was the name of the theater?

Minami:

Yamato-za

Interviewer:

Yamato-za?

Minami:

And the owner used to sponsor a lot of the athletic teams and there was a huge empty place in the back that fellows turned

into a baseball diamond. He sponsored Yamato baseball team, and also basketball team.

0:09:46.0

Interviewer:

Well that's good. Do you remember the name of the---did you know the owner?

Minami:

Yes, Mr. Uchida and after the war they moved to---or they went to Salt Lake---and left Los Angeles and started a nursery.

Interviewer:

Oh; okay. Let's see; now after high school . . . oh let me back up. So when you were growing up, did you ever experience any discrimination or . . . ?

Minami:

No, I didn't; but after I had signed---filled your questionnaire out, I thought, "It's because my activities were all centered around either church or high school or Japanese school." I didn't go out like perhaps fellows do when they go other places and . . . or the only discrimination I felt was when our---the let's see---the Athletic Association hiked to Redondo Beach to go to the swimming pool there. And we didn't realize it, but Japanese were not allowed to go in swimming, and there was---my dear Caucasian friend, she refused to go in and she stayed outside with us all day at that time, and then we hiked back. But that was the only discrimination I felt.

Interviewer:

Do you keep in touch with any of your friends that you grew up with?

Minami:

No; this girl that I was real friendly with, after high school I lost touch with her. But, when I was ill, she would come to see me at my home and then she was sort of a tomboyish person, but she was very smart and I really would like to know where she is. But, there's another friend that I kept in touch with from grammar school. And she moved away oh about 10 years ago.

Interviewer:

Oh, what's her name?

Minami:

Name---**Lucy Delight**. And she lived right on Gardena Boulevard.

0:13:02.2

Interviewer:

Now where was the friend---the other friend's name?

Minami:

Muriel Smith.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Minami:

Yeah; that was about the---yeah; other than the swimming pool incident, I felt no discrimination.

Interviewer:

Okay; after high school, what did you do---after high school finished or when you graduated; I'm sorry?

Minami:

Oh, uh-hm, let's see; I worked part-time at the Kurata Department Store. It was the largest store in Gardena.

Interviewer:

What was the name?

Minami:

Kurata Department Store . . . I just worked during like Easter vacation or Christmas vacation when they would have special sales. And then, I worked selling strawberries at my friend's home---friend's farm on Sunday afternoon, but that was just---that strawberry season. And then, oh and then I started helping my dad fill out insurance forms. Up until then, he had filled out all the insurance forms, but he was getting kind of old, so I typed out a lot of the forms for him. So, I was---let's see, up until 1934, then I started to work at the Sumitomo Bank in Los Angeles. Until then, I had no job **[Laughter]**.

0:15:08.9

Interviewer:

What did you do at Sumitomo Bank?

Minami:

Well I answered the phone and I did typing. And we used to type oh hundreds of envelopes to send flyers out to different people. And, I used to have to read the names in the Japanese directory. And, at first it was difficult, but I learned to read quite a few of the Japanese names. And then that was what I did; I did just---we had to type all the bookkeeping accounts to send to the head office; so.

Interviewer:

Uh-hm; and how did you get to work?

Minami:

I took the Red Street Car.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Minami:

Later my brother worked in Little Tokyo, too, so I used to ride with him.

Interviewer:

Now when did you get married?

0:16:23.8

Minami:

About 1938.

Interviewer:

Oh; and before that, now how did you meet?

Minami:

Oh, my husband; I met---I knew of him at high school. He went to Gardena High, too. But, I met him at the---at our Baptist Young People's Union. We used to have a Sunday night meeting where all the young people used to gather. That's when I met him.

Interviewer:

And so did you like him right away?

Minami:

I guess I must have **[Laughter]**. He was a good athletic fellow. He used to play basketball, and that's what you know---well, my

brother used to play, too; but we used to go watch him play. He was a very good player.

Interviewer:

Now where did Sam grow up?

Minami:

He was born in Riverside, but he grew up in Gardena also.

Interviewer:

Oh.

Minami:

His family moved from Gardena to San Pedro, and back again to Gardena.

Interviewer:

Oh okay; now how did you finally get together if you knew him for so long?

Minami:

Well it was---I've known---I've kind of went around with him for about seven years. But, you know we were---that was the Depression era then and he grew---he had a job, but you know it didn't pay well. I had a job, but I think I started out \$63 a month. But the Japanese Bank---the summer bonus and the winter bonus were very good. I mean, I thought so compared to the salary we were receiving. But, at that time, you know we thought that was a lot of money because we didn't have any money. And I guess we just couldn't save enough to get married . . .

Interviewer:

Oh.

Minami:

. . . until---there were other things that happened, too, that we weren't able to get married you know earlier, but . . .

Interviewer:

Now, I know Sam was involved with Nisei---with the community things.

Minami:

Yes.

0:19:28.4

Interviewer:

Now, were you involved in community, too, after high school?

