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Guadalupe Speaks Oral History Project

Title: An Interview with Harry Masatani

Interview with: Harry Masatani, Guadalupe resident

With comments by: Marion Perales and Tom Neuman

Interviewed by: Lucia Stone, Cal Poly Student

(affiliation) Cal Poly Ethnic Studies Dept.

Edited by: Janet Crabaugh

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About the Guadalupe Speaks Project

Guadalupe Speaks is an oral history project that is part of California Stories, a multiyear initiative designed to strengthen communities and connect Californians by uncovering personal and community stories that help document multicultural communities in present day California. California Stories is funded by the California Council for the Humanities.

In 2003, the Guadalupe Speaks project began recording and transcribing oral histories of the residents of Guadalupe. The stories reflect the history and culture of the town, capturing the residents' impressions of their community. The stories represent the multicultural backgrounds of the residents including Swiss-Italian, Portuguese, Filipino, Chumash, Mexican, Chinese, and Japanese ancestry.

Situated approximately ten miles west of Santa Maria on historic Highway 1 on the border of Santa Barbara & San Luis Obispo counties, the City of Guadalupe was founded in 1843 as one of the earliest communities on the Central Coast. In 2003, the city has a population of 5,700, mixed with long-time and native residents, recent retirees from outside the county, and a large Latino population.

Guadalupe was once the principal agricultural center of northern Santa Barbara County, at one time providing one-third of all lettuce grown in California. Although it is still primarily an agricultural community, the crops have changed to include broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and other vegetables. However, Guadalupe is no longer the central distribution point for the area, and communities such as Santa Maria have surpassed it in growth by almost 2,000 percent. Guadalupe has remained at a standstill, much as it was 50 years ago, while the rest of the Central Coast has grown at an astounding pace.

Today, Guadalupe is a town poised between its past and its future. In 2003, the inaugural year of the Guadalupe Speaks project the small town is on the cusp of modernization and large-scale development. Through the Guadalupe Speaks project, the community will be able to document its history and unique, multicultural way of life.

Using the Guadalupe Speaks Oral Histories

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Guadalupe Speaks

Narrator: Harry Masatani

Interviewer: Lucia Stone

With Comments by: Marion Perales, Tom Neuman

Date: 06/11/03

Location: Mr. Masatani's residence (Campodonico house)

Stone: What is your full name and does it have any significant meaning?

Masatani: My full name is Harry Yoshio Masatani. Yoshio means good.

Stone: When and where you born?

Masatani: I was born on August twenty-first, nineteen twenty-six on South Broadway in Santa Maria, just kitty-corner from the Santa Maria Inn. - which was Santa Maria's first hospital, I think.

Stone: And what was your family life like growing up? Weekends, vacations.

Masatani: Just a normal family life: school, work, play, a lot of playing you know.

Stone: Did your family participate in any like weekend events or vacations?

Masatani: Summertime they used to send me to Terminal Island to grandparents. I spent a few summers down there. Going to beaches and...

Perales: Do you think that was for you, your experience, or for them?

Masatani: Well maybe just want to get me out, away for awhile. A good chance to visit grandparents.

Stone: Were you responsible for any chores, anything like that, growing up?

Masatani: There was some work I had to do. Two hours in store, and after school, pumping gas. That was one of the jobs. You know, the old-fashioned gas pump? Do you remember? The kind you actually have to pump, you know. Old gas pumps, scooping ice cream for ice cream cone. Chores like that.

Stone: When did you start helping out with the store?

Masatani: Oh, practically all my life. I grew up in the store. You saw that picture when I was about four, five years old.

Stone: When did they open the store?

Masatani: My dad started in 1922.

Stone: Describe what the inside of your house was like? What was your room like?

Masatani: Being an only child, I had the front room facing the Dolcini house. Just normal furniture; gas stove, sofas, tables and stuff like that. We used to have a parrot. My grandma bought this parrot from a sailor in Terminal Island - where the ships come in. Think she paid five dollars for this parrot. She brought it to me when I was born. On the train, she came by train. She missed it so much that she decided she was going to buy another one. She bought another

parrot from a Chinese sailor. This parrot spoke nothing but Chinese I heard. [Laughs] That's the story I heard. This parrot was kind of fun because it would imitate people's voices, holler out. It was fun having a parrot.

Stone: Your parents - what type of behavior did they expect you to have? What rules did you have to follow?

Masatani: They were too strict on me. No, no. Weekends I got to go to movies. Just a lot of playing: biking, skating. Childhood games; all kinds of games we used to play, like kick the can, cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, marbles. There was one game called "cut the pie." We would make a circle in the dirt and we each would have our pocket knife - we'd open it up, flip it and stick it in the dirt. The side of the blade determined where the line was. We drew a line and would try and accumulate as much of the pie as we could. One time it was my turn. I stuck the knife, it went through my friend's shoe. Right through the leather shoe. I says "Boy oh boy am I in trouble; I must of cut his toe off." It had gone right between his big toe and the next toe. Not even a scratch. That was one thing I remember. There was a lot of toys. We played with homemade kites, scooters. Stuff like that - just homemade, not store bought.

Perales: You said you went to the movies, where? The Royal Theatre?

Masatani: You know where the Basque house used to be? Geno's Restaurant? That was the only theatre in town at one time.

Perales: So the theatre before that.

Masatani: Just before the war they built that theatre uptown. I think it was fifteen or twenty-five cents for the theatre. And they'd show a movie and then show a serial. Like 'Flash Gordon,' something like that. At the end of the show, he's about ready to get hammered and it cuts off. It's continued the next week. So we had to go back next week to see what happened. It was a serial.

Stone: What values did your parents emphasize? Did they emphasize Buddhist beliefs?

Masatani: They weren't that religious.

Stone: Conservatives?

Masatani: They're conservatives. They weren't too religious.

Stone: What kinds of occasions or holidays did your family...

Masatani: We observed all the holidays. [At] Thanksgiving the Merkin Bakery would roast our turkey for us. Christmas we always had Christmas trees. We observed all the holidays.

Stone: Did you celebrate them with your neighbors?

Masatani: Yes, neighbors would come over.

Stone: Fourth of July?

Masatani: Fourth of July was a time for fireworks. Firecrackers. They're illegal now I think. You know, firecrackers used make a big pop. You know when you light those up.

Perales: What about the Oban? Did they celebrate the Oban Festival [inaudible] at that time?

Masatani: Oh, they used to have it here. The Buddhist church used to be on the Guadalupe Street, where the Seventy-Six station is now. They owned a playground where the new one is. It was an open field. I think they used to have it opened there but it got so big they had to move to another area, larger facility.

Perales: Do you remember a typical Oban celebration? When you were growing up did you participate [inaudible]?

Masatani: It's very similar to what they do today. Sell dinners and dance around, stuff like that.

Stone: I'm assuming that's a Buddhist celebration?

Perales: She doesn't know what the Oban is.

Masatani: That's a Buddhist celebration to remember the people that's gone. People that died.

Stone: It's like a festival?

Masatani: Yes, it's a festival

Stone: Did they have a parade?

Masatani: They have it in Santa Maria. It's coming up, in fact. If you want to go and take a look you can. It's free.

Stone: What was your neighborhood like growing up?

Masatani: Neighbors, the Degrasperous [sp]. Have you ever heard of Degrasperous[sp]? They were on this side, north side. Southside was Japanese families. Dolcinis in front. The Wolf family; the druggist was next door. Their kids were a little bit older than I was, so I didn't play with them too much.

Stone: Where was your house?

Masatani: I don't remember the address – the second house on the corner on Olivera Street. That's Ninth, Ninth and Olivera. So I grew up in the same block here.

Stone: What was school life like?

Masatani: School life was good. When I started kindergarten, Mrs. Negrich was my kindergarten teacher. About thirty or forty years later my kids started kindergarten and Mrs. Negrich [sp] was there for them. School was fun. They had tennis courts. Played a lot of tennis. They had a school tournament. I was runner-up one year. When I graduated eighth grade the American Legion presented me with an award. It was called American Legion scholastic award. It was presented to me by Henry Dolcini. That's your grandpa?

Perales: Yes.

Masatani: One more thing. Maybe thirty or forty years later when my daughter graduated from eighth grade she won the same award, the American Legion scholastic award.

Stone: What was a typical school day for you? How early would you get up and how would you get there?

Masatani: We walked because we lived just two blocks away from the school. School was fun, recess especially. We played all kinds of games.

Stone: What about when regular school ended? What did you do?

Masatani: We spent an hour or so playing. A lot of marble playing. We used to play for keeps. You're not supposed to gamble but we used to play for keeps.

Stone: When did you start going to the Japanese language school and what was that like?

Masatani: I think that was once or twice a week. After grammar school we had to march down to the Buddhist Church, where they had a Japanese language school. Our parents made us go whether we liked it or not.

Stone: What was the language school like?

Masatani: It was mostly Japanese kids, but there was a few Mexican kids too that were interested. Like the Amarillas [sp] girl. They studied Japanese too, I heard. But it was okay. Didn't learn too much but we didn't put too much effort into trying to learn.

Stone: Who were your friends when you were young? And what did you do together?

Masatani: One of my best friends was named Patrick. His parents owned a cleaner uptown here. His pictures are in there; I'll point them out to you later. We used to play marbles and bike riding, skating and all that kind of stuff.

