>> Carlene Tinker: Good morning, Mr. Yamamoto.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Good morning.

>> Carlene Tinker: How are you today?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Fine.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Welcome to Special Collections Research Center. My name is Carlene Tanigoshi Tinker. And-- Excuse me, I happen to be the volunteer coordinator for this new oral history project. And the new project is sponsored by Special Collections here at the Henry Madden Library at Fresno State. We titled the project, "Issei to Gosei Interview Project", because we know that we're running out of Isseis, OK, but there are still might be some Japanese coming over from Japan, so technically they are Isseis. And then we also want to interview Niseis. Are you a Nisei?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I'm Sansei.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, you're-- oh, that's right, you are Sansei. You're the second generation born here in the United States. OK. Well, let me go through the different generations in case somebody who is looking at your interview is not familiar with each of these generations. The first one, as I've said, the ones who came from Japan are the Isseis, OK. And that the first immigration of Japanese to the United States occurred probably on the late 1800s, OK. And then their children who were born here in the United States are called the Niseis, Niseis. But the first generation born here in the United States, they're the second generation of Japanese coming to the United States. The third generation, the Sansei, which you claimed to be and I also am a Sansei, we are the second generation born here, but the third generation of Japanese in the United States. The fourth generation are the Yonseis, our children. They are a third generation born here in the United States. And then if they have children that are old enough to be interviewed, we will be looking at their children who are going to be called the-- who are called the Gosei. So that's why we are calling this the "Issei to Gosei," but to put all of those in one term or one title was too long, so we condensed them. OK. As I've said, we started this collect-- I mean, this interview project, oh, maybe a couple of years ago. I first was looking at people who had been in internment camps, but as it turns out, that population is no longer a big one, OK. You happen to have been in an internment camp, and so have I. But, because we have people who were around who've lived in the Valley who are also Japanese Americans, we wanted to hear their stories as well. So that's

why we-- this new title "Issei to Gosei" evolved and we include the younger generations. Basically, we want to find out what it's been like for you and others to be a Japanese American in the San Joaquin Valley and also it gives you a chance to talk about your own personal story, not only for people who are studying about us, but also to have a permanent record of your story for your family. As I've said earlier when I talked to you, your story will become a permanent part of our digital collection, which means that if you have a computer, you can go online and you can call up this interview and you can see for yourself what you said. OK. And also your family. OK. So, today is Thursday, January 17th, and the time is 9:40 a.m. And we are in the Henry Madden Library as I've said in the Special Collections Research Center. First of all, let-- give me your full name.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yutaka Yamamoto.

>> Carlene Tinker: No middle name?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No middle name.

>> Carlene Tinker: How come?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, I guess being the offspring of an Issei back then, you know, it was customarily all the kids would be-- have Japanese name. And--

>> Carlene Tinker: But no middle name?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No. No.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that true of your grandparents and grand-- your dad as well?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm. Well, my dad when he first came here, he picked his own English name.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, did he?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right. Kay, K-A-Y.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, OK. I wonder how he chose that.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: You know, I often thought about that and I thought, well, maybe back then, there used to be a band, famous band, Kay Kyser.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's right. I do remember--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And I always think that my dad probably saw, hey, Kay is easy name to pronounce, you know, because when he

first came here, he was working as a-- like a waiter at the club, not the Eagles, but it's one of those fraternal--

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, the Elks maybe?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Elks.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: He worked at the Elks Lodge. He was like a dishwasher, waiter, combination. In fact, that's where he learned how to cook turkey.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: So every Thanksgiving, he was the one in the family that made the turkey.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, good for him. So he became Kay, did he have a Japanese name after that? So what was his Japanese--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Norio.

>> Carlene Tinker: Huh?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Norio.

>> Carlene Tinker: How do you spell that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: N-O-R-I-O.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, Norio. OK. And then Yamamoto. OK. OK. And what is your birth date?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: May 28, 1932.

>> Carlene Tinker: 1932. So how old are you today?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Eighty-six.

>> Carlene Tinker: Eighty-six years and going strong?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, great. And, what is your address in-- mailing address?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: 6361 North 8th Street, Fresno, California.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And that's not too far here from Fresno State, is that correct? OK. OK. What I'll do-- what I like to do in these interviews is to kind of trace your background and how you got here, because that actually is the beginning of your

story, all right. So let's start with your grandparents, your paternal grandfather, OK. Where did he come from?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Hiroshima.

