

[Begin Kikue Isobe CD 1]

Interviewer:

It is 9:25 on March 30, 2004. My name is Lily Nakatani and I will be interviewing Kikue Isobe today as part of the South Bay Oral History Project. The audio equipment recording this interview is being monitored by Joe Sekiguchi and the interview is being cataloged by Ed [Mitoma]. All copyrights, title, and any other rights arising out of this interview whether in its entirety or 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 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 Kikue Isobe being recorded on this date. Let's begin the interview.

Okay; can you just state your name?

Isobe:

To state it?

Interviewer:

Uh-huh.

Isobe:

Kikue Isobe.

Interviewer:

And when were you born?

Isobe:

September 25, 1920.

Interviewer:

Okay; and where were you born?

0:01:18.7

Isobe:

In Imperial Valley... town name Brawley.

Interviewer:

And, who are your parents; what was your mother's name?

Isobe:

My mother's name is Sei Kawasaki and my father's name is Fukuichi Nishimoto.

Interviewer:

And, where do they come from in Japan?

Isobe:

Hiroshima Japan.

Interviewer:

Do you remember---do you know when they came to America and how they came to America... like your father; how did he come to America?

Isobe:

By boat I guess; yeah they came by boat.

Interviewer:

Do you know when he came?

0:02:04.9

Isobe:

No.

Interviewer:

No? How about your mom---your mother? Do you know how they met or how they...?

Isobe:

Well they, as soon as they were born they were [*Laughs*] already told that they were going to be husband and wife.

Interviewer:

Oh.

Isobe:

And so, you know how it is long ago. That's how the... So my mother used to say every time she saw him then she'd sort of felt embarrassed.

Interviewer:

This is in Japan?

Isobe:

Yeah; you know when she was going to school.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh.

Isobe:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

So, were they married in Japan?

Isobe:

No, no; they weren't married then. But, when she was going to school well she knew that he was to be her husband---future husband. So any time she saw him, well then she said she was sort of embarrassed, you know.

Interviewer:

So did they get married in Japan and then come to America?

Isobe:

Yeah; that's right.

0:03:02.1

Interviewer:

Oh okay; and how did they end up in the Imperial Valley; do you know?

Isobe:

Well they first... let's see; my father came to America first and then when he turned... I forgot what age, but he went back to Japan to get married. Then they came back to Fresno because their older brother was living there. And then, they decided that Fresno is not the place for them so I guess the majority was going to Brawley; so they followed and went to Brawley, California.

Interviewer:

And what did your father do in Brawley?

Isobe:

At the beginning, I don't know. But, as far as I---we could---my sisters and I could remember is he has always been a Foreman for the Arena Company and growing cantaloupe.

Interviewer:

And how big was this Arena Company?

Isobe:

He must have had two or three; I think---two I think, one in Northern Cal and one in Imperial Valley.

Interviewer:

Oh these are farms that the company owned?

Isobe:

The company... they're the owner; uh-hm.

Interviewer:

And how big was the farm in Brawley?

Isobe:

Well sometimes 300 to 400 acres.

Interviewer:

Wow; so your father was a Foreman for this?

Isobe:

Uh-hm.

0:04:34.2

Interviewer:

How many... who worked for him?

Isobe:

Well, there's... he has a couple of foremen for the Mexican group and then the Mexican group would control the Filipino group.

Interviewer:

Oh; that's interesting.

Isobe:

So they---sometimes when they have to---they call it thinning the cantaloupe when it starts popping, you know when it starts growing; well then they have about 100 people---the workers, and because they have to take each row right away you know to make that 300 to 400 even.

Interviewer:

Wow; did---were there other Japanese farmers working underneath your father?

Isobe:

No; we had irrigator, Mr. Morisaki. He was the irrigator and they usually irrigate at night anyway. Then later my cousin from Japan, he was 18 when he came, I think. He started to take over because his other... Mr. Morisaki went to San Diego; so he moved to San Diego.

Interviewer:

So, tell us about how, where you lived... what it was like living in you know... did you live in a house or...?

Isobe:

Oh yeah; the company furnishes the house and it's real nice. It was always nice.

Interviewer:

Do they... so was it a fairly big house with a... did you have running water and a bathroom inside the house and... do you remember the _____ parts?

0:06:31.2

Isobe:

Let's see; the very first one I can't recall. Well you know Japanese bath, they always have a tub outside you know *koya*; they call it *koya*. And, that kind when we have to get our own wood and everything and then burn it until that oh tub gets hot.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh; tell us about your family and your siblings---your sisters. You have three sisters?

Isobe:

Uh-hm; my... well the oldest is Harue. She's called... well her name is Harue Hara now. And the second one, she's deceased when she was 68, Natsuko, Nishimoto... well Soyeda. And, I'm the third one, Kikue Isobe, and then the fourth one is Kimie Kawasaki.

Interviewer:

What was it like with all the girls in the house? What did you go to elementary school and tell us about your elementary school.

Isobe:

Well, we... like a---farmers like that they don't farm more than two, three years in the same spot; so they move you know. So, we keep moving and I remember the first time we were in grammar school; it was about first grade, I think, it was called Trifolium in Westmoreland, California.

Interviewer:

Is this near Brawley?

Isobe:

It's in that county I guess---Imperial County---Imperial Valley. It's just like saying South Bay and Del Amo area. And that includes you know South Bay is Gardena and Inglewood and all that sort of place... the same thing.

0:09:03.7

Interviewer:

And so did you like... what was life like for you when you were growing up?

Isobe:

Well, we have to go to church every Sunday. My father would take us every Sunday. And mainly that's about the only social thing we had was just go to church and listen to the sermon. And then after that when recess, we all enjoyed, you know each other.

Interviewer:

When you were in Brawley what... when was that that you lived in Brawley? What years were there?

Isobe:

The time I was born?

Interviewer:

Uh-hm.

Isobe:

We were all born there and until evacuation.

Interviewer:

Okay; so was your oldest sister born in Brawley as well?

Isobe:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

Okay; when... did anybody have like... did your mother also work on the farm?

Isobe:

No, she wasn't allowed. No ladies allowed in the farm.

Interviewer:

Oh is that right?

0:10:13.2

Isobe:

Uh-hm; so she had her own - own victory garden. She'll grow okra or *nappa*, *daikon* and you know things like that--- Japanese things, she'll make her own *nishime*. But, there was two markets, grocery stores that sells just about everything and we didn't have a problem in Japanese food.

Interviewer:

So how many Japanese were in that community in Brawley? Do you....

Isobe:

I don't know; I can't say.

Interviewer:

Were there quite a few?

Isobe:

Quite a few; uh-hm... because there's a lot of independent farmers and they grew tomatoes and squash. What else did they grow? That's about it.

Interviewer:

And did you---all the sisters, did you have to work at all on the farm?

Isobe:

No; we're not allowed to.

Interviewer:

So, what did you do after school then?

Isobe:

We were supposed to study [**Laughs**]... supposed to study, and then our friends come over. You know they... we did a lot of visiting you know. The families would come over and we'll go over to their house and socialize... that's about it.

Interviewer:

And, how about your friends at school; did a lot of them have to work afterwards on their farms?

Isobe:

There's quite a few; uh-hm.

0:11:47.5

Interviewer:

But there were others in the---in your group that didn't have to work at all?

Isobe:

Well, the ones that live in the---in town, you know like this fish market, just the father and he was the only one that did the tofu and make *konyaku* and he'd get all the fish.

Interviewer:

Hmm; and so....

Isobe:

So, their children; they don't... we all end up at the church or something and that was the main place, you know... just socialize over there.

Interviewer:

So the church---now tell us a little bit about the church that you went to over there.

Isobe:

Well, it was the first church... it was like I said, an old house. They bought that or they leased it. I don't know how it--
-what happened, but anyway that was our first church and then after that well then there was four men that I can't remember the third man, but there was four men that went around to all the Japanese Buddhist people. You know they taught they were Buddhist anyway... solicit the donation you know to build the church. And so they got that beautiful church that I showed you.

Interviewer:

Is it still standing do you know?

Isobe: No, what happened was that a lot of people stored their, you know properties in the basement, but then some... I don't know what group... anyway they---what they did was they tore down the whole church and they don't know where the properties went.