Stone: And is there any particular grammar school memory or language school memory that's your favorite?

Masatani: Grammar school, but not especially. I remember talking about Mrs. Abernathie [sp], eighth grade teacher. She was known for her twelve-inch ruler. If you did something wrong she would make you stick your hand up; not palm up, palm down. And she would get that ruler and smack you a couple of times. I never got smacked.

Stone: Yoshio.

Masatani: Yeah, the good.

Stone: What would be your happiest childhood memory?

Matasuni: Just playing, carefree. Bike riding. One time without our parents' knowing we took a bike ride out to the ocean, to the beach. That was a no-no. One of the kids was a boy scout and he baked some little hard biscuits. We made biscuits and came back. We're not telling our parents anything about it.

Stone: Did you get caught?

Masatani: No, we didn't get caught.

Stone: What is your saddest childhood memory?

Matasuni: I'm trying to think, but nothing really sticks out in my mind.

Stone: When was your very first job? And how much did you make?

Masatani: I worked in the store since childhood. But I didn't get a salary or nothing. My first job was in camp. That's later on, in the Internment Camp. One summer I worked washing windows at the hospital. The pay was twelve dollars per month. I was figuring out a few years ago how much it was and it came to about four cents an hour. Wow, four cents an hour. [Laughs]

Stone: So did you think Guadalupe was a good place to grow-up?

Masatani: Very nice, very nice place. The depression hit and we didn't think about it. I guess other parts of the country was depressed but not here. Everything's normal.

Stone: When and why did your mother first come to Guadalupe?

Masatani: In the old days, there used to be a matchmaker, something like that. I think Japanese girls were kind of scarce. My mother was a pretty good looker, I hear. Men were after her. My father won out, I guess.

Stone: So she came with him?

Masatani: She got married and came over here, yes.

Stone: What type of schooling did she have?

Masatani: She was born in Hawaii in 1900 or 1901. When she was maybe five or six years old, they came to California. Right after the 1906 earthquake and fire. She always mentioned they had to sleep in tents because the whole town was kind of burned down. Their destination was Monterey, because my grandpa was a fisherman. My mom grew up there in Monterey and I think she finished grade school. That's about it. I think grade school education is all she had.

Stone: When and why did your father come to Guadalupe?

Masatani: My dad, I heard, was a very good student in Japan and some teacher wanted to adopt him and educate him. My dad left. This is towards the end of World War one. He joined the merchant marines. I think from Japan the ship sailed around India and what's the point in South Africa? Capetown or Cape Horn? Was it Capetown? The southern most point of Africa. Cape Horn?

Perales: Cape Horn I think is around...

Masatani: South America? Then Capetown is the one in Africa. I guess the ship went around there. He went to Europe, France, and then the ship sailed the Atlantic to Argentina. They loaded up with corned beef to take back to Europe. This was right after World War one. When the Falkland Islands battle was on, England and Argentina fighting - my dad says "I remember stopping at that place." The ship sailed back to Europe, to Belgium. There's a harbor, Antwerp? He says when the ships got to the harbor there all they could see was the masts of the ships. They were sunk sticking out of the water. That's all you could see he said. Then from there he shipped to the United States and he jumped ship in New Jersey.

He jumped off the ship. So he was here illegally. He's a wetback [Laughs]. He heard about Mr. Minami, who's the farmer. By that time Mr. Minami was a pretty well established farmer in the Guadalupe, Santa Maria area, and Mr. Minami is a distant relative. He comes from the same village my dad was raised in. It's in the state of Wakayama. In the little village, it's called Isumi. So my dad looked up Mr. Minami to come to California. He worked for him for a while, but [then] decided he's going in business. People tell him, "Oh you're crazy. You're making good money in the fields." "You're going to give all that up to start a business?" But anyway he did. [Laughs]

Stone: I didn't know he jumped ship.

Masatani: He jumped off the ship in New Jersey.

Stone: Mr. Minami extended himself for your dad?

Masatani: Well, my dad came looking for him.

Stone: So he knew of him when he jumped?

Masatani: No, I don't think so. Never expected to see him here.

Stone: What type of schooling did your dad have?

Masatani: I think he might have finished high school, because he mentioned a teacher wanted to adopt him, or tutor him or something.

Stone: Then how did your dad meet your mom in San Pedro?

Masatani: I guess by hearsay. They said "There's a woman down there, marriageable age." [Laughs] My dad is single. Some kind of arrangement.

Perales: Did his family arrange it or do you think he already somehow had...

Masatani: I don't know exactly how. But in the old days a lot of single men used to call them "picture brides." They would exchange photos. There'd be guys with some nice looking guy's picture over there. [Laughs] Then the bride would come over and be surprised, "Hey, you're not the guy in the picture!" But it's too late. Things like that happened.

Stone: What did your dad tell you about life in Japan?

Masatani: He grew up in a remote area with a lot of mountains and trees. He had property over there, a lot of mountains. Seven mountains in the lumber business. When he died he left it all to me. But the lumber [inaudible] is all imported from Washington, or Oregon, whatever. The lumber over there is so expensive to cut down, bring down to the mill. It's worth hardly anything I heard. The property's there but I just pay the taxes on it and that's it. He didn't eat too much meat in those days. My dad and his father went hunting and they shot a wild pig! His mother wouldn't let them cook it in the house, so he says him and his father had to build a fire outside to cook this wild pig. That's what he told me. And what else?

Stone: Like "Not in my kitchen."

Masatani: Much less cook it in the house, you know.

Stone: Before your dad opened his business, he worked for Mr. Minami?

Masatani: Yes. He also worked in the eucalyptus trees up here, on the mesa, planting some of the trees, chopping them down, whatever.

Stone: How did he hear about Minami? How was he [Minami] already established and what did he do?

Masatani: He was a pretty well established farmer. They say he was a very lucky person. He was known as the “Lettuce King” at one time. Everything he planted, when vegetables matured, the price was way up there when it was time to harvest. I think we were distant relatives, according to my dad.

Stone: When he worked up on the mesa was he working for Minami as well?

Masatani: No, no. Some people that owned the properties up there.

Stone: Your dad’s type of work, and even starting the business: how common were his different professions?

Masatani: He never had them before.

Stone: During the time, how common was it to be a farm worker, or just be a laborer...

Masatani: There were a few stores already that other Japanese people had started. There was a pretty big population of Japanese people here. I think they all made a living doing it. One of our competitors was Mioshi’s. Tory Mioshi was one of our city councilmen. He was

supervisor. Their store was right catty-corner from us, so we were competitors.

Stone: Did your mom ever have a job when she was in Guadalupe?

Masatani: Just worked in the store. Dad and mom together.

Stone: Was it common for couples to work together?

Masatani: I think so. In fact, most of them did. Husband and wives. Like the cleaners, husband and wife they worked together. Restaurants, you know husband and wife they work together. Like the jewelry store. Cuttiamma? Jewelry store, where the clock is. The husband did the repair work on watches but his wife waited on customers and stuff like that. In those days people lived behind the stores in shops. We were at our own place, a separate house. But a lot of the businesses had living quarters in the back, and that's where the people used to live.

Stone: So in 1922 he started the store?

Masatani: Yes.

Stone: How did he begin it? How did he come up with the money?

Masatani: He must have saved some money to start it, Aliens couldn't own any property back then. Until about 1954, something like that. So he rented from the Acquistapace's [sp], where Two Guys Pizza is now. We just lived one block away from the store. We were open for long hours, from seven to ten. Long, long hours they worked.

Stone: How long were your parents together before they had you? Was it common to have kids at this time?

Masatani: Let's see. I was born in 1926 and they must have married around '22. Somewhere around there. But I heard I had another brother that was born. Still-born.

Stone: Was it common to have kids at this time?

Masatani: Yes. I guess she had difficulty with the first one, so when I came along maybe that's why they decided to have me in the hospital. That Dr. Lucas's hospital in Santa Maria. Maybe that's why they gave birth over there.

Stone: What was Dr. Lucas like?

Masatani: Dr. Lucas, he was a character. I hear he started out in the morning with a big pitcher of gin or whiskey or something, with a raw egg in it. That's how he'd start the day off. Every other word was a cuss word, according to the stories I heard. When he got his car, Model T Ford, one time it got away from him. He was hollering out "Whoa, you son of -" Not S.O.B.: (the words) in full. "Whoa, you..." at his car. I heard he didn't like to put the car in reverse, drive backwards. His garage had a front door, and they opened another door in the back of the garage. Drive through, make a U-turn and come out the front door.

Masatani: [Viewing picture] This is my best friend Patrick.

Stone: Is he Japanese too?

Masatani: Yes.

Stone: Were most of your friends Japanese?

Masatani: I think so. I had a few not Japanese friends, but mostly Japanese.

Stone: Why is that?

Masatani: There was just a lot of them around. Their parents would know each other....

Stone: Do you think different nationalities just stayed together or was it just kind of incidental?

Masatani: I don't know. There was other Swiss-Italian, Italian bakeries but there was a lot of Japanese businesses too. Japanese doctors, maybe a dentist, a druggist, the shoemaker, the barber, the bars, restaurants - the movie theatre, Japanese built that one. Gas stations, beauty shops, a lot of businesses.

Stone: So it was the biggest? That minority was the majority?

Masatani: When I was growing up.