>> Carlene Tinker: Hiroshima.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Japan.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. What did he do at that time? What was his occupation?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, the grandparent on my father's side, he was a carpenter in Japan. And I think back in the early 1990s, he lived in Fresno for maybe a year or so.

>> Carlene Tinker: Do you mean 1890s? You said 1990s.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: 1990.

>> Carlene Tinker: 1990?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well--

>> Carlene Tinker: 1890.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yes, right. It's probably 1890s when he came.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, OK. So he lived in Fresno?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm, as a carpenter. And, what he used to do was-- at that time in West Fresno, there's a whole slew of gambling dens, Chinese gambling dens, where they played-- it's like Keno and-- which was illegal.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And every now and then, the cops would raid the dens to confiscate the money. Well, what they would do is they would wear-- the sheriffs would wear overcoats and underneath, they carried a sledgehammer. And they would go up to the door and break the door down with the sledgehammer and charge in there and then arrest the people. Well, my grandfather being a carpenter, they would call him whenever they got raided and the door got busted, they would call him to repair the door.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And--

>> Carlene Tinker: Now, I have a question about these guys, these guys who came dressed with overcoats. Were they-- I mean, did they take the money themselves or what did they do?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, back then, there's no-- I wouldn't doubt it, yeah, yeah, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, they had a good thing going. Now, these dens, were they underground, were they in buildings? Where did they--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, no, it wasn't underground. I mean, it was just ordinary building, except the door is always closed and there'd be a little window there where the person would peek out to see if they recognize a person, you know, and then they would let you in. That's the reason they had to do that kind of thing to get in there, otherwise--

>> Carlene Tinker: Otherwise they would not have been permitted to come in or even try to come in.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: So during that time, I think my dad came over to live with his father and somehow he got started in the laundry business. He had opened up his own laundry.

>> Carlene Tinker: This is your dad --

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: My dad.

>> Carlene Tinker: -- not your grandfather? Your dad, OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And he went back to Japan to find a bride and it was arranged marriage and he brought her back here.

>> Carlene Tinker: How old was he at the time that he did this?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: He must have been in his late ‘20s.

>> Carlene Tinker: Late ‘20s. And how old was the picture bride or the arranged bride?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, that--

>> Carlene Tinker: She must have been quite young? No?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, they were married in Japan. I mean--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- you know, wife never came to America, so.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, she never came?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, no. I mean, they lived in Japan.

>> Carlene Tinker: Your father lived in Japan?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, no, my grandfather.

>> Carlene Tinker: Your grandfather. Oh, OK. All right, I was getting a little confused here. But didn't your father also go back to Japan to get a wife?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And that's another interesting part of their marriage is that my mother-- my mother's parents had immigrated to Hawaii to work on the Hawaiian plantation.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, for sugarcane?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: To save money so that they could go back to Japan and build their home.

>> Carlene Tinker: That was kind of typical, wasn't it? There were a lot of people who did that. OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: So, when they were in Hawaii at that time, they had two other girls and my mother happened to be the third one and she was born in Hawaii, which was a territory of the United States at that time. So she automatically became eligible for a citizenship.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. But the other two had been born in Japan, is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: That-- OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: So technically--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: That's right. I think I would be classified as third generation.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Because my dad was born in Japan, my mother was born in Hawaii.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. So you're sort of half-Nisei and half-Sansei, wouldn't you?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: I don't know if that--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah. No.

>> Carlene Tinker: -- I think that would work that way.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: So, OK. So your grandfather, your paternal grandfather on your dad side was a carpenter and he was the one who went back to Japan, is that right? But your father came and stayed, opened up a laundry, but then he went back to Japan to get a wife. OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: For arranged marriage.

>> Carlene Tinker: And that was your mom. And she happened to have been born in Hawaii because her family had immigrated there. And because she was born in the territory of the United States, she actually was a Nisei. Is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. OK. So--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: My dad actually in-- back in the '50s, I think, he became a naturalized citizen.

>> Carlene Tinker: Who? Oh, your dad?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: How did that happen? Just because he was married to your mom or did he have to go through classes?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No.

>> Carlene Tinker: No. Just by living here?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm. Well, when he had the laundry business at that time, you know. But during this period of time, I guess he decided he would get his citizenship.

>> Carlene Tinker: And so did he actually study and some-- take some tests?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: He must have.