Interviewer:

This is... you're talking about when you had to go to evacuation? That---that's when you had to store all the stuff in the church?

0:13:48.4

Isobe:

Yeah; that's when we... no; that's when... it was just before... I don't remember that part too much, but I heard that some group you know tore down that beautiful... well it was getting pretty old... Buddhist Temple. And so later we went... many years later after our children were you know grown... I mean in Junior High, well we went to Brawley to show them where we used to live and what---and we went to the church place, you know---the lot and it was empty.

Interviewer:

So nothing has been built over that since?

Isobe:

No.

Interviewer:

Now, I understand when you were growing up, you used to go on vacation in the summer time?

Isobe:

That's because it's hot. It's so hot that you know we couldn't stand the heat, and like me; I used to get a bloody nose, you know---hemorrhage every time... it's so hot that... and so the doctors don't know what to do too. The only thing my father thought was go to a cooler place; so we go to... we went to White Point or to San Diego to Chula Vista, and you know rent a house, and stay there until the school starts, which is September.

Interviewer:

So do you go through the whole summer you spent your time at White Point then?

Isobe:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

Wow.

Isobe:

Well, White Point was then... wherever we... and sometimes... one year we went to Chula Vista and San Diego and we have a friend in San Diego that for a couple weeks who has stayed there and helped him you know make the celery or *nae* they call it. What do you call *nae* in....?

Interviewer:

The **?rootling?**, the root... I mean the little seedling.

Isobe:

Yeah; the planting or the....

Interviewer:

Yeah; the planting.

Isobe:

The plant... you know the celery plant. Well we---us sisters would go in there. My mother would help and my father would go fishing, you know. They have Mission Beach and all over there's fishing; so he loved to fish. So... and we just---we stayed behind to help the girls you know... there's two girls in this family, and so... and the mother, the two mothers would... my mother and her mother, you know.

Interviewer:

Okay; what family are you talking about? I mean...?

Isobe:

That's the one that lives in San Diego.

Interviewer:

Okay; do you remember their names?

Isobe:

Kida. I don't know his first name, but Nobuko Kida and Sonoko Kida and Nobuko Kida... they are two daughters.

Interviewer:

So let's go back to White Point. Tell us usually---when did you usually take off for White Point?

Isobe:

We usually go there right after the cantaloupes is all... well until it's leveled; you know the land is level and then they have to wait for a while, and then my father and my second sister used to go back and my second sister...Natsuko why she would go with my father to cook for him and everything, and my father would make sure that the whole place is irrigated and he goes back to get the furrows you know the furrows are ready for to plant. And then after it's all set up, then he'll come back to White Point, and then we'd go back September, just before school starts.

Interviewer:

So how long did you spend in White Point?

Isobe:

You know not too long. It's only June... let's see July---about two months.

Interviewer:

That's quite a long time.

Isobe:

Hmm.

Interviewer:

And so this is like a vacation, a two-month vacation?

0:18:29.1

Isobe:

Yeah; but then you know they have a hotel there and a restaurant and so... like myself, I just love to wait on people, you know and they want to buy candies or something. There's a place where they sell candy and then there's picnics there all the time. You know, Yamaguchi-ken or Kansuma-san... you would, you know that famous dancer---sensei. Well her group would bring her group and then they'd have picnic over there and all the Isseis would go into this little... I don't know... greenhouse and there's a

stage there and she would have her program there. And then during that time, well we would do the snow cone and sell it to the people that's there - snow cone and candies and you know popcorn, things like that.

Interviewer:

Wow; that's... you had a....

Isobe:

That was fun.

Interviewer:

[*Laughs*] So when you were there for that whole time in the two-month period then you sort of like were just relaxing and just helping out?

Isobe:

Go fishing; I would go swimming. They have---they had a pool even though it was broken you know because of the tidal wave, but we knew how to get *awabis* you know... turn the rocks over and then there's *awabi* then we just get the *awabi* and eat it there.

Interviewer:

Wow; so tell us like a typical day when you're there if you can recall... like once you get to White Point and then you get settled in your room; did you---is it a room with just beds or did you have a kitchen in your room?

Isobe:

Well, what my father did was he rents two rooms---two or three rooms you know then one would be kitchen. He would use it as a kitchen. And then... or him and my mother would be in that room. And then us four sisters would be in the other room. So, it's nice and then the restaurant where they have so many food you know---good foods like lobsters and crabs... not too much crabs, but lobsters anyway. And *awabi*, and things like that.

Interviewer:

Abalone?

Isobe:

Yeah, yeah; uh-hm, uh-hm. And so we had fun. That was really... you know and then we'd see people---a lot of people from L.A. would come and take... they have a spring... what they call that? Oh, I can't think of it. Anyway, it's a black mineral water.

Interviewer:

Hot springs?

Isobe:

onsen they call it... you know some people, you know if you see the Japanese movie at night either the TV, it shows where they go on *onsen* - and really enjoy that. Well they had... at White Point there was a black *onsen* and it was really good for people that had eczema or any kind of a rheumatism and things like that. And, it would---it was... the water was really black; so the towel even turns black. But, it really was good for the body.

Interviewer:

Was it smelly?

0:22:33.5

Isobe:

Hmm?

Interviewer:

Was it smelly water?

Isobe:

Yeah; it smells but then my father used to take a cup and drink. It cleans your stomach you know; it cleans your system; yeah.

Interviewer:

So give us a description of the hotel.

Isobe:

Hotel?

Interviewer:

Uh-hm; do you remember what it---you know when you got... what did---what did it look like? Was it one level or...?

Isobe:

Well, it was two levels, two story, and....

Interviewer:

You know like if you're going there and was there a lobby and...?

Isobe:

They don't have a lobby, but they had a pool table room - pool room; and but hardly anybody was in there. And so - and finally at the end, well when they ran out of rooms, they just divided that thing and put rooms in there and got extra rooms.

Interviewer:

So, was the hotel pretty much filled during the summertime?

Isobe:

It's always filled.

Interviewer:

Always filled?

0:23:43.0

Isobe:

Uh-hm; it's always filled.

Interviewer:

And then the people who are guests at the hotel, were they like you or they stayed for a long time, or...?

Isobe:

No, they would just come for the weekend or some would... it's international, mostly Hakujin.

Interviewer:

Mostly Hakujin?

Isobe:

Yeah; hardly any Japanese because the Japanese, they have their soda company or something like that---Sunrise Soda and I forgot the other name. But anyway, they---those people they come out to White Point for relaxation so they'll play hana and things like that with you know people that get---comes from all over from L.A. you know.

Interviewer:

So once you got to White Point, once... like is school ended, and then you would come out to White Point; your father would bring the whole family? And then---so then you stayed the whole time until school started again in September?

Interviewer:

Isobe:

Well, just my second sister; she's the one that goes home and my mother, too... once in a blue moon she'll go home with my father, but she takes---she... well, we... I guess my father didn't want two separated, you know. At least the mother or the father stayed with the two or three that's left, you know.

Interviewer:

And, how old were you when this---all this was going on?

Isobe:

Well we were---we started to go there ever since my sister was born as far as I know. I mean, it's you know my younger sister, and we've been going there ever since Kay Tagami she's Kay Sato right now... but her father, when we started to go, her father was there. I remember seeing him once or twice, and then after that he had a heart attack. So he passed away. And so the mother and her brother-in-law and sister-in-law took over the whole thing, you know. They were partners.

Interviewer:

I see.

0:25:56.9

Isobe:

And then the uncle and auntie, they went back to Japan. So that lady was taking---Kay's mother was taking care of the whole thing, you know. But Haruko, the older sister, Haruko Tagami... I can't remember her married name, but... and Kay---both of them, and then they have two sons---they did have two sons, Hiromu and Shigeo, and so with the family you know, they did everything. And then the cousins came from Japan, too, and they helped out. And then they had a boat to go fishing you know. What do you call that?

Interviewer:

Barge?

Isobe:

No, no; they have a boat of their own and they go and get their fish and take it to the fish market and sell it. And that's how they're---they made a living with that, too---the boys did. They didn't have anything to do with the hotels or bath house or the restaurant.

Interviewer:

So, how old were you though... you when you first went there?

Isobe:

I can't remember. I was in grammar school.