Stone: I want to go back to the first store that your dad came up with. I want to know if it was common to have a store? It sounds like it was. Was yours first or was it Miyoshi's?

Masatani: There were others before, I think. But I think my dad had the choice location, right in the heart of town. Across from the bank and across from where the Far Western is now. It was the main

intersection, where the flagpole used to be in the middle of the street. Some cities used to have their flagpoles right in the main intersection of town.

Stone: What types of things did you sell? Were there Japanese products as well?

Masatani: Japanese, all kinds of products. Canned goods, newspaper goods, and then later on my dad started to sell meat. The next-door neighbor used to own the Pioneer Meat Company. They didn't like it at all, you know. It was Shirley's father who used to work at the butcher shop. The kids used to go shop and buy meat and George would always give the kids a weenie. I remember that. You know, a free hotdog. So we became competitors I guess, more or less. We sold groceries besides, not just meat.

Stone: So it was along the lines of grocery, but was it like the Campodonico, where it had meat, hardware...?

Masatani: Everything. Work clothes. One time somebody stole a pair of work clothes, Levis or something like that. The Constable, Town Constable, was a barber. So my dad ran over to the barbershop to tell the Constable somebody stole something, work clothes from the store. My dad ran into the barbershop and he says, Mr. Camp - the Constable says "Sorry, I can't go right now, I am right in the middle of a haircut." He was the only law in town - one-man law. That's the way it was.

Stone: So he had to wait?

Masatani: You know that little jail over there? You know where the jailhouse is? Weekends when people get drunk and rowdy, Mr. Camp would throw them into the jail. Never locked the door. When the guys sobered up they would just walk out of the jail.

Stone: Wow.

Masatani: I saw something interesting there at the jail. They had a fundraiser to raise money to restore the jail. They were arresting people from town, you know different people. To get out you had to pay a bail; that's how they were raising money to restore that jail. So they arrested me and took a picture with a striped uniform on and [I] looked in the cot and there was a thin mattress, black and white mattress. On the side it said W.R.A. That's War Relocation Authority. That was a mattress used in camp. I don't know where they got it but they have it in that jail there. I said "Wow, W.R.A." That's the kind of mattress we had.

Stone: Would a family bring it back or would...

Masatani: I don't know where they got it.

Stone: I wonder what camp too.

Masatani: Maybe war surplus or something, you know. They got it somewhere.

Stone: Whose store came first? Your dad's or Mr. Miyoshi's?

Masatani: Maybe around the same time. It was other Japanese stores: Oishi's, and Goto's and Nakase's - maybe five or six Japanese-

owned stores. There was two Filipino-owned stores. Not too many Swiss-Italian. About two others, main stores.

Perales: Your mom was [inaudible] - she retained her citizenship.

Masatani: When she married a non-citizen she lost her citizenship.

Perales: So that act was already...

Masatani: Yes.

[Second tape begins]

Stone: What would have been your brother? I thought there were two miscarriages.

Masatani: There were two. Both miscarriages I heard.

Stone: Finally you were born and you grew up working in the store. What did your parents expect of you and your future? Did they have any expectations? Did they expect you to go to school?

Masatani: No. No expectations.

Stone: Did they expect you to work in the store when you got older?

Masatani: I don't know. Could be. They never pushed me or anything.

Stone: Did your parents participate in any community affairs, or even religious affairs with the Buddhist church?

Masatani: They weren't that religious. They go to some of the functions of the Buddhist Church but they weren't that religious.

Stone: Was your dad, because I know you were, part of American legion?

Masatani: No, no. He never served in the armies. You have to be a service man to join the American Legion.

Stone: In your household, who made the decisions?

Masatani: Probably my dad.

Stone: What kind of things would he look over?

Masatani: Starting new ventures, like trucking businesses. Besides the market he had a trucking business and shipped produce to the markets, stuff like that. Did I tell you about the watermelon story? Once my dad bought a truckload of watermelons towards the end of summer. The watermelons were getting kind of ripe and we had to get rid of it. A boy named Frank Sakomoto was a couple years older than I. He's old enough to drive. So we loaded up the truck and went house to house, all over town here. Ten cents or fifteen cents, whatever we could get for it. So we got rid of the watermelons. This boy, Frank Sakomoto, turned out to be a doctor. He was here last Monday to visit some of his friends but I didn't get to meet him because my son's father-in-law passed away and we were busy with the rosary and all that kind of stuff.

Stone: What were the daily schedules of your parents when you were growing up?

Masatani: Probably early – [open store at] seven, they'd keep the store open til ten o'clock, all long hours.

Stone: No one was ever really home? What would you do during that time, I mean if you were at school...

Masatani: I'd get out around, what time was it? Around three, three-thirty, something like that. I don't recall. We'd play, we had friends. All kinds of games. Listen to the radio, some of the old shows...Fibber Magee and Molly. Have you heard of Fibber Magee and Molly on the radio? He would open the door and everything would come falling out of the closet. Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy. The Lone Ranger. Inner Sanctum, kind of a spooky one. You'd hear the door squeaking open, that was a spooky one there. All kinds of radio shows. Oh! Major Bowes Amateur Hour. Amateurs would compete you know in all kinds of...

Stone: What...

Masatani: Heroes! We all had heroes. Joe Lewis. Donald Budge, he was a good tennis player. Donald Budge. I saw him play when he was pretty old there in L.A. one time. Donald Budge was one of my heroes. Babe Ruth. What else was there? A lot of cowboys - Tom Mix, and his horse Tony, Buck Jones, Tim McCoy, some of the cowboy heroes. When I visited my grandparents in Terminal Island, we had to cross the [inaudible] in a ferry boat.

Stone: Before and after school, or since both your parents were at work seven to ten...

Masatani: I would help them at the store, yes.

Stone: You'd hang out?

Masatani: Yes. While it was light we would still play a little bit because we could still skate or ride scooters on the sidewalks – stuff like that. Of course when it got dark you knew you had to go inside, so I stayed in the store.

Stone: Would you have a bedtime or did your parents...

Masatani: Bedtime. Mom put me to bed.

Stone: At ten?

Masatani: No - maybe - might be around ten.

Stone: Because that's when they came home?

Masatani: We just lived one block away so it was not too far away.

Stone: Before school were you at the store?

Masatani: No. Mom would send me off to school. You know, feed me breakfast and send me off to school.

Stone: Did they ever have weekends to themselves?

Masatani: Hardly, hardly.

Stone: Pretty much twenty-four seven?

Masatani: Occasionally holidays we would close, but other than that, just worked all the time.

Stone: Did your parents ever separate?

Masatani: No, they were always together. They used to have pretty big fights but they stuck it out I guess. They stuck it out.

Stone: When did they pass away? Or who went first?

Masatani: My dad passed away in, gee, how many years ago? I think it has been seventeen, eighteen years ago. I don't know what year that was. I have it written down here, if you want the exact year. My mom passed away in the year two thousand. They're both buried here in Guadalupe Cemetery.

Stone: Who were they buried by?

Masatani: A Buddhist priest.

Stone: Is there a separate Buddhist area of the cemetery? Or how's it divided?

Masatani: There used to be I think. But it's kind of mixed now.

Stone: It did used to be separated?

Masatani: I think in the old days, the Chinese graves they didn't want too close to the Caucasian graves, so I think they had their own section. There's a bunch of them around there together. But it's kind of getting mixed these days.

Stone: So did your parents, before they passed away, did they already have...

Masatani: They had the plot, yes.

Stone: So it's divided more along the lines of religion or the lines of race?

Masatani: Of graves, yes. Availability or whatever.

Stone: It's small - I just thought it was odd cause I saw how all Japanese are in one area. and all Swiss-Italian. I mean, was that agreed segregation? Or it just happened?

Masatani: It kind of happened. The early settlers were Swiss-Italians. They are all almost in the front part, you know. The later immigrants, like the Japanese, are towards the back.

Stone: What is the Buddhist funeral service procedure like? What do they do?

Masatani: Oh - I only know the Catholic one. They talk about the person's life and stuff like that. I went to Mr. Tomoko's funeral. The name's Massey, he was a great baseball player. I think he's in a Japanese hall of fame, you know famer. At the service the organist comes out with "Take me out to the ball game" during the funeral. It was kind of different. [Laughs]

Stone: How is a Buddhist burial different from a Christian or Catholic? Do you have to be in a casket or...

Masatani: Yes, I think most people have caskets. Except for this one other case I heard about. I told you about that one case.

Stone: Who would do the ceremony? How long would it be?

Masatani: Well, it depends. My son's in-laws, they're Catholic, their service was about an hour and a half long, and then they had the burial, you know. That was a long funeral.

Stone: Are Buddhist ones that long?

Masatani: No, I don't think so. But everybody goes up to pay their last respects, you know. Everybody in the church. Their custom is to give money. Have you heard about that? That's to help them with burial expenses, stuff like that. So when somebody in their family dies, now they expect return. What's what it is.

Stone: Who would conduct the Buddhist funeral services?

Masatani: We have a Reverend that takes care of this church and the Buddhist church in San Luis Obispo. You know the road to Avila Beach? There's a church across the canal there. It's a very picturesque church there, among the trees. Next time you go to Avila Beach look to your right and you'll see that church there.

Neuman: It's right by the Bob Jones bike trail.

Stone: Right near where?

Neuman: By the Bob Jones bike trail.