>> Carlene Tinker: He must have, yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I don't remember seeing though.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Yeah, I know that because of the Alien Land Laws, people who came from Japan couldn't own property. Very frequently, if they were farmers, they would buy property in the kid's names if there were kids-- if their kids had been born here. And it wasn't up until the early '50s that things got changed. I mean, they could become citizens. And also during this time, there were anti-miscegenation laws. And that means that you couldn't marry a Japanese person, Japanese-American, well, they were Japanese, let's say, couldn't-- well, Japanese Americans couldn't marry outside of their race, OK. And so, I remember my aunt and uncle, my mother-- I mean, my aunt was a Japanese American, she had been born here. And she wanted to marry a Caucasian man but they couldn't do it in California because of these anti-miscegenation laws. So I think they went to Yuma, Arizona or some place in the-- close to California. So, in my case, I happen to be married to a Caucasian. If I had tried to marry my husband at that time in California, we couldn't have done it. Yeah. So things have improved in many ways, fortunately. Yeah. OK. So, you were born in 1932. Did you have any siblings? Do you have any siblings?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Who are they?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: The brother just below me, his name is Haruo [assumed spelling] and he's five years younger than I am.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And then my youngest brother is also five years-- so the three of us were all five years apart.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my goodness, yeah. So your mother was-- what did your mother do, was she a housewife or did she help your dad in the laundry business, is that what she did?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: And where was the laundry business? I forgot to ask.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It was located on the 900 block of G Street--

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- here in Fresno.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And that's right next to Central Fish, is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, which is still standing.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: In fact, the northern property of Central Fish Market is where the laundry was.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Oh, is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, so the laundry is no longer there, but that's-- OK, that's where it was located. Yeah, tell us briefly where Central Fish is, what's that area called?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Chinatown.

>> Carlene Tinker: Chinatown?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It's at the intersection of Kern and G Street.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And we, also being Japanese Americans, don't we like to call it Japantown?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, I know after the war when we all came back, that term Japantown came into use a lot.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that right? But up until then, it was Chinatown.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Chinatown.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And when did Chinatown, let's kind of diverge here a little bit, when did that first start, do you have any idea? You said your grandpa came in the late 1890s, so he came to Fresno?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Yeah. So, it must have started about that time, right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I think so.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Yeah, OK. But he went back?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, OK. So your mom worked in the laundry with your dad, that's basically what they did up until the war

broke out, is that right? OK. Now, as I recall, you said that you were delivered by a midwife. Was that a custom, was that a new--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: At that time, it was fairly a popular custom.

>> Carlene Tinker: Why was that? Were there not enough trained doctors around or--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I-- I'm just guessing now but I think that's the reason why. Especially I don't think at that time, I don't-- I'm not aware of-- well, there might have been a couple one or two Japanese physicians.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But, from my recollection, it was pretty common practice for--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- a midwife.

>> Carlene Tinker: And you were delivered at home?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And were the other two children also delivered by midwifes? There were such a-- years between them.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I think my brother also might have been through a midwife, and my youngest brother was born in Fresno Assembly Center. Because when the war broke out at that time, my mother was pregnant. And, when the orders came to vacate Fresno and go into Fresno Assembly Center, that's where she started having labor pains and she gave birth in camp.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, in the assembly center.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But, after the birth of my brother, she had some complications so they transferred her across the street, Fresno County Hospital was located across from the fairground. And she spent a couple of days there before they released her back into camp.

>> Carlene Tinker: She was OK then, oh my gosh.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, you know, I think I forgot to ask what her family did in Japan. Do you have any-- do you know-- were they from Hiroshima or?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah, they were from Hiroshima but I'm not aware of what--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, what they did, yeah. Well, in my case, I tried to find out about my-- both sides. And first of all, I don't speak Japanese, and also it's a big country and people don't remember. Yeah, so I don't know either a lot of details. So, anyway. So, you grew up in Chinatown, now Japantown. And, so on December 7th 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked. What do you remember about that or do you have any memories of that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I do have memories because it had to be a Sunday.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, was it a Sunday?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Here in Fresno. And we would-- my age group-- we had about three or four guys that I used to hang around with. And it was customary that if we wanted to do any kind of activities, the place to do it was at the church. It was a convenient meeting spot. And I remember that Sunday morning meeting at the church and the word was going around that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor at that time. And I remember the three of us, we were talking about it and, you know, we just couldn't believe that Japan would declare war on the United States. And our feeling at that time was, when you look at the rural atlas, you can see the United States is like this. And when you look at Japan, it's sliver [compared to California, Japan is just a "sliver", or small part], you know. So I remember the three of us we were talking about, you know, how we felt that it was stupid of Japan to declare war on a big country such as the United States. But--