Interviewer:

Grammar school and then so for how many years did you go in a row? I mean for how many years did you go back to White Point, and how old were you when you quit going?

Isobe:

When we quit going?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

0:27:37.5

Isobe:

It was just a few years before the war started that we quit going. Until then, you know we used to go there.

Interviewer:

So how - how old were you when the war started? You were... were you in high school?

Isobe:

Oh, I turned 21.

Interviewer:

When the war started you were 21?

Isobe:

Uh-hm, I started... yeah; before... yeah 21.

Interviewer:

Oh, so you went there for a long time, for many years?

Isobe:

You mean White Point?

Interviewer:

Yes.

Isobe:

Oh yeah.

0:28:18.4

Interviewer:

So, did you see a change in the hotel as---over the years?

Isobe:

Not really, but towards the end, why the older people naturally they stopped playing Hana and things like that, you know. The upstairs used to be a Hana playing place. And, one by one, you know how they pass away or something like that.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh; so maybe you could go---tell us a little bit about the Kenjinkai picnics that happened over there.

Isobe:

Oh, I don't know much about that. It's just that we helped out, you know. And....

Interviewer:

What - what was it like? What - what was involved in the Kenjinkai; what might---what activities were planned for the...?

Isobe:

The only thing is that I remember is stage, you know where the kansuma and the group would do , and I don't know what Kenjinkai... Yamaguchi ken... I wonder if they went. I don't know. But anyway, there was several, you know picnics over there and then we used to help every time they'd have it. And, that was fun for us; you know we were young and we didn't think about money. We don't want money. You know we don't work for money. It's just to talk to people and enjoy them.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh.

Isobe:

Yeah.

0:29:48.2

Interviewer:

Okay; let's go back to around when the war started. So, where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed; do you remember?

Isobe:

I think at the church. I think the family was at the church.

Interviewer:

And, how did you find out about it?

Isobe:

Well, I think everybody found out at that time, you know that Pearl Harbor was bombed. And then the next thing we know we scattered---went home and then we just sat---you know we just stayed there until we hear from the---a Sensei, you know what to do, or the---my father and you know the older people, they would tell... in fact at that time, there was two persons that got killed---shot... not at that time, but after. The farmer, Mr. and Mrs. Kikuchi, they... I forgot how many children they have... but they had to... anyway, they were both killed.

Interviewer:

How were they killed?

Isobe:

By Filipino.

Interviewer:

Oh; this is right after the war broke out?

Isobe:

Yeah; I think so.

Interviewer:

This is in Brawley?

Isobe:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

Oh wow; that's too bad.

Isobe:

Yeah; there's something to that, too; I don't want to say, you know mention everything because I'm not too sure; so.

Interviewer:

Oh, uh-hm. And, how old were you at this point and what were you
---what were you doing?

0:31:38.3

Isobe:

I was going to school then.

Interviewer:

What school were you going to?

Isobe:

Well, towards the end it was Brawley J.C. I was attending.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh.

Isobe:

Yeah; but war broke out; so you know I quit. And then my sister,
she kept going and then she quit - my younger sister. So, the
other two... my *ne-san* was in Los Angeles. She was teaching
sewing, you know, and *nihonmachi*. And then when the war broke
out - broke out, she had to come home, too; so.

Interviewer:

Let's go back a little bit. Tell us all about the different
schools you went to. So you started out in - at your elementary
school?

Isobe:

Yeah; that was Trifolium and Westmoreland and Brawley and J.C.--
-that's all.

Interviewer:

So, the name of the high school?

Isobe:

Brawley High School.

Interviewer:

Brawley High School?

Isobe:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

And then you went to Brawley J.C.?

Isobe:

Uh-hm; attended.

0:32:49.2

Interviewer:

Okay; so after Pearl Harbor, what was it like in Brawley for the Japanese Americans?

Isobe:

Well, it wasn't too... it didn't matter to us because my mother used to cut my father's hair. But then you know people that went to barber shops, on the door it says, "No Japs allowed," you know. That's the only thing that I could think of that was mean. Oh another thing is when my father was---he was a community worker, see. You know he likes to do things for the community. So, those people that did that, there was quite a few taken from the FBI you know. We had to prepare a suitcase. They told us to prepare a suitcase and have that ready just in case we have to pick up your father, you know. And so, one day my younger sister was home to keep watch, you know. And then we went with my mother to help her with what she was doing, you know. And then my younger sister came over. She didn't have a license, but she drove about 17 - 20 miles I think to come after us and told us Dad was picked up. And so then we went to the station where they sent all the men... I think about 70 men were taken; yeah. And then---so then one of them... my sister said one of... the one that has the guts you know; she says, "We came to see my Dad before he leaves," you know. And they said, "You're not allowed to see him." And so she says, "Well we want to say good-bye to him," you know and, "Don't worry about us." And then he says, "Don't worry; he'll come back fat and sassy." And that really burned her up, you know.

And... but they wouldn't let us in - let us see him. And they... what I heard was they were all pushed into the cattle train, you know and then they were taken to El Central and then they put them in the jailhouse. And Rinban Masuoka, he's---at that time he was a *Rinban*, but between Reverend... when he first came from Japan, my father went after him to the... what do you call that---immigration office, and he picked him up and brought him to Brawley. And then, since then he was... they wanted him to be the guardian. So he was their guardian until Dad---until both of them passed away. So, the kids right now, her children right

now, the other day when my brother-in-law passed away, well all four daughters came to the house and said, "We're going to be Nishimoto number two." You know, they were going to take over us. And so we says, "That's good, you know." They were joking, but they're real nice girls.

0:36:11.6

Interviewer:

So was the Reverend/Rinban at the Brawley Church at the time?

Isobe:

He---no he became Rinban at Betsuin.

Interviewer:

Oh, but I mean he was a reverend at the Brawley Church?

Isobe:

Oh yeah.

Interviewer:

So, he was taken as well as everybody else, too?

Isobe:

See, he came from Japan... Japan told him to go to Brawley, you know and Mr.---Reverend Hirota... Hirota, you know the one that's next door to Doctor Terada... I mean Reverend Terada?

Interviewer:

Oh yeah; yeah, yeah.

Isobe:

They lived close by I think, don't they... right there...

Interviewer:

I think so.

Isobe:

... the Mayflower Place. Well that Hirota, his father and mother was the one---the first... well there was another reverend before that, but I can't remember him. But, Reverend Hirota and his wife are the ones that was there when they built that **?Bukkyokai?**; so.

Interviewer:

In Brawley?

Isobe:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Do you remember the year they built that church?

Isobe:

No, I don't. It doesn't even say it on here either.

0:37:19.4

Interviewer:

How old were you when they built that church; do you remember how old you were?

Isobe:

I don't know; I must have been about seven or something.

Interviewer:

Oh, you were quite young then?

Isobe:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Oh, okay.

Isobe:

Yeah; this picture seems like---it looks like it's... that's me. What do I look like - seven?

Interviewer:

[*Laughs*] Yeah.

Isobe:

[*Laughs*] Or smaller?

Interviewer:

Yeah; oh so that's when it was built?

Isobe:

See, because my sister Kim, she's only two years younger than I am.

Interviewer:

Yeah; I see.

Isobe:

And that's the one that passed away.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh.

Isobe:

No, this is the one that passed away. This is my *ne-san*.

Interviewer:

So, your father was taken... where did he end up? And, he was in the jail at El Central you said?

Isobe:

Oh, him... he was with *rinban* all the time. I keep calling him *rinban* because that was his last, you know honor--honorable name. And so, Reverend Masuoka, my father stuck by him you know, and he did, too. He didn't want to leave him. And so, they asked him - they asked the Reverend... they respected him as being a reverend, so they told him, "You don't have to go in jail."

0:38:38.6

Interviewer:

This is the FBI who told him this?

Isobe:

Yeah uh-hm; but you could choose one man that could stay with you, and so naturally he picked my father.

Interviewer:

And where did they stay then?

Isobe:

So the got to stay in a separate room.

Interviewer:

Oh, they didn't have to go to a jail?

Isobe:

No, they didn't have to go in jail. And then they were sent to Bismarck, North Dakota. And that's where they were interned.

Interviewer:

So, you were separated from your father?