Stone: Are all Japanese buried by the Buddhist church?

Masatani: No. A lot of them are Christians too, so. Some are Catholics. My son married a Catholic girl, so he had to convert. Times are changing.

Stone: If you wanted [a burial plot] by the front of the cemetery could you have one?

Masatani: I suppose so, if it's available. You can't discriminate in a cemetery, I don't think.

Stone: This cemetery is kind of unique with all those angels and stuff like that. You don't see that hardly anywhere.

Perales: In Santa Maria I think they restrict - don't allow - the old monuments. I wonder if they put restrictions out here too.

Masatani: I think, yes. A lot of cemeteries just have to be flat, you know.

[TAPE 2]

Masatani: Do you know what church bulletins are? They put announcements in there and send them out, kind of humorous. One goes: "The church will be having an outdoor sing along tonight at the park in front of the church." It goes on to say, "So bring your blankets and come prepared to sin." They left out the "g." [Laughs] One more was, I remember, "This morning's sermon is 'Jesus walks on water.'" Evening sermon 'Searching for Jesus.'

Stone: I like that one. [Laughs]

Masatani: Another one is “Church will be serving a bean supper tonight at five o’clock; music to follow.” [Laughs] Those are bulletins.

Stone: You said you were about fifteen, or you were about fourteen, when the war started?

Masatani: When the war started, yes.

Stone: So what kind of global events were kind of happening when you were in your sophomore year of high school?

Masatani: In Social Studies the - what you call it? - the project for the semester was ‘National Defense.’ Life magazine had all kinds of pictures: U.S. battleships, aircraft carriers, airplanes. I clipped all those pictures out and made a booklet to turn in for the semester. I think I got an ‘A’ in that. [Laughs] When the FBI came and searched our house, they found that book, with all those pictures and information about battle ships and everything. They confiscated it, and they tracked me down in a camp where I was in Colorado - Amache, Colorado. That’s the camp I was in. They tracked me down about a year and half later and said, “What is this book about?” So I had to explain what it was. It looked like spy notes. Gathering information about the United State Military.

Stone: When all this world war stuff was happening, did it affect your family in any way? Before, obviously before, the camps. A curfew or?

Masatani: Yes, there were curfews and you couldn’t go within so many miles. Yes. I forgot how many miles.

Stone: It wasn't a time of day you had to go in, you just couldn't..

Masatani: Anytime of the day. In fact, [in] some towns the lines were right between the town. I forgot what town. You couldn't go from one side of town to the other side of town.

Stone: There was like a radius?

Masatani: It was something there. I heard of towns like that.

Stone: So it wasn't "In at nine o'clock?" It was more "You can't go past this point."

Masatani: Yes, it was distance you could not travel.

Stone: Can you remember what you were doing on Pearl Harbor Day? What your reaction was to the news?

Masatani: Pearl Harbor, that was a Sunday. I think I went to Buddhist Church that day. Parents used to send us to church. Make you go. When they came out of church, I heard the news that Pearl Harbor was bombed. The very next day in social studies, our whole class had to listen to FDR's Declaration of War. That was kind of uncomfortable, sitting there, with all the Caucasian kids. That was kind of uncomfortable, yes.

Stone: How did your family react when you went home after church? I mean what did they...

Masatani: They was telling me what happened. You know, what they heard.

Stone: Were they scared? Or were you scared initially?

Masatani: No, I wasn't scared or anything.

Stone: But you already kind of felt at school the next day, did you feel that they were...

Masatani: It kind of felt like there's a war that would be coming on. Even the [unclear] thought that because in nineteen forty our subject was national defense. So, "Oh, they're preparing for war."

Stone: How did your neighbors respond to the news?

Masatani: Neighbors - nothing special.

Stone: Shock?

Masatani: Yes

Stone: At school, anywhere, downtown or what not, did you ever feel any form of segregation, or...

Masatani: No - friends were friends from grammar school. No matter what happens, you're still friends or classmates.

Stone: There was no evil stares following global events?

Masatani: No.

Stone: How were you informed about leaving? Or people in the town? I know your dad went first, so how were you notified? What was it like?

Masatani: We left Guadalupe to move near Marysville, so I don't know how this town was, but they gave so many days notice, maybe a week or something like that, to clean-up your business, whatever you have to do to get prepared to be sent to camp. But we moved away just before evacuation to Marysville. Did I mention to you my dad had a friend in Marysville? Marysville is inland, you know. The coast was zone one, a little bit inland zone two, zone three. I think Marysville was a little bit inland so, my dad says "Move over there, where my friend is. It's zone two, or three, so maybe you won't have to be incarcerated if you move over there." That's why we moved away. But it didn't do any good, we still got rounded up.

Stone: Away from where to Marysville?

Perales: Was your dad already...

Masatani: No, no. My dad was in North Dakota.

Stone: Where were you when he found out?

Masatani: When he found out about the evacuation?

Stone: That he was going to go? Yes.

Masatani: There was no warning. They just came and picked almost all the heads of the households, all the men. So there were left just the women and the children.

Perales: Was that pretty quickly after? Do you remember the month?

Masatani: You mean after the war started?

Perales: Yes, remember when they came?

Masatani: Pretty soon after it started. I don't remember how many weeks but it was pretty close.

Stone: What season?

Masatani: It was wintertime, December seven; so maybe around, maybe December, maybe beginning of January.

Stone: Your dad was picked up from Guadalupe and then you moved to Marysville?

Masatani: Yes, after my dad was picked up.

Stone: You left all your belongings?

Masatani: We had everything here, yes. So we had to dispose of whatever we had as best we could.

Stone: Did you give it away or sell it?

Masatani: Just about gave everything away.

Stone: What about your dog? What happened to your dog?

Masatani: We just left it there. I think we gave it to a neighbor to take of.

Stone: How did this make you feel? You were fifteen when you up and had to move and leave your friends from Santa Maria.

Masatani: It was kind of dramatic, I guess. Just pull up roots and take off like that. But my dad was in the trucking business and a guy named Bruno Strazinni [sp] used to live a few blocks from us. He used to drive a truck for us. He drove us to Marysville.

Stone: Where did you stay in Marysville and how long were you there til you got...

Masatani: My dad's friend had a camp, like a labor camp. They used to feed a bunch of people. The workers weren't there anymore but they used to run this camp. That's where we stayed until the order came out for evacuation.

Stone: Your mom, how was she coping with this? Who was the kind of the stronger one between the two of you since it was obviously a shocking situation?

Masatani: I guess my mom had to be strong. I was still a kid.

Stone: Did she express fear to you? Or did you tell her?

Masatani: No, she didn't express fear but [it] must have been pretty traumatic.

Stone: Do you remember what went through your mind when you were fifteen? Like "What's going to happen to me at camp?" What kind of questions came up?

Masatani: We didn't know what to expect, you know. Something like this don't happen everyday. They said all you take is what you could carry with you. The suitcase, the bedrolls, that's all we could take.

Stone: Were there any required objects to bring or anything like that?

Masatani: They didn't give us any clues. We didn't know where we were going, either, so we tried to get warm clothing and maybe boots, because you might be sent out to some barren area where there's snakes, whatever. We didn't know where we were going. So my dad and mom bought me engineer's boots or whatever you used to call them, you slip them on. In case there's scorpions or rattlesnakes or whatever.

Stone: That was before you left? You got supplies?

Masatani: You went to shop in Marysville, yes.

Stone: You brought warm clothing and what not. But were there any sentimental items or anything you noticed your mom brought like pictures?

Masatani: I don't think so because all we [could] do was carry all we could with us and it's more important to have something essential. So I don't think she brought photos and stuff like that. [Pause]. We stored a lot of stuff with the Strazinnni [sp] family there. They had a water tank and right below there was a room to store things. So a lot of the personal things we stored there.

Stone: How was the community response, along the lines of that family, to help? What was the community like?

Masatani: I don't know.

Stone: When you were getting picked up, did some people agree or...

Masatani: I wasn't here when people from here went. We were away so...

Stone: But before then, when they picked up your dad, right after that?

Masatani: I don't know what their thinking was.

Stone: What happened to the market? And the trucking business?

Masatani: We had to sell everything off. My uncle came down and helped sell some of those trucks and cars and stuff like that.

Stone: He wasn't picked up?

Masatani: My uncle wasn't picked up. No. My uncle Joe.

Stone: Why not?

Masatani: He wasn't "enemy alien," he was born here, you know.

Stone: From my understanding, some people that were legal citizens that were Japanese still got picked up.

Masatani: If they thought you were a threat, but he was no threat. He was just like an All-American boy. Surfing, and all that. He was one of the

first ones to surf in Southern California I think, with those big ten or twelve foot surfboards. In those days, there wasn't too many surfers.

Stone: He sold the trucks, but did he continue to run the store? Or did he...

Masatani: No, no, we had to move away. So we had to dispose of everything.

Stone: [inaudible] everything in your yard? Or did you have a sign that said...

Masatani: No, we sold everything off. Got whatever we could for it. We couldn't leave it because we didn't know if we were going to back or not.

Stone: Were people hesitant to take? Or...

Masatani: A lot of them were.

Stone: Were they really greedy, I guess?

Masatani: A lot of them were looking for a good bargain.

Stone: Family friends.