>> Carlene Tinker: That's very true.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But I remember that morning, though, throughout Chinatown, everybody was glued to the radio, they were listening to the news. Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: What did your parents think?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, they were in the same boat as everybody else. I mean, there's nothing else they could do.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: They couldn't believe it, you know, believe that it happened. But, all I know is that from that day forward, every night, after my dad closed the laundry and came home, first thing he would do was turn the radio on to listen to the news reports, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. OK, so that was December 7th. And then in a very short time, we were designated or identified as enemy aliens, is that correct?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And so, things moved very quickly, the United States declared war on Japan. And then President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, on February 19th, 1942, declared that we were in a military zone and that we could be treated-- they didn't specifically say Japanese, right, but we could be treated whatever the army thought, right? Is that right? So, on February 19th, they signed-- he signed the Executive Order 9066, OK. So, what did that mean to you guys? What did that start in-- what started in motion at that point?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, after the war started, I think I was in the, probably, fourth or fifth grade at the Lincoln Elementary School in Fresno. And, the first day-- well, the first school day after the war was declared, I remember within a week's time, I could sense a change among my classmates, even my teacher. And, when the order came for evacuation, I can remember the last day of school, I went up to the teacher and I told her that I wouldn't be attending from tomorrow. And she never asked me why or she never said anything about, well, we're going to miss you, nothing. She just had a stoic face, and she just said, "Oh", that's what I remember about her.

>> Carlene Tinker: Isn't that something?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: When I told her, I said, I won't be coming back from tomorrow and she just says, "Oh", you know, like good riddance.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. What about your neighbors and people near-- you know, near in your dad's business and so forth, how did they react to you?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, they were all bewildered.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I mean, people-- I know like my father, every night, when he-- as soon as he got home, he would-- first thing he would do is turn the radio on to listen to the news.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: But within a very short time after EO 6--9066, the orders came through to evacuate us, to relocate us, OK. And how were you notified of that? How did you guys find out where you-- that you were actually going to be evacuated? How was that posted?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: What the army did is they posted-- tacked on to the telephone pole the Executive Order. That was the only-- as far as I know, that was the only notification to the Japanese community.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Everybody saw that poster and it's-- gave the date, you know--

>> Carlene Tinker: Do you remember where you were supposed to report? Do you know-- do you know-- was it the church or it's at the Buddha church?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, what I remember is, one of our close Caucasian friend drove us to the center and dropped us off.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, is that right? Yeah. How many days did you guys have to get ready to be evacuated?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I'm just guessing, I would say-- I'd say the war was declared in December and--

>> Carlene Tinker: But the evacuation notices probably went up in March of '42 [inaudible].

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: So my-- we probably had about maybe-- I'm just guessing, maybe two months.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. But then to-- actually after you saw those signs posted, didn't you only have like a few days to two weeks maybe to get all of your stuff together and get ready to go to the assembly center, isn't that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But, you know, the government never-- when that executive order came out, there was no official that would-- that you can turn to and say, well, we have questions about, you know, what can we take and, you know, things like that. And, there was no organization that would-- was available where all the potential evacuees could go to and say, well, how do we take care of our property and thing like-- everybody was on their own.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my gosh, how disorganized and how-- well, also the fact that you said-- I think earlier you said something about bewildered. I mean, can you imagine what your parents were going through not knowing and all these other people not knowing where you were going, how long you were going to be gone. And, also probably you didn't even know you were going to go to the fairgrounds right away because, first of all, the government was so disorganized itself, OK. And, obviously, they were not operating with a full set of brain tissue. And so they didn't know what to do with you. So, they knew they were going to send you to one of the 10 relocation camps, all right. And the ones that were designated for this area were Jerome, Arkansas or Gila [Arizona], right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And so, those places weren't ready right away. This is March '42 and they had-- first of all, had to find property to build these camps on. And of course, those people and those areas didn't want you to come, or didn't want us to come. And so it took a while for them to acquire property to build the camps and then they had to build the camps, which would house anywhere from, what, 7,000 to maybe even 19,000. OK. So they had to put you some place temporarily. So you went to where the Fresno Assembly Center. Where was that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: At the county fairground. [Inaudible]. But even then, when we arrived at the camp-- I mean, at the fairground, they were still building the barracks, you know. I mean, they were building them so fast that the living quarters that the barrack was situated, they didn't have time to pour concrete, you know, for a concrete floor and all that.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my gosh.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: They poured asphalt, asphalt.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my gosh.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And then they built the barrack on top of the asphalt.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh. Now, did you-- Your family happened to be in a barrack or did you-- or one of those who've gone on a horse stall. Because a lot of people--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, see, Fresno Assembly Center, everybody got to live in a barrack.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right. But, what had happened is eventually somebody said, well, we have to continue the kid's-- children's education. So what they did is they cleared out the horse stables at the county fairground. And they-- And they made each stable a classroom.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, I didn't know that.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: They would just put the desk and a cable in there. And I remember every day at 3 o'clock, they would serve snack. And it was two graham crackers and a carton of milk.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: What did you-- Did you have school-- what did you do before that then during the day?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Nothing. We were just playing around and--