Isobe:

Oh yeah; we were separated that time. That was the first time we were separated from my parents.

Interviewer:

But, your mother stayed back then. What happened to the farm at that point?

Isobe:

Oh that... a Hakujin had to take over... you know Mr. Arena had to come and do everything. He had to get... maybe that Foreman probably continued, that Mexican Foreman.

Interviewer:

Oh... so how... after your father was picked up then how much time lapsed between before you had to leave Brawley yourself?

0:39:47.4

Isobe:

Oh, we left... oh, I can't remember that. It was summer time we went. It was....

Interviewer:

Oh, so you were there quite a many months until you had to leave for camp then?

Isobe:

Yeah, uh-hm; but then you know the Arena Company, they had Hakujin, one of the son or nephew or something he took good--- real good care of us. So, he told us, "Don't stay---don't go out of the house. Just stay there and then if you need any food, well we'll bring it over to you." And so he told us, "Just stay in the house," you know. So, we stayed in; we stayed in. And - and then, the next thing we know we had notice to pack up and leave. And so my sister, she's the only that was---had a license and was driving. So, we had to go to El Central... or we had to get our passport... I mean our birth certificate first, and my sister and I didn't have it because them days, they didn't--- some doctors didn't give it.

And so this is when my father and mother was together yet, you know before that evacuation happened. And so we had to go to El Central and go to Court and then my parents have to put their

hands on the Bible and say that it's true that they were born in Brawley and luckily our doctor was alive. So, he signed it, you know. But, my other two sisters was under another doctor, and he signed and gave it right away. So he---they didn't have any problem. So, my you know birth certificate is about that long. It's real long---a legal paper.

0:41:52.0

Interviewer:

Oh.

Isobe:

Uh-hm; and then that's my passport now.

Interviewer:

So then---so how---you... where did you go? I mean, did you have to go to---you had to go to El Central to the train station; that's where all the Brawley people had to...?

Isobe:

No, no, no; El Central is the Courthouse we had to go.

Interviewer:

Oh okay.

Isobe:

And then we came home; and then when we had to go to Poston, then we all had to meet... I forgot where we met, but anyway we all---everybody had to take their suitcases and then go on your own.

0:42:24.5

Interviewer:

And where did you store - store your things?

Isobe:

Well, I... well, you know this Foreman, he kept our things for us; so. But then by the time we came back why half of them was gone anyway. And then we just bought a brand new Chevy, and it just came out, and that was the last car that they really made before the war. And so the company wanted that car back again, you know. And so my sister says, "Okay; I'll sell it back to you providing you give me the same amount I had to pay." And he says, "Oh, I'm sorry; I have to give you Blue Book price." And

so she couldn't do anything about it. So she got to give it up because we couldn't take it. At first they said we could take our car and so she bought a big trailer... I mean a trailer to put our suitcases on. And they told us we could take our dog; so we, you know the dog that we used to take to church all the time. Well, we had to give it to a Hakujin boy and the couple; you know took care of that. That dog was---used to go to church with us Sunday and he sat on the floor and all the *osekkyo sundekara* he gets up and goes with us. He was my father's right-hand man. He used to go to vacation with us and everything. We used to call him Shiro. But anyway, I guess we figured he's gone after the war; we didn't even check. But they wrote and said that he is, "He gets to sleep with us. He's sleeping with my son, 18 year-old son, and he's well taken care of. So don't worry." And so we didn't worry about him. But, we missed him a lot, but it couldn't be helped.

0:44:20.8

Interviewer:

Now to get to Poston, where did you... you don't remember where you got on the train?

Isobe:

Uh-uh.

Interviewer:

But, what was the train ride like?

Isobe:

Well, it was one of those [*chuck-chuck*] things you know... old; they didn't have fancy train then them days, and then every time they hooked things, you know hot it jerks? [*Laughs*]

Interviewer:

[*Laughs*]

Isobe:

That thing kept happening each time. Each town that they go to they have to stop, so... to pick up people and things like that. But then like us, people---no one was allowed to go in our cars, you know because we were under restriction and all.

Interviewer:

And do you remember if the shades... did they ask you to pull the shades down on your cars, too?

Isobe:

I don't know anything about the shades.

Interviewer:

Oh, you don't remember that?

0:45:04.1

Isobe:

No, uh-uh; some people say they had the shade down, but I don't remember that. All I remember is [*Laughs*] Masa in the front seat with the security boys.

Interviewer:

Yeah; we... why don't you tell us about that when... so did you know Masao Seo?

Isobe:

Oh yeah; I knew him from back... he was going... he was always at White Point. You know because there's a ranch---his father's ranch is up on top of the hill, and then White Point was way at the bottom by the ocean; see. So, Masa used to come down quite often.

Interviewer:

And so he was in the same car with you going to Poston?

Isobe:

Yeah; it was really a coincidence, you know. And we says, "Don't tell me that's Masa over there." And then, so when we got on it, then he's riding in the front already you know with the security guards. And so then afterwards when we had time out when we got off and I told him, "What happened to you? You did some *ijiaru* thing again?" And he says, he started laughing and he says, "No, I jumped the fence and something." He said something like that and they wouldn't let him talk anyway, you know. They kept real close... and then when we got to Poston, we lost sight of him. I don't know what---where he, you know what room he was---what family he went with or if they put him in jail or what... you know all that. I don't know what happened to him.

0:46:46.8

Interviewer:

Describe... I remember you were describing to me what it was like to see him. He was sitting there with other people?

Isobe:

The... no, he was sitting in the front seat with the two security guards. And only three could sit on each bench, you know---each chair. It wasn't long enough for four of them to sit. And so, when I---when we were climbing up, I said, "Oh Marsa, what's...", and then we couldn't say too much, you know.

Interviewer:

And were there other people like him with other security guards next to them?

Isobe:

No, **we didn't** notice.

Interviewer:

Oh, he was the only one in your car?

Isobe:

Well, yeah.

Interviewer:

Okay. [*Laughs*]

Isobe:

[*Laughs*]

Interviewer:

And now, maybe you could tell us a little bit about how---what it was like... you were at Poston?

Isobe:

Yeah; I was in Poston.

Interviewer:

Poston, there was one, two, and three I think; right?

Isobe:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

Which one were you in?

Isobe:

We were in Poston One.

Interviewer:

Poston One?

Isobe:

Uh-hm.

0:47:44.0

Interviewer:

So, tell us about how it was like in camp for you.

Isobe:

Well, it was... when we first got in camp after... I don't remember this, but we must have registered and then the first thing they told us to do is go to the certain section to get straws to put in our canvas cot... you know like a canvas mattress. It's for a mattress; so we had to do that. And then, it was so hot then. It was... I think we went there May or June or somewhere around then. But, it was the hottest time. And then, so we slept in that mattress---on that mattress for I don't... I can't remember how long. And then they gave us one of those cot---Army mattress, black and white, you know. It's about that thick... and then a spring bed, and they gave us that. So, we got on that and they didn't give us sheets; so we had to furnish our own sheets. And the blanket they gave us---an Army blanket. And... what else was it?

Interviewer:

Was it a building? Did you go into a building?

Isobe:

We went into that barrack you saw.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh.

Isobe:

And then it just had... it was just wood and it was hot. So a friend of ours, why he was an electrician, so he always... my father was his guardian, too, when he came from Hawaii, so he made... I don't know; he made a big box and put Sulphur or something... no; what do you call that---what do you call that thing you put in a box and then you wet it and then you put the

fan in it and then it makes it cool---that the water hose comes out to...?

Interviewer:

A swamp cooler?

Isobe:

Yeah; wall coolers. Well...

Interviewer:

Swamp cooler?

Isobe:

We were lucky to get it because we had this friend of ours that--from Brawley....

Interview:

My microphone.

Isobe:

Oh, don't touch that. [*Laughs*] I thought it was my necklace.

Interviewer:

Oh. [*Laughs*]

Isobe:

That's you know... we got that. Oh, he got that for us; so were lucky we were... at least we kept a little cooler than the rest of the people.

Interviewer:

Oh, so who was in your room then? It was you and your mother?

0:50:36.9

Isobe:

?Okusan? and her daughter... because we took care of her because since it was in North Dakota; so Okusan and daughter and then us four sisters. And then my girlfriend, she lives in Camp Three, but they didn't have nurses aid training; so she had to come and live in Camp One so she came to live with us. And so we... I don't know how many was there.