Masatani: They took a lot of stuff, yes. I heard in Terminal Island they just got a few days' notice. Refrigerators went for three dollars, or four dollars. You know people jumped at a chance like that. They got something.

Perales: [inaudible] mom or dad, kinds of talks about having to get rid of things so quickly and how they felt about that? If they...

Masatani: We couldn't help it. We just had to do it. No ifs or buts. We don't know if we were coming back or not.

Stone: Assume the worst, I guess?

Masatani: Yes.

Stone: There wasn't forewarning when your dad left, but when you were in Marysville you had a week or two warning, so what did the town look like? Were Japanese on the sidewalk just selling everything? What was it like?

Masatani: I don't know. We didn't go into town very often. We just went to buy; it was a little town outside of Marysville, so I never seen any Japanese people around when we went shopping, for shoes or whatever. But when the time came to assemble, there's a whole trainload of people there at the station. I never met those people before

Stone: You went by train, how long was it until you arrived to...

Masatani: Colorado? Oh, that was a long train ride.

Stone: What was it like?

Masatani: About three or four days. They would pull off to the side whenever a main train...three or four days I think.

Stone: What were the conditions like?

Masatani: I think there was barely enough water to drink. I think whenever we came to a town or city they wanted us to put the shades down, so they couldn't see us.

Stone: Why?

Masatani: Because they'll say "Oh look at those Japs in the train." All in these little towns or cities that we'd go through.

Stone: Would they be shocked that you were in a train? Or would they be mad because what was going on?

Masatani: Maybe. You can't tell what one might do. So just for precaution they kept the shades down.

Stone: What was the moment like when the train stopped and you got to the camp? What was it like and what were you feeling? What'd you see?

Masatani: I said, "We're here at camp." Passed through the entrance, where the guards are and go inside. They showed us our one room, it was a long barrack with like four families in one barrack; maybe five. Each family had one room. One room with a pot belly stove.

Stone: You arrived at camp, they showed you where your barracks were: for you, now that you finally figured out where this destination was, what went through your mind? "Am I safe now?" Or did you feel scared at that point?

Masatani: Well, I said “So this is going to be our home. I don’t know how long.” But just one room for each family. I think some of the larger families just had one room. Some were a little bit larger but it was just one room. So there was no privacy. Bathrooms were all centrally located. We ate in the mess halls.

Stone: Was there a difference in how the Nisei and Issei generation reacted to the camp? I mean, since you were young maybe it wasn’t as...

Masatani: It was fun for us. Made new friends - we didn’t think about the war. We’d just think about dating and stuff like that. We had no cars or anything.

Perales: What about like your mom? Do you remember how she reacted?

Masatani: The camp? They tried to keep busy. They had classes for different things. She learned how to make those artificial flowers. She got very good at it. In fact, she was teaching some of the classes later on.

[Lucia presents a hand painted wooden sandal].

Perales: Tell me about this.

Masatani: This is made from scrap lumber when they built the barracks. We just had a hand saw and we just cut it out like this.

Stone: Who made this?

Masatani: I think my dad cut it out and I had a hand in painting this thing. Grandma made this part of the slipper here. It was nineteen forty-two. That's when we went to Amachi. [sp]

Stone: How did your dad cut them out if you were at...

Masatani: With a hand saw.

Stone: No, but when did he cut it if he was at a different camp.

Masatani: We were all together in one room. We just had the one room for each family.

Stone: So you met up with your dad?

Masatani: He was released.

Stone: When did you guys meet up? He cut them before he left?

Masatani: May, May or June he rejoined us in Amachi. [sp]

Stone: This was close to when you got to leave, then. Because he was released.

Masatani: He was released. May or June.

Stone: You were still incarcerated?

Masatani: Yes, he joined us in the camp.

Perales: He was released from Bismarck.

Masatani: He was released from Bismarck and joined us in the camp in Colorado.

Stone: So not by choice. He was still in internment?

Masatani: Yes, where we were.

Stone: So after awhile were a lot of fathers matched up, or men of the household?

Masatani: Eventually, yes.

Stone: That's interesting. So he wasn't there. He was only at his camp for six months or so until he got to meet up with you.

Masatani: Something like that.

Stone: What was your mom's reaction when she got to see him? Did you know he was going to come?

Masatani: I guess we had a notice that he was going to be released.

Stone: What did your mom think of it when he was released?

Masatani: I guess she was happy that they got together.

Stone: What activities or hobbies or religious types of things went on within the camp? Did they have activities, church and stuff?

Masatani: Yes, they had churches. Different denominations. A lot of sports, you know to kill time: baseball, basketball. I wasn't that good in sports so I was good at marbles and stuff like that. Something for little scrawny kids to do, you know. Or ping pong or table tennis, I was good at that too. [Laughs]

Stone: So they had a lot to do there then?

Masatani: Well, you had to make up your own things to do.

Stone: But there was freedom, too. You weren't just locked in a room.

Masatani: There was freedom.

Stone: You said that you worked while you in camp. How old were you when you got that job and how did they offer you jobs? How did you apply for a job?

Masatani: They were saying they needed workers, so I applied and got the job right away, a window cleaning job. They gave it to me right away. I didn't have no qualifications to do it but...

Stone: They paid you.

Masatani: We got paid.

Stone: They never took your money back from you or anything like that?

Masatani: No, it was mine.

Stone: Did your mom work?

Masatani: No, she didn't work. My dad did. My dad worked at the Co-op. There was a store, like a commissary, where people could buy things that they can't get in camp there. He worked in the warehouse, since he had the experience of the market. They put him in that job.

Stone: So people could make money there and spend it at the Co-op?

Masatani: No, no.

Stone: So what went towards the camp, the Co-op profits?

Masatani: I don't what [the profits] went for. I guess they must have used it for the camp. My dad's job - he worked at the Co-op in the warehouse. He got paid. I don't know what he got.

Stone: Did you save your money? Where would you spend it?

Masatani: Not much to save there.

Stone: You also completed high school there?

Masatani: I graduated.

Stone: What was the typical high school day like? How many were in your class? And who taught it?

Masatani: There was about a hundred...it was a big class. There's one picture of me in the gown. After graduation, it was still during the war, a lot of guys who were eighteen were getting drafted and

going into service. So some of my classmates and I said, "Let's go out and see the world a little bit before we go into the service." So a bunch of us went to Chicago, and got all kinds of jobs. I worked at a hotel called Stevens Hotel. Right on Michigan Boulevard. It was the world's largest hotel at that time. They had about seven different restaurants in there: Old South, Normandy Room, fancy restaurants. Grew up pretty fast there. We learned how to smoke and all that kind of stuff. I was seventeen, you know.

Stone: What did you do at the hotel?

Masatani: I worked in the pantry, desserts and stuff like that.

Perales: How long were you in Chicago before you...

Masatani: Close to a year maybe. I went to the service from there.

Stone: Back to the high school situation: There was about a hundred people in your class. Was there a separate school building, and did the teacher teach for eight hours? How similar was it to school outside?

Masatani: It was similar to outside high school. We even had a gym. Of course, the weather gets severe in Colorado. Big hail storms, snow or wind. We had not a fancy building, but it was a school.

Stone: Who taught?

Masatani: A Caucasian, and there was some Japanese teachers that had credentials, you know.

Stone: What's your best or favorite thought from the Amachi Camp?

Masatani: Amachi [sp] Camp. I made a lot of lifelong friends.

Stone: Oh, yes! Tell me about that friend that was at your camp that you go to coffee with.

Masatani: Oh. Bindo?

Stone: Yes, Bindo.

Masatani: The old Italian guy. I didn't know him until... I go next door everyday for coffee and he started coming in. He's Italian, Grosso. But he says when the war started and they were rounding up the Japanese, this is northern California some place, he says, "I was one of the guards," [Laughs] He had a rifle but no ammunition. That's my best friend now, Grosso.

Stone: The Amachi Camp he was at?

Masatani: No, this is just assembling up north someplace. I don't know exactly what town.

Stone: Are you still in contact with some of the friends you made at camp?

Masatani: Yeah, I still do. They have reunions, like that paper I showed you. They had a Gila Camp reunion.

Stone: Have you ever been to one?

Masatani: No. I went to one for Amachi about three or four years ago, but I think that was going to be the last. People are getting old, and - it's been what? How many years ago? Sixty years ago, was it? More than sixty. People are getting old and the next generation, what do they know? They weren't even born.

Stone: So your good memories were making lifelong friends while you were there. It was almost fun and free because you were young.

Masatani: It was fun, yes.

Stone: Did you ever have bad memories that stuck out from the camp? Were they violent at all there?

Masatani: No. Things were pretty quiet in our camp. Some of the other camps had troubles. I think some of the guys resisted the draft, stuff like that. They were saying, "Why should we serve when our parents are locked up?" and "Why are you saying the Pledge of Allegiance? Freedom and justice for all seems kind of hollow." Saying stuff like that. So that's what some of the objectors were saying I think.

Stone: What would you consider your worst memory there, then? Bad food?

Masatani: A lot of neighborhood kids were dying off in the war. In Italy, next door barrack neighbors. Here and there, all over, you know.

Perales: Were you able to correspond with anyone from Guadalupe? Did anybody keep in touch with you?

Masatani: Hardly anybody.

Stone: Did they let you...