Minami:

After high school . . . gee, there were---I wouldn't say I was involved in community things. Sam was, of course, active in community affairs in Little Tokyo. No; it was just our church that I was active in.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Minami:

And then, in 1939 Sam helped--Sam started the JACL in Gardena. And, we had a huge membership because we took in all the people from Hawthorne, Torrance, Gardena Valley; it was a big area. And then, my brother was the first President and then . . . I belonged to that, but other than that there wasn't much.

Interviewer:

Now, what did you do when you were involved in---or what did JC--Gardena JACL--what were the activities, I guess?

Minami:

Well we had just started in 1939. Do you know I really can't remember---I probably didn't take any active part.

Interviewer:

Now; what about Nisei week?

Minami:

My husband was involved in it, but I wasn't.

Interviewer:

Would you go every year?

Minami:

Yes; Sam was the---he and the young fellows were involved, and they---Sam became sort of a executive secretary or something after the first year. It was something--he was that for quite a few years. So we went to all the things that happened and that sort of things.

0:22:12.7

Interviewer:

Now, where did you live when you got married?

Minami:

At first we lived in Boyle Heights. And then, in 1939, I think my folks---my father had gone to Japan---returned to Japan, and also he wanted to go back. So my father and mother went to Japan and to Manchuria. They were away for about six months and my younger sister joined them and went to Japan. But, I had another sister and a brother living at home. So, to keep her company, we moved back here for the six months that they were gone. And then when we moved back, we moved back to another home---house that was in the rear of a big house. And then we lived there until war was declared.

Interviewer:

Now, did you own this home?

Minami:

No; we rented.

Interviewer:

No; okay. Let's see what time---okay; we're fine, I guess. Let's see, did you have any children before the war?

Minami:

Yes; the oldest one, Roland, was born in let me see February 1941 and the war was declared end of the year; wasn't it--- December 7th?

0:23:59.4

Interviewer:

Yeah; now what were you---what were you doing on December 7th?

Minami:

My husband had gone to play golf, and when he came back in the afternoon, he took us to a drive-in nearby to get ice cream cone. And then, the newspaper boy was selling newspaper and declaring war, and that Pearl Harbor was bombed. That was the first time we heard because I hadn't put the radio on. And, from that night, my husband was busy trying to do something. And then soon after my folks---my father and mother were taken by the FBI, and my younger sister was the only one home so we moved down here.

Interviewer:

Oh; now I guess when you first found out the news, you said your husband wanted to---was trying to do something.

Minami:

Well, let's see; yeah there were let's see quite a few---the leaders of the community got together and they formed a group trying to---trying to show America that we were loyal citizens. I don't know too much about it, but that's what they were doing. And then some of the leaders were later . . . I think that they feel, especially some of the---I don't think I should name names, but later---the JAACL kind of opposed what they did to, I think. But there was a Quaker name, Mr. Roth, and he went on radio trying to . . . well, this was after the evacuation. They said that we might be evacuated . . . trying to stop the evacuation. And my husband had something to do with him and a few other people, but I---he was a professor at a college, and because of that he was estranged.

0:27:26.8

Interviewer:

Okay; what was his full name?

Minami:

George Roth.

Interviewer:

George Roth. What was the name of the organization that was formed? Do you not remember?

Minami:

Anti-Axis Group, or something like that.

Interviewer:

Okay, okay; now did you and Sam ever talk about you know anything about how you felt about the attack on Pearl Harbor or anything like that?

Minami:

Well, we just couldn't believe it. No; I don't think so. I was in such a shock that I just thought it was a terrible thing to have happened.

Interviewer:

What about your parents?

Minami:

Yeah; my parents felt real bad. My mother she went to the neighbors and you know said that she was sorry. She went to my classmates' home and apologized. And she went to the Chief of Fire, who lived on the corner---apologized. But yeah; I think they were really shocked, too.

Interviewer:

Yeah; now you mentioned they were taken away. When did they get taken away?

0:29:15.0

Minami:

December---around February, I think---February 1942. February or March, my father was taken away and then mother was taken away March and she went to Terminal Island. My father went to Tujunga, and I remember that we went one Sunday to visit him and we could just see him across the fence. Roland was just learning to walk, and so we wanted to show how Roland was walking. And the, mother---we had to go on the rowboat to Terminal Island. I just remember that you know. And then, I saw my mother there. And that was

Interviewer:

How did you feel seeing your parents you know in these camps?

Minami:

Well, we felt so badly, but---and we didn't know why, but we had heard the Japanese school teachers were taken and people who were active in the community were taken. So, we figured that was why they were taken.

Interviewer:

Oh; what was I going to say? Oh; now---during that time, was---there were curfews going on?

Minami:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Were you able to go to work or anything?

Minami:

My husband got a special permit to stay out later because he was working in Los Angeles. We stayed in Gardena so we were okay.

Interviewer:

Did you feel that it was unfair or in any way not right?

Minami:

No; at that time we just had to obey what the government said; so we just did whatever they said.