Interviewer:

You had quite a few people in your room.

Isobe:

Yeah; it's all just one room. It's all girls. My father was interned... since he was interned. So it was all us women.

Interviewer:

So there was eight people in your one room?

Isobe:

Yeah; somewhere around there---four, five, six, seven, eight with the little... Chisako.

Interviewer:

And, how old were you when you went to camp?

Isobe:

About 21.

0:51:42.9

Interviewer:

Twenty-one?

Isobe:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

So, what did you do when you got to camp then... once you got established?

Isobe:

Established?

Interviewer:

Uh-hm, in the camp; then everybody....

Isobe:

Had to do something.

Interviewer:

Uh-hm.

Isobe:

Well, I had the---they told me to be a box... they told me to be the block secretary. So, I was that with you know the boss right behind me and he was a family friend of ours; so... I grew up with him anyways. So that... and he went to college and

everything; so he had an education. And so I was his secretary for a while. And then there's... after I worked for, just for a short while, there were two men that came from San Diego, Mr. Yasukochi, George Yasukochi and Jimmy Yahiro. Did you ever hear of those two? They were big shots.

Anyway, I don't know how they found me, but they told me to come and they came to the office and they told me, "Will you come and help us do time keeping for the noodle factory because we're going to make a noodle factory for the ladies that don't have nothing to do, or anybody... young people that don't have nothing to do, they're going to make a noodle factory?"

So I says, "Okay; I'll be a time keeper." And then so I did that for a *chotto* and then next thing, those two men took me to the counsel office working with the Mayor Nakamura, but then he got sick. So they had to take him out... I mean they had - he had to go to the hospital. And so Jimmy Takashima took over. And so I was sort of like a PR woman over there. And then there was the secretary... my girlfriend was one secretary and there's this Japanese, Johnny Matsuda, he was... he just passed away about two years ago, I think. Indirectly, we found out we were related, but he was a Japanese secretary.

And then there was a young fellow was a messenger boy and then there's a young girl that was just a standby. I don't know what she was doing. But anyway, I was working with them for a while until my sister got married, my second sister got married, and then she was Assistant Advisor for the YBA with Mr. and Mrs. Yoshimura, John... Mister John. What's his first name... Danny Yoshimura, Victor's mother and father. Mrs. Yoshimura was Advisor and so my sister was Assistant Advisor; so. Then when she got married, they needed somebody to replace her so they told me to get out of that place and come and do that. And so I said, "Okay;" so I went... I got out of that counsel because all they had was---all they did was smoke cigars and you know they're talking Japanese *bakkari*.

And so I said, "That's not for me." So I went to the YBA, and there was about over 1,000 people I think. But, they don't come all at one time. But, then it goes by blocks, you know quads and stuff like that. And so that's why I have this pictures of that block councilman. I just picked them and then most of them are still living and that---the one that I felt wasn't going to---I thought he was just too young and not going to be doing too much, but then he... when I went to the conference, I found out

that he was a big shot. He turned out to be a big shot. He said, "Hey Kikue, what are you doing here?" He says like that; and I said, "Who in the world is calling me?" And then he said, "Don't you remember me?" And it was George Sato, and I says, "Yeah; now I remember you." I said, "What are you doing?" And he says, "Oh, I'm---I help around this church, you know quite often." And I heard he became Chairman and things like that. But, he passed away a couple years ago. And so anyway....

0:56:08.5

Interviewer:

Umm... yeah; go ahead. I'm sorry.

Isobe:

During these WBL (Western Buddhist League) conferences over here, well I go quite often and I know just about everybody everywhere we go.

Interviewer:

In your camp experience, did you have some---do you have---what were your general memories of camp? Were they bad or were they good, or...?

Isobe:

Well, the beginning was pretty bad, but towards the end it was fine for me.

Interviewer:

And how did you meet Tak, your husband Tak?

Isobe:

Oh, let's see; how did I meet him? I don't know; my friends were... they grew up together and... oh, I know; I was working for the Administration Office, you know the counsel office, and I was taking something---a message to somebody to another office, and then he happened to be coming... he's a photographer, but he didn't have anything. But he was---he didn't have the camera or anything. He was just walking across at the Administration Office, and we just saw each other and just didn't say nothing you know because we didn't know each other. And then I found out that he's a real good friend of my girlfriend, and they grew up together. And she told how - what a hard life he had and this and that. And then, and next time we walked around---walked, bumped into each other again, he didn't

say anything. And after... it's up to the guy to say hi or something.

So, I didn't say anything. And then about the third time, I finally said, "Hi, what are you doing," going---walking back and forth. **[Laughs]** And then that's when we sort of got our first acquaintance. But then mainly, the reason why we got together was my girlfriend and my sister was working... she was singing in the choir with Tak and that bunch. And they all liked Tak and so she told me, "You ought to meet him." And then my girlfriend says, "I'm going to introduce you," you know she's a Watsonville girl. She said, "I'm going to introduce you to him." And then I says, "You don't---you people don't have to introduce me to anybody." I said, "I'll find my own," you know. **[Laughs]** And then I said that as a joke, and then it turned out that something about him I guess; he was quiet and *kibei*. Like my father says, "If you're going to get married to anybody, you're going---that person has to be *nihonjin*... don't put this down... *nihonjin* and then they have to be a *Bukkyo* and they have to know Japanese or don't bring them home. And then so I had to look around for that kind of person, you know. **[Laughs]** If I do go out... if anybody asked me why then I have to make sure... that's how strong of a Buddhist he was, you know. And so then we started to go around.

0:59:23.1

Interviewer:

Tell us about Tak. Because he... went into the MIS?

Isobe:

No, he was... when I met him he was the President of the... the YBA was divided into two sections because it's such a big you know, Poston One. So he was the President of one side and then Masao Karisu was the President of the other side. So, I went to the Masao Karisu side because that---that's my section, you know. And then... well because of the YBA I guess we just met.

1:00:05.0

Interviewer:

Right, what did---how did Tak get---end up in the military in the MIS?

Isobe:

He was a Japanese school teacher at Minnesota when I married him.

Interviewer:

So was he like... did he volunteer?

Isobe:

No, he was drafted from camp. There was about over 70 something Japanese were drafted. That was the biggest draft they had. And at that time he left for Camp Shelby and then had to get his training for and then... where was it now? I guess they took tests or something and then found out that he knew a lot of Japanese. So they put him in the Japanese section. And then when the war... oh, I was... we were told to get out of camp; so... you know the younger people.

1:01:13.3

Interviewer:

What year was this now?

Isobe:

I can't remember. If you say a year, I could never remember a year because we never did---we never kept track of the date.

Interviewer:

How old were you? Do you remember how old you were?

1:01:26.1

Isobe:

I was about 22 I guess... 22 or 23. Yeah; I must have been about 23.

Interviewer:

Okay; I guess we'll take a break right now.

Isobe:

Would you like Coke?

[Break]

1:01:50.2

Interviewer:

Okay; so let's go back to about Tak and when he was at the Military Intelligence Service. So he was teaching Japanese in Minneapolis. Do you... did he ever tell you very much about his time when he was there?

Isobe:

No; he just goes to... he did his work and correct the papers and then when he comes back he corrects the paper. So, we didn't do much.

Interviewer:

Did you go to Minneapolis to be with him at that point?

Isobe:

Oh yeah... no; see in camp they told us we have to get out of camp. And so we all had to get out. And my father said, "Well you're not going alone. You're going to go if somebody responsible will take care of you," because we never separated, you know the family. So Frank Akita and my brother-in-law, Jiro Hara, they both escorted me to the train and we went up to L.A. *made*, and after we got to L.A. I had to go to Koyasan church.

All the ladies have to go to the Koyasan church and then the boys have to go to Evergreen Presbyterian Church or somewhere around there. And so we got separated and then I called him... oh, and then the lady of the house, Koyasan lady of the house, would have a bulletin with all the jobs offered---job offers, and then she sort of---I shouldn't say favored me, but she called me and said, "Would you like to take this job," and then; so. It was baby-sitting... working for a pediatrician and it's to baby-sit and light housework.