Masatani: You could write. One of my old friends was Clyde Gatewood. He was one of the first blacks in Santa Maria. Clyde and I were friends. He went to the Navy and we used to write to each other. He used to write to me in camp. Clyde recently retired from Oakland. He moved back to Orcutt. He came to look me up and we had lunch and stuff together a couple of times. Clyde Gatewood, one of the first blacks in Santa Maria, I think.

Stone: When you were in camp, did you ever consider repatriation to Japan?

Masatani: No.

Stone: Did you know anyone that did?

Masatani: I don't know of anybody.

Stone: Wasn't too common?

Masatani: I think there was one camp, Tule Lake, [where] some of the people that wanted to be repatriated back to Japan, I think they put over there. To exchange with the Americans that were stranded in Japan or whatever, they would exchange people.

Stone: Describe the day you were released from Amachi.

Masatani: I graduated from high school and I left camp.

Stone: That's how you got to leave?

Masatani: Yes. I went off to Chicago.

Stone: How'd your mom and dad get to leave?

Masatani: They stayed until the camp closed down.

Stone: Why?

Masatani: They didn't have anywhere particular in mind to go.

Stone: So they were kind of accustomed to their new lifestyle.

Masatani: Well, I don't know. I don't know why: they just stayed until they closed the camp.

Stone: They kind of had to push people back out?

Masatani: Like that article today about Jerri Souza, When she left the guard told her, "Lock the padlock." I guess she was one of the last ones to leave the camp. See that little article she was mentioned, today.

Stone: So when you graduated they said "You can leave." It wasn't one set date everyone got to leave?

Masatani: We kind of got together and said "Let's go." Classmates, you know.

Stone: How much earlier before you graduated, did they tell you could leave?

Masatani: The kids before us, they could leave whenever, just so they don't come back to zone one or zone two,

Marian: Where they were picked up?

Masatani: Where it was illegal to be. As long as we were back east.

Perales: You could go inland, right?

Masatani: We were inland. There's no danger of invasion from Japan in Chicago so...[Laughs]

Stone: So you and some of your classmates were 'released,' but you just had to graduate.

Masatani: We were free to go.

Stone: How many of the Issei generation do you think stayed behind like your parents?

Masatani: I guess it all depended on the family. If they had a place to go, for sure they'd leave.

Stone: But they didn't see this?

Masatani: I don't know why my folks stayed til the end.

Stone: How long was it that you in Chicago until you were drafted?

Masatani: Close to a year.

Stone: How'd you feel about that after serving in a camp? Did you want to?

Masatani: It was freedom. Oh - guys lived at the boarding house, and downstairs was a little store, neighborhood store. The owner of the store's daughter was Tokyo Rose. Have you heard of Tokyo Rose? She's the one that broadcast in Japan during the war, in English. She was brought up here, you know. [unclear] do you miss your sweetheart and stuff like that and play American [inaudible]. That was Tokyo Rose's father and mother who ran this store. We kids lived upstairs in the boarding house and Tokyo Rose's sister cooked for the boys. It was room and board, but of course I worked in a restaurant and I got my meals off. The other boys got their meals cooked by this lady. I heard Doris Day was only about two blocks away from that St.Valentine's Day Massacre. Al Capone massacred a bunch of guys in the garage. It [the garage] was only about two blocks away. Well, that's history I guess.

Stone: How long after you left camp did your parents head back to Guadalupe?

Masatani: As soon as the camp closed my dad and mom came back here.

Stone: So was that a year after you left?

Masatani: I left in forty-four and camp must have closed around maybe forty-six; I'm not sure what year exactly. I can't recall what date.

Stone: How did they get back to Guadalupe and what did they tell you about their experience when they got there?

Masatani: I heard that they came and the government had given them each twenty-five dollars in cash. They got off the train depot and didn't have anywhere to stay, so they stayed at the old Buddhist Church. They said they weren't too welcome because somebody shot through the window when they were staying there. Nobody got hurt but somebody did shoot through the window.

Stone: So the community changed?

Masatani: Yes.

Stone: From the time they left, when they were still their friends, to when they came back?

Masatani: I guess these were older people maybe. I don't know.

Perales: Were other families that came from other camps in the church until they kind of got...

Masatani: Most of them are people that used to live here.

Perales: But your parents weren't the only ones there. There may have been...

Masatani: There were other families. Families that didn't have a place to sleep.

Stone: Who in the community helped your family?

Masatani: They just helped themselves.

Stone: Any specific loyal family friends that come to mind?

Masatani: They just made it on their own.

Stone: Was it generally the Japanese community that was helpful?

Masatani: A lot of them kind of stuck together. It was tough starting a new store. Merchandise was scarce after the war. The wholesalers wouldn't sell to a new store. We were a new store I guess. They had a little bit of trouble, struggle.

Stone: Did your parents ever tell you about anyone making it hard on them? Making their situation harder than what it was? I mean for example, if whoever shot that bullet owned a store...I don't know.

Masatani: I know somebody shot through the upstairs window too. A few years ago. There was a hole in the window and those old green shades we have up there. There's a bullet hole there. The bullet was lodged in the wall right above this board of the bedroom upstairs.

Stone: Do you know who did it? Do you know why?

Masatani: We don't who, we don't know why.

Stone: Is it like a BB or a bullet?

Masatani: No, a bullet.

[Tape 2, side 2]

Stone: How did your dad rebuild the store and how did he come up with the money to lease it? Or did he own it?

Masatani: I guess he had enough money saved to start. Just start out small, you know. Gradually built it up.

Stone: Who did he lease the building from this time? Where was it?

Masatani: This time it was the Shimizu [sp] family. Shimizus [sp] used to own some property across the street there. Mr. Shimizu [sp] was an American citizen born in Hawaii so he was able to have property before the war, you know.

Perales: He was able to hold on to it.

Masatani: Yes. Mr. Shimizu used to have a Chevrolet dealership before the war. This was the largest Chevrolet dealership in Santa Barbara at that time.

Stone: When he rebuilt the store, how was it different and how was it the same? [Any] similarities and differences between the first one and second one?

Masatani: Different type of customer. It's all mostly Hispanic.

Stone: By the time they came back?

Masatani: Most of the Japanese didn't come back here. Before the war, we'd sell tons of rice. There were hundred pound sacks of rice. We used to get a truck and trailer load, that's how many hundreds of sacks. There was flower seed company camps all over. We used to sell a lot of rice to Arroyo Grande and Oceano flower seed companies.. They would buy twenty-five, maybe more, sacks of rice every so often. [We] would have to deliver. But times have changed. Now we're selling five pound bags at the most. The biggest. Used to be hundred pounders.

Stone: How did the merchandise change?

Masatani: That's what I mean. It's not too many Asian foods, some Filipino and whatever the customers want. You have to cater to the customers.

Stone: Was it less of a mercantile or strictly grocery second time around?

Masatani: Yes, just food.

Stone: Who was your competition then?

Masatani: Campodonico building, "Jeff's Market." Then "Homefood Basket", where the bend in the road is. That was a Japanese store before "Homefood Basket", come to think of it. Fish market - Paul Kurokawa had a fish market. That's about it after the war. Oh, another one there where "L.A. Liquor" store used to be.

Stone: No more? Moisho? What was the guy kitty-corner from you? The first round?

Masatani: Oh, Miyoshi? No, their father bought his property on West Main Street before the war and they moved away. You know where the depot street is it? The street through there? Used to have a main street drugstore. One of the sons was a druggist there. They chopped up their property with that road.

Stone: So was it common form, at this time, to have Japanese markets or Japanese business owners?

Masatani: There was only two Japanese: "Homefood Basket" and ourselves, just the two of us. There used to be about five or six. All together there was about thirteen stores when I was a kid. Some mom and pop, some a little larger, grocery stores. I think it was thirteen stores. In a little town like this.

Stone: Where did you go after the service?

Masatani: I came home and helped my dad. I said, "I got this GI bill of rights, might as well take advantage of it." So I told my dad "I think I'll go to school." That's when I went to L.A.

Stone: When you first came back to Guadalupe, what were the biggest changes you noticed? Since you hadn't been back since fifteen, right?

Masatani: Hardly any of my friends were here anymore. They were scattered all over. Some in the Midwest, some back East. Most of them didn't come back at all.

Stone: Who was here?

Masatani: Who was here, let's see [Pause]. There's a couple of Japanese families that came back. Maenagas, I don't know if you know Maenagas. Sammy is a classmate of mine. And Shimizus. Not too many actually.

Stone: Who were the new faces?

Stone: Not too many Japanese if you're just talking about Japanese. There were all kind of Hispanics. Some of the Hispanic kids I went to grammar school with.

Stone: Did they then become the majority-minority?

Masatani: Majority-minority.

Stone: Then you decided "I'm going to use my GI Bill. I'm going to go to UCLA." What was UCLA like? Was it challenging? Were there lots of Japanese?

Masatani: There was a few. There was a girl from Guadalupe that I met. I just met her briefly there. She was...oh, Gene Oishi, did I tell you about that book by Gene Oishi? His sister. I saw her briefly there at UCLA. But I didn't graduate. I just went two years.

Stone: If there were few Japanese, what did you see? Mainly Caucasian, or black, or Mexicans, or mix?

Masatani: UCLA was mixed, yes. Mixed.

Stone: No real majority?

Masatani: I don't think so.

Stone: What was your biggest challenge when you were there?