Interviewer:

Okay; why don't we take another short break?

Minami:

All right.

Interviewer:

Are you okay?

0:32:01.7

[End CD 1-Track Three; Begin CD 1-Track Four]

0:00:00.2

Interviewer:

Now, how did you find that the climate or people---Caucasians treated you different after the bombing?

Minami:

Well, after the bombing---let's see, that was December . . . I really didn't go out.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Minami:

You know---stayed home; the only place we went out, there was a house converted into a restaurant. They had real good chicken, so we used to go there and eat. But, that was okay; we had no trouble. And, let's see . . . December, January, February, March, April . . . it was only four months that we were here. So I can't tell; my neighbors were nice . . . the Caucasians, the **Spencers?** Fire Chief was nice, and my classmate was nice. So, I don't---I just don't know.

Interviewer:

What about---did you read the paper or the---listen to the radio? Were they saying things that . . . ?

Minami:

Yes; we took the L.A. Times when we lived at---in East Gardena. So we had been taking it for years, and then we listened to the radio. But, I just can't remember . . .

Interviewer:

Yeah; that's fine.

Minami:

. . . I think we were just so worried about what was going to happen to us. That was something that we just didn't know. I think that's what we were worried about.

Interviewer:

What did you think? Were there rumors going around?

Minami:

Yeah; there were lots of rumors going around. And so, I just can't remember. I---uh-hm.

0:02:35.8

Interviewer:

That's fine. So, when executive---the Executive Order 9066 came out in April, what happened to you? What . . . ?

Minami:

This---my brother wanted to go with his wife's family who lived out in Lawndale, and then I think if we had stayed here, we would have gone with the people from Compton, which included my uncle's family. But, we wanted to go with my brother. So, we went---I think it was April 14th. And the interesting thing, I've read quite a few articles about how different people were evacuated; I think our group that went to Santa Anita, they were very lenient because my brother had a friend who had gone there earlier. And he telephoned my brother and said, "Bring everything that you can.

And it just happened that my husband's father had a grocery store on Wilmington Road then at that time, and they left voluntarily to go to around Fresno. And so, they left the store

just as it was. They just left. And so, my husband and I went to clean it up and we found checks in the [Laughter] in the till there and then a friend came by and said, "I had borrowed this truck from your father and they left in such a hurry I couldn't give it to them." So, my husband took it and then we loaded---we had a sofa turned to daybed. We put that in the car, in the trunk---truck; we took as many things as we could carry. Now when we got to the Santa Anita, I don't remember being checked--bodily checked or anything or our suitcases being opened unless they did it while we were being taken to the . . . I don't think they did all that. So, the guards there were a lot lenient I thought than other camps.

0:06:08.8

Interviewer:

So when you got to Santa Anita, what did it look like? What was it?

Minami:

I forgot to mention that my brother's family, my sister and I, and Roland, went with my brother in his car. It was actually my folks' car, and then Sam drove in the truck with all our belongings. And so, I can't remember Santa Anita either. We just got in there and then I guess we waited until my husband came, and his truck needed water every so often. So, the guards used to wait for him at the service station. But, at the end they told him, "You just come to camp by yourself," and they left. And he just got into camp. It was raining that day, too. So he got---he was the last one reaching the camp. And I guess we must have waited for him, and then we were taken to the horse stall that was at our house.

Interviewer:

So, when you were evacuated, some guards went with you?

Minami:

Yes; we had a caravan from Lawndale, and they---all the people from my Western--west of Western, I guess, went.

Interviewer:

What happened to those people who didn't have cars? Or, did everybody have cars?

Minami:

That's what---I don't think buses or anything. Most everyone must have had their cars.

Interviewer:

Okay; so you said you arrived in your horse stall?

Minami:

Yes.

Interviewer:

Now . . . ?

Minami:

That---we cried. It was just---we all---my sister, my sister-in-law, we all cried. And so, the fellows cleaned it. We didn't take any broom I don't think. I don't think we had any broom. We borrowed a broom and cleaned it up. And it was raining, and then we were fortunate because we had a cot with a mattress already there. But, my sister-in-law said she had to stuff hay in her mattress. So, my sister was alone, so we put her in the front room with the sofa. She slept on there and we were in the back with three cots.

0:09:41.4

Interviewer:

Yeah; we you got to . . . is that what you expected to see?

Minami:

No, no; we thought we could get into one of the barracks.

Interviewer:

Oh.

Minami:

You know; but they had no room in the barracks. They were still building when we went.

Interviewer:

Did it snow?

Minami:

It snowed; it was raining; it was just miserable. That's the only

Interviewer:

How long were you there in the stalls?

Minami:

Yeah; actually you know we weren't there long because my mother was released from Terminal Island fairly early. We were in there April, June, maybe a few months and she came back, and my sister . . . and she wanted to go to the barracks. And there was openings--so they moved out. And so, we soon moved out also. So, we must have stayed in the horse stall only about April, May, June---three months, three or four months.