So I said, "Well, I'll have to go see the house with my two escorts, you know. They have to okay it." And so, I called them and then they went with me and it was in Hollywoodland. You know we went on a taxi and went to Hollywoodland and he says, "What do you think?" And I says, "Oh, I think I'll enjoy it." And then so he says, "Okay;" so.

Interviewer:

This is during the war though... the war was still going on?

Isobe:

Yeah; uh-huh. Doctor Kas was the doctor. He was a famous doctor in Hollywood. And so I came back and then Frank had to get his job and my brother-in-law had to go look for a job, too. And

then *Koyasan no tokoro* they had a cot for each girls and she told... the lady told me that it was a meeting room, you know before. And so they sacrificed it for us girls. But, I stayed there only two nights, I think, because I got the job right away. And then I got my sister and two other girls to come and stay with me so they could find a job. And so then... so I started working there and they were a real nice couple.

Interviewer:

Did they discriminate at all because...

Isobe:

No, oh no.

Interviewer:

... you're Japanese? Did they ever say anything to you?

1:05:32.8

Isobe:

No, no, no; she just says, "Come on...;" they call me Ruth because... I went by Ruth because Kikue is hard to say, you know. So I said, "Just call me Ruth." And so she says, "Ruth, come on; let's go to Chinatown. We're going to go to dinner." And I says... you know me, we're in war; so I says, "No, I'm going to stay home." And I never went with me. Every time they'd ask me to go with them, but... and then she would give me her card. She handed me... what was that name of the store, the department store?

Interviewer:

Saks Fifth Avenue.

Isobe:

Huh?

Interviewer:

Saks Fifth Avenue... remember you said, "Saks Fifth Avenue."

Isobe:

Yeah; Saks Fifth Avenue credit card, she told me that, "Go ahead and buy whatever you want with that."

Interviewer:

That's okay; go on.

Isobe:

And then... and but you know, us Japanese, we *enryo* and so I says, "No, I have everything. I have my own clothes; so you keep that. I don't want to be responsible for that." So I gave it back to her. And she says, "Don't hesitate." And she says, "Up the market that's two blocks away, they have fruits and everything---anything you like; so you just go ahead and pick what you want and put it on - charge it on my account."

Interviewer:

Wow.

1:07:01.1

Isobe:

But then I didn't; you know.

Interviewer:

Now, when did you get married to Tak?

Isobe:

And then while I was taking care of the baby, the child... she was two years old, and there was an infant that the nurse was supposed to be taking care of. And then the atomic bomb fell in August, and that time she came running to me and said, "Congratulations; aren't you happy? We won; we won." And so I says, "Oh yes." I said, "That's really... I'm glad the war is over;" I said like that, but inside of my heart it was different. But anyway, after that when Tak wrote me a letter and said, "Remember your father said we could get married as soon as the war is over?" So, I sent him a letter saying, "I'll write a letter to my parents." And then my father says, you know he did see that. So, I'll get the *baishakunin* for you and if you could make arrangements to come back to camp. So, I went back to camp and Reverend Masuoka was my *baishakunin*, him and his wife. And then for his side was Mr. and Mrs. Kimoto; they are both dead. But, they were indirectly related to them.

And then so from there I got the train ticket to go to Minnesota to get married. And in between we had to transfer and there was an old man, 82 years-old; he was deaf and he couldn't speak English. So I said, "Did you get *ojisan*, did you get a transfer?" And he says, "Transfer?" And I says, "Yes; transfer *Nakatta*, you cannot go on the bus, the train to Minnesota." And they said, "Come on; everybody get in line," and we had to get in line.

So I dragged that old man to the coach and then they said, "Where's his ticket?" And I says, "He doesn't have any." "Well, he can't go; he can't ride." And I says, "No, you have to take him because he's deaf, he's old, and he didn't know about the transfer." So, he says, "Well, there's not going to be a seat for him." And I said, "That's okay; he can have mine." And I didn't know how far it's going to take to go to Kansas City... to go to Minnesota from Kansas City. So anyway, I said, "He could have my seat." And they said, "Are you sure?" And I said, "Yes." And so... you know I was young yet, and so then I went in and then as soon as I was---got in, got him seated, then there's a post you know where you hold. So, when the train started moving I was holding that post. Did you know a Captain or somebody with a white uniform came to me and says, "Miss, would you like to have my seat?" And then I says, "Well where will you sit?" And he says, "I'm---I belong in the Armed Forces; so I could sit anywhere I want. Don't worry about me." And so he says, "You may have my seat." So I got his seat, and went to Minnesota.

1:10:52.2

Interviewer:

This is a Caucasian...

Isobe:

Yeah, uh-huh.

Interviewer:

... military man?

Isobe:

Uh-huh; and then so as soon as I---we reached... it started snowing and then as soon as we reached the station instead of being happy seeing Tak, I said, "Tak, get a taxi." [**Laughs**] And then he said, "What for?" I said, "Get a taxi; hurry up." And then so he had to get a taxi and we got that old man onto the taxi and his bundle and then - and then I have to show the WRA card to the driver and tell him to take him over there. And then after that then I says, "Tak, I'm sorry; you'll have to get my luggage now." [**Laughs**] And we got on the street car instead. And then he took me to the apartment that he got. That's...

Interviewer:

That's how you...?

Isobe:

... and then three days later, we got married and I stayed at my girlfriend's house.

Interviewer:

Uh-huh.

Isobe:

Her husband was overseas so she says, "You can stay over my house," because we grew up together in Brawley. And, so Tak... let's see, three days after we got married and we had three girls... the rest of them was all soldiers, you know--- instructors; then no honeymoon. And that was - and then he had to go back to school. I mean he got to come back to the apartment naturally, you know.

Interviewer:

So how long were you in Minneapolis?

Isobe:

Six months.

Interviewer:

And then where did you go?

Isobe:

Six months, well Tak said, "Well I'll take you to a nice Chinese eating place." So we went and then I saw Terri Ikari---her name, but it was... her maiden name was Terri Maeda. She came to me and says, "Aren't you formally Kikue Nishimoto, and I says, "Yes." And I says, "How did you know?" "Oh I asked somebody," or something she said. And then she said she remembered me as being the *obon* dancer, number one, because I used to go practice at Camp Two, and then have to show the 1,000 dancers. And then she says, "I remember your *nihonjin*... it had *tsuru* on it and it's orange(ish) color." And I said, "Gosh, you're sure observant." And then I found out that she's a *odeshi* for *kansuma*.

Interviewer:

Oh.

Isobe:

That's why she knew. And she says, "You know, I could get you a job right away---tomorrow. I'll get you a job tomorrow." And then I said, "Where?" And she said, "An insurance company." And

then I said, "Why do you have---I don't have experience in working for an insurance company." And she says, "They'll show you; don't worry." And then so she took me over there and they showed me, and did you know all I had to do was type the policies and I over-typed you know about three times more than the other people because I thought I better do good, you know. I was a fast typist anyway; and then so then I remember the teacher, the head said, "I want you girls to type a little faster. You can do better than that because there's a girl--- there's a lady here that can do two times more than you." And I thought, "Oh my God." I was... I just told her. I mean it was just between the head lady and me. And then... but she went and announced it and then I thought, "Uh oh, I'm in trouble."

1:15:08.6

Interviewer:

Were there... how many were there... is it a Japanese firm you worked for?

Isobe:

No, Hakujin.

Interviewer:

Caucasian firm?

Isobe:

Five minutes.

Interviewer:

Oh, okay; so then how long---how long did you... you stayed in Minneapolis for six months and then you went to... where did you go after that?

Isobe:

And then we got transferred to Monterey. He got transferred to Monterey.

Interviewer:

Doing what in Monterey?

Isobe:

Instruct---instructor... all the Minneapolis people were transferred.

Interviewer:

To Monterey?

Isobe:

Uh-huh; is that the end.

Interviewer:

And then... well I guess we could stop here and then we'll pick up the Monterey part on the next disk.

1:15:53.4

[Ed Kikue Isobe CD 1; Begin CD 2]

Interviewer:

It is 11:03 on March 30, 2004. This is a continuation and the second CD of the interview of Kikue Isobe, the same date being conducted by me, Lily Nakatani, for the South Bay Oral History Project. The audio and catalog persons remain the same. All copyrights, title and other rights arising out of this interview whether 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. Let's continue the interview.