Masatani: Staying away from school for a long time, you know it's hard to get back into studying.

Stone: When did you meet Timiko? And how?

Masatani: Nineteen-fifty. I met her at a dance at UCLA.

Stone: Describe how you met.

Masatani: Oh, just a stag dance. I liked her. Somehow I finagled her phone number and called her and we started dating.

Stone: When did you get married?

Masatani: Nineteen fifty-two, a couple years later. Our first apartment when we got married, was in Los Angeles, on North Hoover. It was predominantly a Jewish area. When our landlord rented to an Asian, the other landlords complained to our landlord. We were one of the first ones to move into that street there. I remember something like that.

Stone: When did you decide to start a family?

Masatani: It just happened. I guess Steven. We wanted to have a family, yes.

Stone: During the nineteen fifties was it hard to raise a kid? What were some of the struggles?

Masatani: It was okay. After UCLA? Not much money...

Stone: In the shop?

Masatani: Yes. And so my girlfriend Kim's father was gardening, and they were making pretty good money in those days, gardening. So I turned to gardening too; got to support a family.

Stone: Did you work for her dad?

Masatani: One year he went to Japan and he let me run his route. That's how I kind of learned how to do it. When he came back, I started my own route.

Stone: So you're obviously stable enough with your job that you decided to have after Steven...

Masatani: Brian next. Yes, two kids.

Stone: What was your address when you were in Los Angeles?

Masatani: Los Angeles. Not too close from what used to be called Westlake Park. Now it's called MacArthur Park. It's in Wilshire area. We got married in Wilshire area there. A big church. But [at the park] free fireworks display on Fourth of July. So when Steven, my oldest boy, was about three or four or five took him down there by the lake and watched the fireworks. That was nice.

Stone: When and why did you decide to come back to Guadalupe?

Masatani: Nineteen fifty-four when my dad got his citizenship.

Stone: How?

Masatani: To become naturalized he took the exam and became naturalized. Until then he couldn't become a citizen. So he bought this property from the Shimizus. The market that we're in. He was operating that for a few years and then he said, "I'm getting kind of old and if you want to, you should come home and help me run the market." That's when we came back. Must have been, I don't know, fifty-six or something like that maybe. I don't know what year. I'm getting kind of bad on dates.

Stone: What was your citizenship standing?

Masatani: One year and I'm an American.

Stone: Did your mom become American when your dad became American?

Masatani: She never did apply, you know. She lost her citizenship and she never tried to get it back.

Perales: She would have [inaudible]

Masatani: She was trying one time. To prove where she was born and all that. I don't know what became of it.

Stone: When you came back again in the late fifties, what else was different? Was anything else really different in the community?

Masatani: No, I don't think so. Not too much changed around here in this town.

Stone: Did anything change with the minority make-up?

Masatani: I noticed there was more Hispanics. Before the war, I think mostly Hispanics lived in outlying areas, on ranches or whatever. There was not too many living in the town actually. But since then they all moved into the town.

Stone: How did crime change? Or did you notice any change in crime?

Masatani: No. Guadalupe has always been pretty safe place. People get the notion from the big headlines in the Santa Maria Times about this and that, this and that. But it's a safe place; relatively safe.

Stone: Did you notice any change in the economy of Guadalupe from the time you left to the time you came back?

Masatani: In pre-war days it was a lot of Japanese farmers, small farmers. I think there was maybe two hundred families all together - Lompoc area. Most of them had small farms and that changed.

Stone: What was it now?

Masatani: The bigger ones gobbled up the smaller ones. That's what happened.

Stone: In your opinion, what has had the greatest influence on Guadalupe as a town? Historically.

Masatani: Not much happens in this town. I was the Planning Commissioner for twelve or thirteen years here and nothing much happened. Somebody wanted to build a garage or something and that was it. The whole meeting was about this guy who wanted to build a garage. [Laughs] Back in the fifties, nothing happening here.

[Tape 3]

Masatani: ...the principal [Laughs]. [Unclear] weren't in the school. Then Mr. Mc Kinsey tells me "Hey, why don't we get your two boys out of school today? Steven and Brian. Because you get ten more clams for each person." [Laughs] A ten limit for each person. He got my kids out of school and we were out on the beach that day. I think Mr. McKinsey's family won't like to hear that kind of story.

Stone: At least your boys were safe. If they're out, they could be out.

[Pause]

Stone: The nitty gritty Guadalupe questions: what aspects of Guadalupe do you consider strong?

Masatani: Strong? I don't know. The City Council has seen a lot of controversy and end fighting going on for the past year or so. That's not good for the city. I know this one councilman has resigned and they appointed somebody else to take his place but I don't know what's going on in the City Council.

Stone: Would you consider that a weak aspect of the community?

Masatani: I think so.

Stone: Do you think that the diversity make-up of the community is a weakness or strength?

Masatani: Well, strength in diversity. We have a Filipino mayor and the rest of the councilmen are Hispanics..

Stone: What would you like to see Guadalupe develop into as a community?

Masatani: We're in the kind of business where if it [Guadalupe] develops, a big supermarket and a shopping mall go up, we're going to be out. We're kind of a dying breed you might say.

Stone: So does that mean...

Masatani: In our line of business, yeah.

Stone: Would you want to see Guadalupe stay the same?

Masatani: Well, it's nice to wish but I don't think it's going to be the same.

Stone: What do you think will happen?

Masatani: Eventually there will be more housing, a shopping center somewhere and Taco Bell would be coming in competing with all these Mexican restaurants in town. Every new restaurant that opens in Guadalupe is a Mexican restaurant. restaurant!"

Stone: Would you like to see a sushi bar here?

Masatani: There is no Japanese here, but we don't have any in Guadalupe. No, there's no demand for it here. What they could use here is a Chinese restaurant. Many, many years, ever since before the Depression there has always been at least one Chinese restaurant here and now there's none.

Stone: What else do you think Guadalupe needs?

Masatani: I think they need more recreation for the young people.

Stone: Why?

Masatani: All the years of participating in the Elks Rodeo raising funds and this and that, and kids don't even know how to swim. There's no place to swim, you know. Isn't that a shame?

Stone: Do you think tourism will help the community?

Masatani: It could. It could. The downtown area is like an Old Town, and it has some antique stores. Some place where people might stop [when] driving through. Otherwise, it just Highway One, just drive right through.

Stone: So then a hotel would be good?

Masatani: A motel or hotel, yes. Nowhere to stay in town, except the Dolcini house. [Laughs].

Stone: So do you think Guadalupe is a good place to grow up now? Even though there's no recreational things?

Masatani: Yes, I think so.

Stone: Why?

Masatani: There's no high school here either. So they go to St. Joseph, private schools. They got everything over there.

Stone: So what does Guadalupe offer?

Masatani: Not too much to offer then here.

Stone: If there's not much for them then why do you think it's a good place for them to...

Masatani: It's a nice quiet family town. It's nice to raise a family. You know your neighbors, not like big cities.

Stone: Like the safety factor?

Masatani: Safe, yes. There was only one hold-up in this town, I think. The Elray used to be a liquor store. The Elray Liquor Store. An old man worked over there some years ago. Somebody tried to rob him - the liquor store guy said he had known the robber since he was a little kid. He said, "Armento, what the hell are you trying to do?" You know, he chased him down. Tackled him down the street there. Armento - [Laughs] The guy's name.

Stone: No strangers. Aside from meeting a lot of people through the market and knowing them, in what ways are you involve in the community now?

Masatani: I belong to the American Legion. That's nice. We meet once a month. Last meeting, a guy named John Sherrell was at the meeting, he's an old timer. And every time they have a function, a meeting, they have a dinner. Different guys cook. John sat next to me at the meeting and he said, "We're going to have an installation dinner coming up." And John gets up and says, "I make a motion that when we have our Installation Dinner we buy some spare ribs from Masatani's market." I'm sitting next to him and say, "I second the motion." [Laughs] They got a kick out of that.

Stone: Are you affiliated with the Buddhist Church at all?

Masatani: Yes. One time I was a treasurer, some years ago. But not that real active.

Stone: I was reading in the research for the interview, that the American Legion called for the removal of the Japanese around the beginning of the war.

Masatani: Probably. After the war, the American Legion Post in Guadalupe wouldn't allow the Japanese kids to join. They said "No, you guys make your own, form your own chapter." That's what they were told.

Stone: Then why'd you become a part of it?

Masatani: Later on, it was like the Elks, you know. They wouldn't let in no black or maybe Hispanics a long time ago, but now it's changed.

Stone: Is there a strong Japanese community in Guadalupe?

Masatani: No. Not here.

Stone: Not versus, when, before Internment Camp, but I mean in comparison to the other ethnicities in the area?

Masatani: Japanese community?

Stone: Yeah.

Masatani: There's hardly any here. There's only a handful of families. Whereas there was like two hundred families here before.

Stone: What changed all that?

Masatani: Well, they shipped us away and most of them didn't come back.

Stone: In your lifetime, what are you most proud of?

Masatani: I kind of saved this house. Dr. Aikola, he was building Old Town in Santa Maria and South. Where the Highway Patrol used to be, behind there on the hill. He was collecting old houses and he was going to buy this, just about ready to buy this house and cut it up and move it to Santa Maria. I said, "No, this house belongs in Guadalupe." And I bought this house.

Stone: Just because he was going to buy it?