Interviewer:

When your mom came back, did she say much---what happened to her?

Minami:

What I regret now is that I never asked my parents about their internment---my father, too. I think the Terminal Island was pretty good. It was mostly women and they were all school teachers---Japanese school teachers. So, they did a lot of sewing and they---she brought back a lot of clothing for our son. So, I think they were treated pretty fairly over there.

Interviewer:

Now, let's see; how is the---you talked about the stalls, but how did you wash---you know your hygiene; how was---what . . . ?

Minami:

Yeah; we had restrooms. Let's see now, I remember that the showers did have curtains. You know other camps they said that they didn't have any door or anything, but we had some kind of covering. Yeah; I'm sure there were curtains---uh-hm.

Interviewer:

Now this . . . how long were you at Santa Anita?

Minami:

Santa Anita---we were there for only six months. But, it seemed like ages [Laughter].

0:13:42.5

Interviewer:

Yeah; now what did you do to pass time?

Minami:

I went to---let's see--- a sewing school there. So you know I was able to sew things and get a certificate. There---and then, I also learned how to make paper flowers. People used paper flowers all the time for different things. And there were a lot of activities, if you wanted to go. My mother watched Roland for me, so that was why I was able to go. She worked in the kitchen first. And, my sister worked in the hospital. So other than that, I can't remember any other activities.

Interviewer:

Okay; let's see, now how---what did you eat?

0:15:06.4

Minami:

The first night was terrible. We didn't have any milk for children. They had to eat the same thing that the adults ate. And all I remember, the first night was sort of a stew like thing with turnips in it. And I had never had stew with turnips. And it wasn't very good [**Laughter**]. That's the worst thing I remember. But, later on it improved. Santa Anita, let's see---I don't know whether it was Santa Anita or Rohwer, but it improved later. And, we kind of felt that we could---it wasn't the fault of the cooks. They were all volunteer cooks and that the supplies were very meager. So, we used to bring our toast home from breakfast, and then we'd snack on peanut butter and toast and make our own coffee. We had cold **?osta roca?** and we used to just warm things up on there.

Interviewer:

I---you mentioned then, now your mother---was your father still away at this time? At Santa Anita, did you meet him?

Minami:

He was interned for a long time, and he was released to Rohwer. Oh, another thing I wanted to tell you about the food; in the horse stall, the walls were not completely up to the ceiling, so we could hear the conversation of our neighbors. And evidently, our neighbors were farmers because farmers never had vacation. They all worked so hard. And the children used to say, "Oh we had something different today. Oh it was so good." You know and they were just so happy.

Interviewer:

Really?

Minami:

Yes; so we figured, "Oh they must have worked hard, you know. They never had different kinds of food." This is much later on when food [**daily**] improved, but---so, it was nice for them [**Laughter**].

Interviewer:

They had a vacation.

Minami:

Uh-hm.

0:18:29.1

Interviewer:

But you know, I guess for you and for Sam, it wasn't---I mean, did you ever say anything?

Minami:

We just thought that we missed about three years---especially Sam; he had just started a new job with a Junior [redacted] Club as their Executive Secretary, and it was a pretty good job. And so, we felt that it was three years taken out of his life, you know---life's early and things like that.

Interviewer:

Now, when did you go to . . . oh wait; hold on. Okay; we're going to stop.

0:19:21.2

[End CD 1-Track Four; Begin CD 2-Track One]

0:00:02.6

Interviewer:

Okay.

Minami:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Okay; from Santa Anita, where did you go?

Minami:

We went to Rohwer, Arkansas.

Interviewer:

Now, can you explain how to got to . . . ?

Minami:

We went on a train. Sam was the---I don't know what you---he was in charge of the train, taking care of all the people. And because I had---Roland was . . . let's see, how old is . . . under two, the mother and the child could go into the train with what you call . . . ?

Interviewer:

Like a car---sleepers?

Minami:

Sleepers and with a nurse. A nurse was assigned to us. So, and we were the first ones to go to the dining room to be fed, whereas the rest of them all had to sit on the hard bench and go to sleep and everything. So, it must have been hard for the rest of them. But, Sam said that by the time he had eaten, it was time to feed another group [**Laughter**] because it took that long. And we were so surprised that they had a tablecloth on the table and the African Americans with a white coat and everything served us. Isn't it surprising?

Interviewer:

Yeah; that's odd.

Minami:

See, I don't know if every train had that, but ours was like that. I know that they put the curtains so we couldn't look out except in Arizona, we were able to just get out for a little while and then get back in the train. But so, that part of the way we were served was really surprising.

0:02:29.1

Interviewer:

Did you know where you were going?

Minami:

Yes; Rohwer Arkansas; you know.

Interviewer:

They told you?

Minami:

Yes; it took us about four days to get there.

Interviewer:

Now you said when you went to Santa Anita, you got to take as many things as you could take. What happened to those things to go to Rohwer?