Okay, Kik; maybe you could tell us... then you went to---now you moved; you're married and you moved to Monterey with Tak because that was his second assignment?

Isobe:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

So can you tell us what happened after that?

Isobe:

Well, he was an instructor there for a while and then they transferred him to the Pentagon after that for atomic survey. You know he had to go research or something for atomic survey. So he stayed there so many months and then he was transferred to Tokyo and then he was connected with CIC and so then he had to go to *Sendai*; you know it's close to Tokyo, I guess. So he was going as a messenger, taking important papers back and forth,

you know. And, he said he was---his office was next, about a block away from... what was that?

Interviewer:

Douglas MacArthur?

Isobe:

MacArthur; yeah... MacArthur's headquarter, and he stayed there after.... I was pregnant with six months in L.A. that time and then so it was time for him to either re-enlist or to discharge, you know. So I told him to get discharged because then he could continue his schooling. He liked photography so much that I told him, "You might as well come back and then go to photography school and....," but it's up to him. So he came back and that was the first time he saw his son, you know, because I had him when... he was born when Tak was overseas. So he didn't get the chance... so that's why I had a lot of pictures up there and I took it all off you know so that you people can see it. But, I had Archie come to the house and he took a picture of the baby as soon as it was born and in the crib, and so then I airmailed it to Tak so that he could see what his child looked like.

0:03:49.6

Interviewer:

Now, Archie is?

Isobe:

Archie is the father of Gary right here.

Interviewer:

Miyatake, Archie Miyatake.

Isobe:

Yeah; Miyatake uh-hm. And so I told him... not too long ago, I told Archie, "Do you remember the time you had to come over to the house taking a picture of my oldest, you know Craig, in a baby crib?" And he says, "Yeah; I could never forget that because that's the first time I ever did such a thing," he says. And he started laughing and he says, "I'll never forget that because....," it's the first time he did go to a crib and actually took picture. And then... but he knew the reason why, you know. And so we don't see each other too much now days, but then I used to see him quite often when Tak was living, you know; but.

Interviewer:

Did Tak ever tell you anything about his, you know time with the CIC ever?

Isobe:

No; we were separated; so.

Interviewer:

Even after he came back?

Isobe:

No.

Interviewer:

He didn't say too much?

Isobe:

Uh-uh; because I was working for... while he was... even though I was pregnant, she kept me until the last you know. I worked in the Motor Vehicle doing that license things you know right there on Hope Street. And so she was nice enough to let me work until the last because that way I guess I get a little... I mean, it will help financially, huh.

Interviewer:

Did you have problems finding a job after you came back here?

Isobe:

No, I had a girlfriend that worked in Motor Vehicle, a Brawley girl, and she told me, "Why don't you come and work for us." So I says, "Oh, you think your boss would hire me?" And she said, "Well yeah." She and I were real close; so she hired me. And then I got Ruby Iizuka in there, too... and who else was it? Ruby Iizuka was working for a Hakujuin home, too, just like I was. And then... so she started, too, but then she got laid off. And then after that, I was the last person. And I told the---I told the head lady, "Why she kept me until the end when I'm pregnant?" I said, "I thought I'd be the first one to be you know fired because I was pregnant." And she says, "No." She says, "You type fast enough." And then she says, "You need the money don't you?" And then I said, "Sure that would always help," you know. And so she says, "That's why I kept you until the end."

0:06:55.9

Interviewer:

So these were nice people then?

Isobe:

Oh yeah; Hakujin girl, lady; and she was in her... I think she was in her---close to 70s.

Interviewer:

So how did you relocate here to Gardena? How did you decide? When did that happen?

Isobe:

Oh, after he graduate... well let's see---why? Oh, we were renting... my *nesan* was renting in Boyle Heights, right there at Boyle Avenue and then my father says, "You can't you know be living there like that forever," you know. So what he did was he was doing sharecrop strawberry, and well they saved money from that. And then so half of the property that was on Figueroa, 190th and Figueroa, there's a two and a half acres there.

So, he put the half down for us and he says, "You people pay the balance," you know. You three sisters pay the balance to keep that property. And then so... and then in the meantime, well that **time Tak says, "He'll go to school from there," you know from the 190th. So what he did was from 190th and Figueroa, and he took his case and took his bento** and everything and went to the next street and caught a Gardena Bus to Wilshire. And so... and then Saturday and Sunday, he did gardening you know from 5 o'clock in the morning until about 8 to... because all he got was \$80 a month you know for schooling.

And then so he had to make extra money to feed us, too, because I was pregnant. And so and then my sister and I was... since my father got that two and a half acres, he plowed it and fixed it up so that we could plant strawberry or celery or string beans or whatever. So, we did that and then the boys would do the hard work, you know after they came back and.... Jay, you know Jiro Hara, the one that passed away... him and my Tak both made this... when we did the string beans well it's climbing so they have to put the post in, huh. So, he did that and then that stucco garage, my dad and Tak made---turned it into a... put up ply-board inside and then put a partition and so he made one side a bedroom; you know just enough for a double bed to go in and then a two-story... two... what do they call it?

0:10:05.3

Interviewer:

Bunk-bed?

Isobe:

Bunk-bed; yeah for the kids because I had three children then. And then a partition and then on the next side is a three-burner gas stove. And then he had... what do you call that... ice---refrigerator is the kind that you put in your trailer court or....

Interviewer:

Ice box?

Isobe:

It's---not exactly an ice box; it's a regular refrigerator to fit in. It's the smallest size refrigerator. We used it for our... and then for dishing---wash dishes... dish washing, we put that little you know a small size sink so we could wash our dishes there. And then we had a little dinette there so we could sit down and eat over there.

Interviewer:

So you lived - you lived on the farm then essentially for a while on Figueroa and 190th?

Isobe:

Yeah; right there on the corner where the---Pethaven is right there where the... there's Pethaven where everybody takes their dog and cat to... well that other... across the street is our---was... two and a half acres was ours you know. And then what happened was my sister's daughter got polio and so then she---so then I taught her how to drive. I just... she didn't know how to drive. But I says, "You better learn to drive you know when you come out in the country like this." So I showed her and she's my *nesan* so I couldn't scold her or anything you know even if she does something wrong in the way she drives. So I told her that, "You better learn," and then after she started to drive on her own then her daughter got that polio. So it was luckily that... since I was pregnant and I had two other children. I was pregnant with Ayako---I think the third one, and then my *nesan* had nerve enough to go to... what is that...?

Interviewer:

City of Hope?

Isobe:

No, that City of Hope is cancer.

Interviewer:

Children's Hospital?

Isobe:

Children's Polio... anyway for polio. So she drove up to there and then she started taking her there. And she had to train her, give her exercise, and then she had surgeries and all that. And so... but look how healthy she is now and she's got two sons... one graduated--two graduated from college already.

0:13:12.4

Interviewer:

So when did **Tak?** open up his studio here in Gardena?

Isobe:

Oh, and then after he helped... after he came back from gardening then he would... or from school, he'll go out on the ranch and then help us out you know to until it gets pretty dark. And then he went two years of this art---photography school, and as soon as he graduated, well then there's a place where they offered him so much an... it was near Christmas, so they told him to come in and work for him. But he says that... so he says, "Okay; I'll go," and then they were going---the amount they were going to pay him, I says, "You know Tak, it's better to just open up and then you know, the money that comes in will be yours, you know even though you have to pay expense.

And so why don't you---why don't we try and open up this---the center part of that you know the place where we first opened?" And then I was telling Toshi, she was coming from L.A.... I mean she was at L.A., and she used to come visit me you know because we grew up together from first grade. And then she says, "Well, I'll think about it. I was thinking of opening it at---by SC, you know a beauty shop." But then I said, "Yeah; but they're all school students and they can't afford you know hair---having their hair done. So why don't you just open next door to us." So she says, "Well let me think," and then so she thought.