Masatani: He was going to buy it, chop it up and move it to Santa Maria. He's making the Old Town and he's collecting a lot of old houses. I think he had the Newlive [sp] house and the old school house.

Stone: So, when did you purchase this house?

Masatani: I think about eighteen, nineteen years ago. Something like that. I'm getting kind of bad with dates or years.

Stone: Who'd you buy it from?

Masatani: I bought it from a boy named Gary Silva. Campodonicos were the builders, they built the house, lived in it all those years, the family all died off and then finally there was I think two sisters left. Finally just one left and she was living here all alone She was getting quite elderly and needed help. A young couple offered to help her and live here and they were offered a chance to buy it and they bought it before I did.

Perales: You were saying the Campodonico sisters were still here?

Masatani: Yes, that's the last sister and Gary Silva and his wife offered to help her and they could live here as long as she was here or something. She sold it to them. But Gary and his wife split up and that's who I bought it from, Gary. At that time Dr. Aikola was looking around for old houses, you know.

Stone: Where'd you live before?

Masatani: I lived on Tobazini street. I lived in the house across the street here to. Right next door to Dr. Nelson. On the corner. Next door to him.

Stone: When was this house built?

Masatani: Eighteen ninety-six I believe.

Stone: Have you allowed it to be a part of anything?

Masatani: No, it could be. I haven't applied for it. I guess you have to apply for it if you want it to be a historical building. My wife said, once you apply then they are going to put all kinds of restrictions on you. You got to do things a certain way, I think. So as long as we have it, we just leave it the way it is.

Stone: How long do you see the house staying in the family?

Masatani: I don't know, just Kim and I. I'm getting in the late seventies. My kids, I don't know if they want it or not.

Stone: It would go to them though?

Masatani: Probably.

Stone: What do you see in the future of Masatani Market?

Masatani: Eventually we'll be out of business. We can't compete with supermarkets, you know.

Stone: You don't know when that will be.

Masatani: Eventually, yes. We'll maybe have to downsize and you know, go into like a specialty shop or something.

Stone: Right now you have Steve and Brian helping you out. Do either of them, if it wasn't out of business in the near future,

Masatani: They'd probably have to go get a job or downsize it, you know. They could open up an antique store or something, you know.

Stone: How do your children feel about Guadalupe?

Masatani: They grew up here, they like it. They have their own schoolmates, kids they went to school with.

Stone: What about your daughter?

Masatani: My daughter, yes, they get together about once a year. Her and her classmates, they get together. She comes home quite often. Brings the grandkids - Grandkids are fun.

Stone: Made the kids worthwhile, huh?

Masatani: Yes. Did I tell you about Brian's little boy? He's about five years old and grandma took him shopping before Christmas to Toys-R-Us or someplace. This little kid likes seafood. After shopping, grandma thought she would give him a treat, go to Mac Donalds or someplace for a bite to eat. So she asks Miles, "Hey, how about going to get a little bit to eat some place?" Miles says, "Okay. Let's go to the Red Lobster and eat some crabs." He's only five-years-old. As long as grandma's buying [laughs] he likes seafood. Little kids are fun like that. He would come and wash the windows at the

store, you know with the Windex. Right away he was going to reward himself and heads for the candy. You know gets a candy and grandma says, "No Miles. You can't help yourself to the candies. You have to ask somebody, your dad or somebody, and get permission first." He can't, he might go to some other store and start helping himself to candy. So one day he washed the window, heads for the candy, he was getting the candy and grandma catches him getting the candy. And grandma says, "I thought I told you, you have to ask somebody you know to get permission before you get the candy." And he says, "I did." Grandma says, "Who did you ask?" He says, "I asked myself." He's not so dumb. [Laughs]

Stone: Do any of your children speak Japanese?

Masatani: No. None at all I think. Hardly any. They might know a few words but that's nothing.

Stone: These are kind of random questions: if you were able to relive your life, would you do anything different?

Masatani: No. Same. [Pause] Same.

Stone: So not regrets?

Masatani: No regrets.

Stone: I hope I can say that to when I'm older. [Laughs] I really do.

Masatani: I had a good life.

Stone: Back in, with the Reagan thing, in eighty-eight he had the Repatriation.

Masatani: Yeah. I guess he gave every camp member twenty-thousand. Twenty-thousand.

Stone: Did you get that?

Masatani: Uh huh.

Stone: Your parents?

Masatani: Anybody that spent time in camp received it. But the ones that lost out are people like my dad, you know. He's already dead, you know. When you're dead you don't receive nothing. They were the ones that deserved it. But they were already dead, you know. Gone.

Stone: So like it didn't go down to the kids or anything?

Masatani: No.

Stone: What'd you do with your money?

Masatani: Kim, my wife, got twenty, because she was in the camp in Arizona. And I got twenty. Kim bought that piano. She said, "That's my share." It wasn't that much but I said, "That was your half."

Stone: There's nothing really big you bought?

Masatani: No.

Stone: Did it help?

Masatani: It was like a bonus. You weren't expecting anything. Although, some people lost a lot.

Stone: What did your mom do with the money?

Masatani: We had a credit business before the war. I think dad and mom were saying like fifty thousand dollars worth. Pre-war dollars. You would let the farmers or whatever charge and at the end of the season when they would harvest, they would pay you back, whatever. But you know. So they lost quite a bit.

Stone: What'd she do with the money when she got it?

Masatani: My mom? She just lived frugally.

Stone: Is there anything that you would want to say about your hopes for Guadalupe? Or anything involving the expansion?

Masatani: Guadalupe, I think it's going to grow. The surrounding area had grown already. Where the price of land is so expensive now. I think we're still kind of in the ballpark for expansion.

Stone: Do you think this project is a good idea? We got a grant.

Masatani: Oh, you're talking about a grant?

Stone: Guadalupe is one of ten communities in the state that was given seventy-five thousand to come and rebuild itself. Since Guadalupe is really stagnant.

Masatani: Is there redevelopment? Redevelopment money? They spent some of that on the streets, didn't they? Is that part of the money?

Tom: That was Caltrans.

Masatani: It was Caltrans? New sidewalk, new street lamps but it stopped short of our store. We're not downtown.

Stone: This is more along the lines of the tourism. Hopefully to maybe get the theater running again...

Masatani: That would be nice.

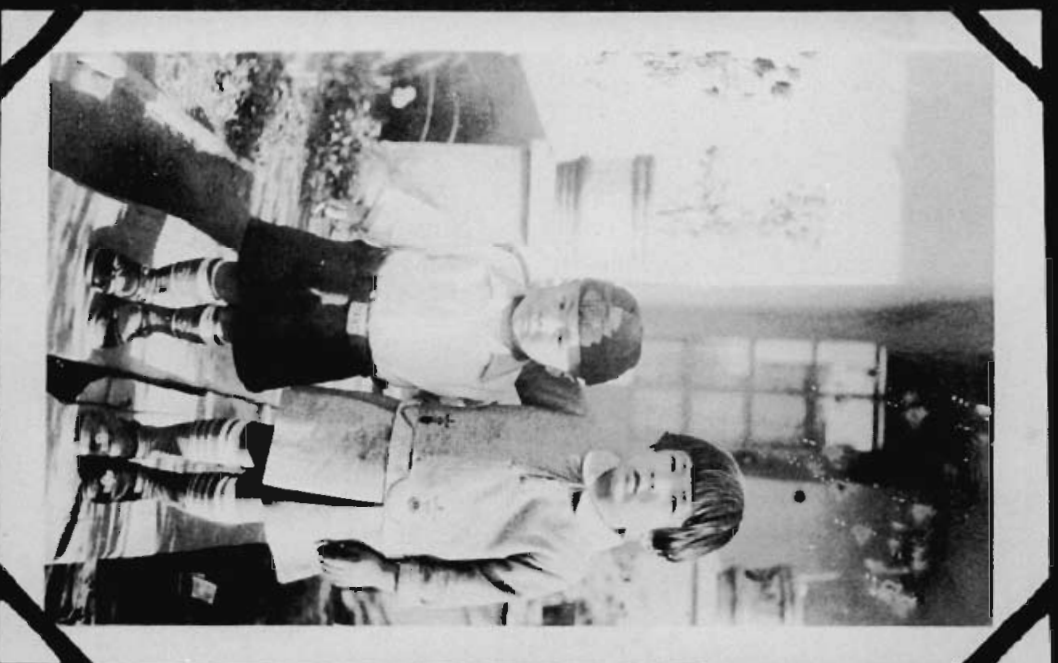
Stone: Performances.

Masatani: They shot that Ten Commandments in nineteen twenty-three in the sand dunes. I think at the seventy-fifth anniversary [of] the movie they had some [unclear] at the theater here, at the Royal Theater. Some of the people in the original movie was here. There was a little boy in that movie with a whip and he's whipping Moses. A little kid about five, or six or seven years old. He was here and he's an eighty-something year old man now. He came and read a letter from Cecil B. De Mille's daughter congratulating the seventy-fifth anniversary and stuff like that. That's why people in Guadalupe are good, because we got the Ten Commandments here. Didn't you know that?

[Interview ends]



Aki AND Yoshio



Yoshio, MASATANI
AKIKO. MAKAGAWA
1929
GUADALUPE
CAL.



AUG. 1936



Emiko Ogawa



Harry Masatani

AUG. 3-1936