Minami:

Oh, well let's see, yeah; we---Sam . . . how did we get? I don't know how, but we were able to take all that.

Interviewer:

So it all came?

Minami:

No---yeah; whatever we had, I guess the government took care of it.

Interviewer:

Oh.

Minami:

I guess Sam took care of those things; I don't know [**Laughter**].

0:03:37.8

Interviewer:

Yeah; so it took four days. Now, when you got to Rohwer, so you knew then that you were going to another camp?

Minami:

Yes, yes.

Interviewer:

So when you got there, what was it like?

Minami:

We had to walk some distance, and of course, it was just an open place. But, we were fortunate. Part of the camp was just plain and then half of the camp was in a sort of a wooded area. And so, our camp---Block 5 was just the beginning of the wooded area. So, we were kind of nice to see trees you know. It wasn't just a desert like Poston in Arizona. We had heard about their camp. But, and of course compared to Santa Anita, it was much nicer. And then, I've read that other camps had---didn't have

the plasterboard inside. It was bare so that the wind came through the knotholes and everything. But, you know, we had a plasterboard in the house and camp was pretty nice. Later, the Japanese people put up a porch for us, you know a little porch. And then, we have---the only furniture we had was the daybed that we had. That was the only furniture that we had. There were a lot of lumbers just stacked in each block, and so people just took those home and made chairs and tables and things like that, and my husband did the same thing.

There were . . . later on, we visited some friends. I guess they found hardwood and they made beautiful furniture out of hardwood, and even they had the little living area. They put hardwood floors. It was really nice. So there's so many, well you know talented people there that made things. It was surprising how beautiful the apartment was.

Interviewer:

Yeah; so yours was more like an apartment. It wasn't like the others that you hear about---when you said apartment?

Minami:

We called it apartment, but it was---let's see one barrack had one, two, three, four, five---five units. It should be units; I should say units.

Interviewer:

Were these units one room?

0:06:58.7

Minami:

There was a unit for just one or two person, and a unit for---well ours was three. And then at the very end there was larger units for a bigger family.

Interviewer:

When you say unit, was it the one-room or the rooms inside?

Minami:

Yeah; just one room.

Interviewer:

One room.

Minami:

And then we partitioned with screens that we bought from Sears Roebuck later on, you know--- partitioned.

Interviewer:

Yeah; what about the restrooms and things?

Minami:

Restroom and the showers were all in another building. And then, laundry was way off someplace---a huge laundry place. And the mess hall---each block . . . I don't know how many barracks were in each block, but each block had their own mess hall, laundry room, and they must have had more than one restrooms.

Interviewer:

Were the ones that---Rohwer, for the females, were they partitioned or were they just opened, because you know I've read about?

Minami:

Yes; now both the men and the women used one restroom, but they--I'm sure we had sort of a half-partitions in the restrooms.

Interviewer:

Oh.

Minami:

And as I said before, curtains on the showers.

Interviewer:

Now, was your brother's family with you, too?

Minami:

Yes; they lived across the street---not the street---the path from us. And, two units had a porch---common porch. So they had the one, two, three---they had three porches a unit.

Interviewer:

And your---so your family was together then?

Minami:

Yes; my brother became the---what do you call them---manager of the block. He was bilingual so he did a good job.

0:10:08.0

Interviewer:

Did your father meet you in Rohwer?

Minami:

No; we had gone out before he came back.

Interviewer:

Oh okay.

Minami:

He was interned for a long time. After the war, we found out that Brian [grandson] became very interested in it. So he sent for the details of my father's internment, and I think both my father and my mother. And one question that they asked, "If the enemy came into your---came to America, would you be loyal to them or to America?" And my father's answer was he would be loyal to his homeland, but he felt that---he hoped that it would never come to that. And my mother's answer was, "I have children in this country who are citizens of this country, so I will be loyal to America." And that time, they were not citizens you know. So, my father's answer **[Laughter]**, I think that kept him in that camp. We all wrote letters. We had our Caucasian friends write letters. My brother went to the hearing. But, still he was released before some others.

Interviewer:

Now, where did he end up---what camp?

Minami:

Rohwer.

Interviewer:

Oh your father?

Minami:

Oh my father was in Santa Fe, but he was released to Rohwer because my mother was there.

Interviewer:

Okay; now you left camp early?

Minami:

Yes; we left about one year after we were in Rohwer. We went to Milwaukee. My husband had a job at the Firestone Tire Company. His friends from Los Angeles were there and encouraged him to come there. So we went out there. He went out first because he wanted to find housing for us, and then he was able to find

housing at the Federal Housing in Milwaukee, which is a very nice place. So, we went out there.

Interviewer:

Now, how did the people in Milwaukee treat you?