Well one month later then she says, "Yeah; I think I'll start in." And then... so she commuted on the bus you know and then any time the---our phone rang, I used to run through---run to her place and then take the appointment for her. And then if her

worker didn't come, I had to go over and then go to his house and tell him, "Wake up, you know; you're supposed to take care you know of that place until **Toshi** gets there." And then---and so he says, "Oh, I didn't know it was that time." And then---and so that's how **Toshi** started. And then the way we started, well **Tak** on weekdays he'd go to gardening and then I would take my three children and drive the car to the---leave the car in the back, and then let them take a nap there. And **Ayako** was the only one---we had the little baby, the little tiny crib, where she could sleep any time she wants and then I gave her a bottle of milk, you know. So that way she was on milk anyway... so she was only 10 months old. So, and then the---and then kids were playing in the back yard and Yo Shigaki and Mary, they were real nice and they helped you know play around with them, too. And then Toshi's place and Faye... no I got pregnant with Faye four years after Ayako, and then so Ayako used to go over there to Toshi's house---Toshi's beauty shop and she would get that big old broom and try to sweep the hair for her, you know. So then Toshi bought her a little tiny broom and a dust pan and then she started cleaning and then she cleans her ashtray and everything and things like that.

We still talk about it right now, you know. And - and then that's when we started to---we said---I told her---told Tak, "Even though we're *heta*, you know you're a beginner just getting out of school, we could start and then they'll come and take at least an ID or something. So let's open up." And then so he says, "Yeah; I guess we could try." And then he went to auction place and bought these cameras and stuff like that and we [**Laughs**] started with \$50 in the bank. What a guts, huh? But, you know when you're young like that, you don't think that far. And so with \$50 in the bank and then we started the studio and then....

0:18:00.8

Interviewer:

So, what date was that? When did you... do you remember what date, around when you...?

Isobe:

Uh-uh.

Interviewer:

The first studio was on... the... where was it located?

Isobe:

It was located on 1133 Gardena Boulevard on the other side.

Interviewer:

Initially?

Isobe:

It was the north side of the street.

Interviewer:

I see.

Isobe:

And then across was the Ryo Komae and then the shoe store... remember Firstman's Shoe Store? And then Tad Uemura opened up a baby shop, but it didn't work. And then Giuliano right next to that.

Interviewer:

So they were all there when you moved in?

0:18:42.9

Isobe:

Yeah; uh-hm.

Interviewer:

When did you move across the street to the south side?

Isobe:

Oh, when that... there was an appliance store there and then they were trying to sell ice boxes and stuff like that. But it didn't... I guess they couldn't make a go of it; so they closed up. And then so as soon as we heard that, we just rushed over and then said let's take it over there because it's wider and we needed that widened space, you know to take the family picture.

Interviewer:

What year was that that you moved across the street?

Isobe:

I don't know. We didn't... we never kept track of those---the dates, you know... just automatically; we just did it you know.

Interviewer:

So what was Gardena Boulevard like back then when you first started out?

0:19:30.1

Isobe:

Oh, it was starting to look like a Japanese area, you know with the Toshi's starting a month after us and then Yo Shigaki Cleaner, and then Gardena Pharmacy was real popular because we used to go there when the kids were young you know. That was the only Japanese are. Then we used to go to Yamada---fertilizer because we were farming, too, at the same time.

And then so... well we slept in that garage I don't know how many years, but I remember the kids were real tiny. So, my son slept on the top and then the bottom, the two girls toe-to-toe, you know because they were small, huh. They were only a year apart. And then so my son used to jump off of his bunk-bed into our bed because that's how close it was. You know how small that stucco one-car garage... and then we really went through a lot. But, when that Yuri Takeyama's wife was... she was saying and her sister was saying something like, "Sister-in-law was getting married," and she wanted this and she wanted nice things, you know. So she says... she didn't say too much because it was going to be her sister-in-law, but then... but she says she used to say things and then... well I hope she doesn't read this, but anyway she used to say things, "I wish I had this and that," and so then one time she came to my house and then she says, "My **[Japanese Phrase,]**" she says like that. I said... that's when I told her, **[Japanese Phrase,]**. And then I told her all that.

And then, *nan-nen*. We moved on the other side---La Salle, we bought a brand new home. But, it was one toilet... bathroom I should say, and then we... my mother-in-law and brother-in-law moved in. You know we told them to move in with us. And then... because he was going into Air Corps you know and then to let her live alone would be an... you know it wouldn't be so easy. Well at that time I thought 60 years old was old, you know. So I did everything. And so we gave them one room and gave that bunk-bed to them---separated it, and then gave one room to them and then the three girls slept in one room... two girls---three girls. And then we had the other room. And there was only bathroom. So then as everybody got big---larger, everybody had to go to the bathroom; so then we decided we better get a larger home. And that's this house.

0:23:04.7

Interviewer:

It's a nice house.

Isobe:

And then---and so that's the story.

Interviewer:

So you've seen a lot of change in Gardena over the years...

Isobe:

Oh yeah.

Interviewer:

... and so **?Tak?** became you know a very prominent photographer in the South Bay area?

Isobe:

Yeah; well he started with the junior high school over there. It was combined with the high school, you know when Melody...

Interviewer:

Kobayashi

Isobe:

... she was going; well they were going there as high school. And then that switched over to the new one; remember?

Interviewer:

Uh-hm.

Isobe:

And then... and so he was doing the senior picture since from there to 25 years and then we quit.

Interviewer:

You did senior pictures for the Gardena High School?

Isobe:

Yeah; for Gardena.

Interviewer:

For 25 years?

Isobe:

Uh-huh; 25 years, and then the first quarter was black and white and then we had to make the black and white picture into a sepia tone to have the colorist hand color it with oil painting. And so I used to run over to---way over to... I don't even know... Venice and be way past Rosencrans... I used to take it over to here and she used to do oh hundreds of those pictures you know.

0:24:33.3

Interviewer:

They were hand-colored?

Isobe:

Yeah; eight by tens. So they'll never fade. And then the color came in and then we started that, but then they---it wasn't perfected so the color started fading. And then we used... sort of not too many complaints, you know. And so we did some over for them you know and then sprayed something over it so it won't change. And then now they have this one that shouldn't fade.

Interviewer:

Do you have any memorable moments from the studio, certain clients that came in or certain people?

Isobe:

What experience?

Interviewer:

Well, I enjoyed it; I enjoyed talking to everybody that came in and well naturally, everybody gets one or two people that you know isn't pleasant you know.

Interviewer:

Well, did you feel... was it difficult setting up business? Was the... you know was there any discrimination? Did you feel anything?

Isobe:

No, no; we didn't feel any discrimination, uh-uh.

Interviewer:

Even in the business with other Caucasian... did you ever have to interface with any other Caucasian business; no?

Isobe:

No; there weren't too many Caucasians. It was mainly *Nihonjin* and then the black people. They were pretty good you know because you know Tak used... the black people have different color blacks, you know. And some has ink color black and some is brown and light and all that. And so he has to try and stick to that. And then - and then the ink color one is really *kuroi-ne*. So those---why he makes it lighter than... they're real happy.

Interviewer:

Oh.

Isobe:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

That's interesting.

Isobe:

There's tricks to everything in that photography.

Interviewer:

We'll be finishing up the interview. Do you ever speak to your children and grandchildren about your experiences?

Isobe:

Well, they went through it with us, you know. And so they know what we went through and that's why they say they want to sort of repay back. But we said, "No, you just go ahead and go for your goal, you know." And so that's why Faye, she - she was studying all the way until she graduated high school... you know summer school---she went; she never missed it. And she was pretty smart. But then she got tired of it. And so I told her, I told Toshi, "You know what about her going to beauty school?" And Toshi says, "Yeah; there's a nice one in Beverly Hills you know. And that's... Charles Ross is noted as the number one. So why don't you just send her over there. And then so then from home she drove every day to Beverly Hills to do---to go to that school you know... excuse me.

Interviewer:

So let's sum it up; is there anything that you would like to say before we end our session here... like, I have this question; can you tell me why you might feel it's important to preserve these stories for future generations?

Isobe:

For future generations that would read, uh-huh; but everybody seems so busy.

Interviewer:

Okay; well thank you very much, Kikue. It was a pleasure interviewing you and....

Isobe:

Well, there's many, many things more to say, but then you know there's no end to it; uh-huh.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much.

Isobe:

Uh-hm; I'm sorry I couldn't be of....

[End Kikue Isobe CD 2]