>> Carlene Tinker: Just playing around. Who taught you? Who were the teachers?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, they assemble the-- those that were fortunate enough to have graduated from college or high school teachers. And--

>> Carlene Tinker: I'll be darned. Yeah, see, I did not know that. So, during the day as a kid, you just kind of played around. What did your parents do? What-- Did they have jobs?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No.

>> Carlene Tinker: They didn't have jobs either?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No. Luckily, my dad volunteered to work in the mess hall.

>> Carlene Tinker: And what about your mom?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: She just stayed.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. What-- Kind of watched you guys. OK, what happened to your family's belongings and your dad's laundry?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, in our case, we were fortunate enough that my dad while running the laundry business, he became acquainted with this Mr. Jean Lamoure who was a Frenchman, but he had a dry cleaning shop in Chinatown. And, my dad got to became close friends with him. So when the war broke out and he found out that, you know, we're going to be sent away and all that, he came to my dad and said-- he told my dad and he said, "Kay, I'll take care of all your property until the war ends and if you manage to come back to Fresno", he says, "I'll return everything to you."

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And so we were really lucky because my dad had a 1937 Pontiac, you know, at that time. And he had all the laundry equipment. And this Mr. Lamoure stored everything, our furniture, our automobile and the business equipment.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my gosh.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And when we came back to Fresno, he returned everything to my dad.

>> Carlene Tinker: You know, ironically, I was a counselor at Bullard High School. When I was working, I had one of his grandchildren or great-grandchildren.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, the Lamoure family, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: And then they-- Yeah. And it's-- Yeah, yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's interesting. OK. Well, yeah, you definitely were one of the lucky ones because a very small percentage of Japanese and Japanese Americans who came back were able to recover a lot, because a lot of--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And you know when the orders came to evacuate prior to that, I don't know what made my parents do all this-- what they did was, they went to-- there used to be a five, 10, 15 store in Chinatown. It was run by a Caucasian, it was called Kingen, five, 10 and-- five and 10 store. My parents went there and they bought four sleeping bag and they bought metal, tissues and cups. And, I think they purchased one fan. And I think they also purchased one hot plate. I don't know where-- how they got that idea of doing that, but they did. They bought four sleeping bags, a metal dinnerware set, a fan, and

that was what we took to camp with us. Because when we-- when we got to the camp, you know, we were told that we couldn't bring our furniture, it was only what you can carry.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: So when we arrived at the Fresno Assembly Center, I remember they gave each member of the family a large like a mattress cover. And then they were pointing out to the field that there's a big haystack. And they said, go over there and fill your sack and use that as your mattress.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my gosh.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And the bed was a surplus hospital beds. It wasn't that standard one, it was that one that would, you know, about three, four feet high.

>> Carlene Tinker: That was great for you kids.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah. Oh, we have trouble getting up, you know, into the bed because, you know, there was no furniture in the living quarters. I mean, all it was just four walls with maybe two electrical outlets. The windows wasn't sliding window, it was-- you had a stick and you prop up the window to-- you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now, this was from March until-- when did you guys leave for Jerome?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It was late fall.