0:13:28.6

Minami:

Very nice; they were so friendly and we had a neighbor who had a boy about the same age as my son, and they used to play together. He was a blonde boy. And, they used to call each other "Cousin" **[Laughter]**. They---and you know so, some Caucasian would ask, "Are they really related?" One was blonde and one was black hair **[Laughter]**. But, that family was really nice. When our second son was born, the Federal Housing place moved us to a larger place, and at that time this Tommy Schwinn's mother gave us---sold us a buggy and a washing machine for \$15. So we took that with us to the new place. And the new place had two bedrooms, whereas the first place was single.

Interviewer:

Did you find it odd that here you are free, and then people were in camps?

Minami:

Yes uh-hm; and we sent a---after we were out, we sent a box of candy back to the camp for all the people to share. But, I still wrote to my relatives in camp. They were in Poston. But, it was really funny because when I was supposed to go out with Roland, I was scared to go out by myself. And so, Sam took time off from the work to meet us in Chicago. And so the fellows used to say, "But May knows how to speak English. How come she has to have you come after her?" I was just **[Laughter]**---I thought it was another strange country I was going to or something. But, I was fortunate because my classmate, who happened to be my brother's best friend, happened to visit Rohwer at that time. And he delayed going out a few days so that he could go out with me to Chicago. And then luckily, I was glad he went because I got train sick and couldn't take care of Roland. But, I don't know . . . it's just staying in camp where everything you know---we didn't really have to worry. But going out just was frightening for me.

0:17:24.9

Interviewer:

Yeah; before I move on, now can you just---did you have any family members that were in the military?

Minami:

I---my brother---brother-in-laws, the oldest son was in the Medic at Camp Crowder, Missouri. And there was another brother who went to Colorado, but he was released because he had a bad knee. And Ronald, he had volunteered; he was in the 442nd I-Company, and Leo, the youngest, went as an MP to Germany.

Interviewer:

Wow; okay. Now when the war was over, where were you?

Minami:

We were in Milwaukee.

Interviewer:

And then?

Minami:

That was 1945 wasn't it?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

Minami:

Yeah; 1945---yeah; we were in Milwaukee.

Interviewer:

Now, when did you move back?

0:18:57.3

Minami:

We came back March 1946.

Interviewer:

Okay; and what happened to all your things that were here in Gardena prior to the war when you evacuated? What happened to your things?

Minami:

Some things we had asked to have it sent to Rohwer. And the others were stored in my folks' garage. My brother had half of the garage partitioned off and so we stored our heavy things

there. And then the back bedroom, we locked it up and stored our small pieces there.

Interviewer:

And what happened to the house though?

Minami:

Oh our house was rented out, but we had this missionary---the Caucasian advisor to our church---young people, and he was interested with caring for a lot of places---nurseries, and so we asked him to look over the things. And my husband had a car; so he stored it with the Fire Chief. It had been put in their garage.

Interviewer:

So did you get---when you came back, did you get all your . . . ?

Minami:

During the war, they wanted the tires from the cars. So my husband sold the car, and then the truck that we took to Santa Anita and the---my brother's---my folks' car, they sold it in camp. And---what was the question you asked?

0:21:04.4

Interviewer:

Yeah; your other things?

Minami:

Oh other things; there were a few things missing. We had---my brother and I had a coin collection. My brother's collection was gone. Mine was okay. There were a few things taken from the back bedroom.

Interviewer:

Do you know who took them?

Minami:

No; we don't know. Maybe, when we asked Mr. Roth, who was taking care of our things, to send some of the things for us, maybe when it was opened, maybe---you know it could have been. That's the only thing we could think of.

Interviewer:

Could you explain, you mentioned that the things in the garage that you couldn't get them or something like that? You had to have an attorney?

Minami:

Oh no; when we came back, we lived with Beth [Morris], who was a school teacher. She had invited us to stay with her when she learned that we were coming back because the tenants were not out of my folks' home. So, we stayed with her for let's see--- March, April, May---March, April, and May, but we didn't want to impose on her for so long because she had another family staying with her, too. And so, we felt well we could get into the garage, and live in the garage until the tenants moved out. And so, that's what we wanted to do. We moved into the garage. We had a carpenter make a door---doorway so we could get in. And then, the tenants wouldn't move out and so my folks got an attorney to do that, but he was a Japanese attorney---Japanese American attorney and he seemed to not want to make any waves. So, he didn't do anything. And so, they got a Caucasian attorney from Gardena, and he said he'll get the Sheriff to evict them if they didn't get out by a certain date.

0:24:16.5

Interviewer:

So they left?

Minami:

They left.

Interviewer:

So you lived in the garage?

Minami:

We lived in the garage for May, June, July, August, September--- five months [Laughter].

Interviewer:

And then from the garage, where did you end up?

Minami:

I was expecting my third child, and so the tenants were still in the house when I came back from the hospital, but they opened the back bedroom for us---not the back bedroom; the next bedroom, which is the largest bedroom. I think they---the attorney had told them, "You have to do that," and so our family

moved into there. And, my mother and father and sister who lived with my uncle in Compton, they moved into the back bedroom. And, we were allowed to use the bathroom. I don't know whether I should tell how we were using the **[Laughter]** . . . before, when we lived in the garage, we couldn't use the bathroom. They let us use the shower because there was a second bathroom, but no toilet---just a shower and a Nihon furo in there. But they . . . so we used a chamber pot, and Sam got the permission from the Fire Chief first whether he could do that. And the Fire Chief said, "Sure; just dig a hole in the back and put lime---cover it with lime." And that worked fine **[Laughter]**.

Interviewer:

Oh; for five months, huh?

0:26:30.8

Minami:

But we---as I said before, we were able to use the shower, but not the toilet or anything.

Interviewer:

Wow; now when did you move into---so that was that? Now, what was this whole area? Your parents owned this lot, so how did it become developed?

Minami:

No; my parents owned that lot and this lot.

Interviewer:

Okay; so what was this lot before?

Minami:

It was just empty. In the spring we had California poppies just growing wild here. And it was so beautiful that people used to stop by to look at it.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Minami:

It was just empty. But, my folks planted a pine tree here, and we had a beautiful---another pine tree here. But, they had to take it out when we built this.

Interviewer:

Now, when did you build this house?

Minami:

1957.

Interviewer:

Oh, where did you live in between?

Minami:

We had another---we had a house on---not too far from here. It was 168th Street between Western and Normandie.

Interviewer:

Okay; and when you came back, did you find any discrimination? Did you find any prejudice or anything when you came back after the war?

Minami:

No; I guess because I had children, I didn't go out that much. And then, but I felt no discrimination.

0:28:46.2

Interviewer:

Now, can you talk about what, just briefly, about what . . . did you work ever after the war?

Minami:

Let me see; after---I did a little sewing peace-work, but that was the only thing at home.

Interviewer:

And what about your husband?

Minami:

Oh, excuse me; that was when I was living at the other house. My husband, he didn't---he thought he better start working, so he started to garden---do gardening work. And, he would work half a day and go to Los Angeles in the afternoon because he had a little sporting goods shop in the basement of a clothing store, mostly just to sell golf equipment and tennis equipment.

Interviewer:

Oh.

Minami:

And then, it was---then my husband started a sporting goods store in Gardena, and that's when I started to work again.

Interviewer:

What was the name of the sporting?

Minami:

Sam's Sporting Goods.

Interviewer:

And where was it?

Minami:

Right on Gardena Boulevard near Normandie.

0:30:37.2

Interviewer:

Okay; I heard a lot of people used to go to Sam's; huh?

Minami:

Yes; we were fortunate. Just when he started, the Gardena Recreation Department got a new recreation leader, and he Sam became good friends, and he encouraged Sam to start the sporting goods store. And just then they were starting baseball leagues and basketball leagues---just the right time. And so, we started . . . and at that time, too, he just worked part-time at the store. Oh, he was still . . . that's right; he quit Los Angeles and he was still gardening a little bit to get the income because he used to have a good gardening route. And, I would watch the store in the morning and he would come in the afternoon. But just for a little while, because we had just started and there wasn't that much business; so **[Laughter]**.

Interviewer:

Yeah; can you give us the names of your children and your grandchildren?

Minami:

Okay; the oldest is Roland. The next is Neil. The youngest is Dale. They are my children. And my grandchildren are Krista and Brian, who are Roland's children, and Lanie and J.T. [Jaret], who are Neil's children.

Interviewer:

Do you ever talk to them about your experiences?

0:32:49.6

Minami:

Well, Brian was the only one who was interested. So, he would ask me all kinds of questions. Brian knows more about my family than any of the other grandchildren. And Roland said that they never mentioned---thought about camp or anything until Dale start---Dale started to be active in civil rights. And then he became interested. So, he is thinking of going back to Rohwer in September because they're having a tour of the camps in Rohwer. And Krista is showing a little interest now, and she wants to go along with him.

Interviewer:

Are you planning to go?

Minami:

Roland wanted me to go, but I don't think I could make the trip. I would like to.

Interviewer:

Yeah; that sounds like an interesting trip.

Minami:

Yes; I think so.

0:34:05.6

Interviewer:

Now are you active still with any of your church or any groups?

Minami:

The only---I'm active---I shouldn't say active because I don't do much to help them anymore, but I'm a member of the **Ista?** Circle of our Church. It's a women's group. That's all.

Interviewer:

And do you---you mentioned here, you answered that, I asked if you feel it's important to---that your experiences or the experiences of the Nisei and Issei are reported for future generations. Do you think it's important?

Minami:

Yes; I think so. I think so. I think you're doing a good job at doing this. I understand there isn't too much written in the history book. J.T. was saying something about evacuation, there's only a couple of a paragraphs or something like that in the books. But, I think more and more the public needs to get interested. And, they all feel that was a wrong thing for the government to have done.

Interviewer:

Now, how do you feel about that fact?

Minami:

Yes; and, well I---at first, when we were taken by the government we said, "Well the government order, so you know we'll make the best of it." And the young people have been questioning, "Why didn't the Nisei fight the evacuation?" But there were no leaders really---leaders to take charge. And, I don't think at that time, even if they did, the public was not ready. But now, the public is beginning to understand and they think that it was wrong. Yeah; so I think the public should be educated. When we were, or when we came back here, my husband was a very good friend with the executive in Honeywell Company. And he was in Iowa when evacuation occurred. And he said he didn't know anything about the evacuation. So, of course, in those days I guess it was just, I guess, it was just the West Coast mostly.

0:37:16.4

Interviewer:

Anything else that you want to say since we're kind of leaving that that you feel that you might want to---you remember that you want to add or want to say?

Minami:

[Laughter] I don't think so.

Interviewer:

Any other questions? When did Sam start Sam's Sporting Goods? When did that open?

Minami:

When did it open; let's see. I'm trying to think of the date. We retired in '77 after---1977 after 25 years, so what would that be?

Interviewer: So '52 or '53.

Minami:
Yeah; uh-hm.

Interviewer: When you came back to the Gardena area after the war and your kids were starting to go to school; right. What age were they in school? How old were they?

Minami:
Oh yeah.

Interviewer:
One thing your mentioning is you might not have experienced any . . . but how old were the kids when they went back to school? Would they come home and . . . ?

Minami:
That's right; I did ask my children even Dale, and he said some people called him Japs and things like that. My oldest went to--he went to kindergarten in Milwaukee for just a few weeks before we came back. And then he went to Chapman Avenue School. He must have been five years old. And . . . I'm sure you know in school they might have, uh-hm; but

Interviewer:
But they never complained or said anything to you? He never said anything to you?

Minami:
No; they never complained. They had Caucasian friends and Mexican friends and African American friends, especially Dale, he'd actually bring---one time he brought an African American girl. It just happened to be a hot summer and I happened to have watermelon. So I said, "Would you like a slice of watermelon?" And they both just laughed you know **[Laughter]**. But I didn't think anything of it.

Interviewer:
So do you think maybe this---having them grow up here in this community, they were more open or less exposed to things?

Minami:
Yeah; less exposed, I think, because I'm sure; yeah, the fellows get out more than women do, and . . . gee, I never; I think I

did ask Dale whether he was shown any discrimination and he said, "Yeah," he was.

0:41:16.3

Interviewer:

One more question, when you lived in Milwaukee and the war was over, what decision or what brought you back here? Was there a reason or would you have considered staying in Milwaukee? Or, what brought you back?

Minami:

Oh no; Milwaukee---my husband did re-treading and it was real hard work. When the Japanese came to help them, they leveled the output you know before they had---I think there were African Americans there. But when the Japanese . . . and so the Firestone were real happy. But, my husband---we wanted to come back to Gardena. This was our home. That was the reason.

Interviewer:

So the first opportunity you had was to come back was after the war?

Minami:

I think we could have come back in January 1942, but we didn't come back until March---so just a few months. And so, the only thing . . . I don't know why we didn't come back earlier, but we just waited until then. We made the deadline let's say---April 1st was the deadline or March 31st and we got here just before.

Interviewer:

One more question, do you think that the you know the lessons maybe or the way your family--your parents raised you growing up, you know the Japanese way that, that had some influence on how you dealt with things?

Minami:

I think so; I think so. Uh-hm, yeah; they used to say don't be ashamed to the family, always do your best, and be oyakoko you know---to take care of your parents, think of your parents. All that had something to do with my thinking.

0:43:52.9

Interviewer:

Oh, one more---well, speaking of---did you have a close relationship within your family---your parents?

Minami:

Yes, uh-hm; I was thinking that they never spoke English, but my father wrote---when he filled out the insurance form, he had to fill it out in English, and then when he had to contact about buying the lot or building the house, they were all Caucasian. And so, they must have understood and spoke a little bit. And my mother went to---when we were living still at the old house--- she went to adult education class for foreigners. She learned English there, and then she---they also taught her how to cook American food. Well, I guess my mother spoke a little bit; uh-hm. But, she never did speak to us; so.

Interviewer:

You spoke Japanese at home?

Minami:

At home; uh-hm.

Interviewer:

That's interesting.

Minami:

And she was very strict in how we spoke Japanese. Japanese to elders you have to use a certain language and so.

Interviewer:

So the purpose you went to Japanese school is to learn the reading and writing?

Minami:

Yes, yes.

Interviewer:

And you spoke at home all the time.

Minami:

Uh-hm; speaking I had no trouble.

Interviewer:

Okay; she had good handwriting, too. It's nice, your Japanese writing.

Minami:

Oh no; my dad had beautiful writing. And my mother's I didn't think was as nice. She was always in such a hurry. But, you know my---I think even J.T. writes better than I do **[Laughter]**.

Interviewer:

Okay; well I think that's it. I think so. Thank you so much, May.

Minami:

Oh; that's all right. I kind of stuttered around.

0:46:44.5

[End CD-2 Track One]