>> Carlene Tinker: Late fall.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Because--

>> Carlene Tinker: So--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- that was another thing. When we arrived in Arkansas, the camp wasn't ready yet. They were still building the barracks. As every day, a foot load of people would be coming in but-- you know, so they would have to double up with other families.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, now, in-- So getting back to the assembly center, if you were there that long, you had to deal with the heat, you're going to have fans or probably-- obviously, not air conditioning. And then as it got cooler, I

don't know if it was not cold enough yet, but then when you got to Jerome, it was cold, right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, it wasn't cold then. I think it might have been around November, October and November, we arrived there.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But I never-- It was still warm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Now, do you have any memories about leaving the Fresno Assembly Center on a train, traveling, what was that like?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: By coincidence, we all-- From the camp, we were trucked to Downtown Fresno to the train terminal along G Street there. And the train was parked such-- in such a way that it blocked Kern Street, you know, for-- from traffic. But, the car that we were in, we could see part of our laundry building, we could see down Kern Street, we can see the church about three blocks down. With that-- That I remember distinctly because I thought how fortunate that we're--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- in the car that travels Kern Street and you could still see Chinatown, you know. And I remember, I thought, gosh, that's where our playground, was and all that, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. How did you feel as a child? Did you have any idea what was happening to you?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No.

>> Carlene Tinker: I mean, nine years old.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No. But--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- we didn't know what was going on. But, it was-- to me, it was kind of exciting, because it wasn't our daily routine anymore. You know, it seemed like every day, things were changing. You know, we were either going somewhere or we were getting settled somewhere. In a way, it was exciting and yet it was kind of sad, because I can see where we used to play and the minute the train started rolling away, you know, it--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah, it--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Now, what about your playmates? Well, the teacher was obviously very indifferent and not sympathetic. What about the kids you were playing with? How did they treat you as you were leaving for Jerome?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: That's another thing that I'll never forget is the day that we were going to leave for the camp. On the block that I lived, around the corner was a Chinese family. And he was-- we were in the same class, but he came that morning that we were going to leave, he says, you know, I came to say goodbye to you, you know. Yeah, his name-- it was the Wong family.

>> Carlene Tinker: Did you-- When you came back, did you touch bases with him?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, that's great.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: In fact, when I joined the Navy, I found out that he was also a Navy veteran, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And, their distant relatives are the ones that run the Sakura Chaya.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: I'll be darned.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: The Wong family.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Getting back, I keep jumping back and forth because new ideas come in my head. Now, when you're on the train, were you able to look out?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, that's another thing.

>> Carlene Tinker: You know, and see where you're going? How long did the train trip take?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I think it took about four days.

>> Carlene Tinker: Four days, because that's a long way.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But, throughout the trip, the minute we were entering any town or city, the MPs would come down and they

would say, we had to pull it, draw the shades. And they didn't want us looking out. But naturally, we all peeked and everything.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But that was a normal routine. Whenever we went to a major town, they go down the train and tell everyone, draw the blind, you can't look out to.

>> Carlene Tinker: Could you get off the train or ever, did you detrain?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I recall the train stopping a couple of times along the way to let everyone off and stretch their legs and things.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, because that's a long time to be just sitting and I'm sure it wasn't very comfortable going to the bathroom or eating

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, see, that's another experience, I mean, a four-day train ride, because my mother had the baby, they had a special car set up just for all the mothers that had babies. So that when it came time for their formula, you know, they would all be in one location to feed the baby. Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that right? So she's-- she was separated all that time?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: We could-- Well, they could come back to our car and--

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, just during feeding time. I--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, no, not just feeding time, they lived in a--

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, but she could--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- you know, because it--

>> Carlene Tinker: -- come in and visit the den.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, right. So that car would be just filled with mothers with babies, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah. And then, to eat our meals, they set up tables, folding tables in the baggage car.

>> Carlene Tinker: In the baggage car.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: And so did you have to take turns? You must have--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, right, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: -- because there were a lot of you. Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And I remember, you know, there was no means for them to cook the meals. So it had to be, I guess, prepared beforehand, so, you know, we knew what city we're going to and then they would have the food ready. Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But for four days, we couldn't take a bath or anything.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my goodness. So when you got to camp to Jerome, as I've said, that was one of 10, now the term has called, instead of internment camp, relocation camp. The more acceptable term now, I think, is incarceration or concentration. How would you-- how do you refer to it?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, at that time, I just referred to it as, you know, Jerome or Fresno Assembly Center or Tule Lake .

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. But in your-- When you referred to these camps now as an adult, would you call them a relocation camp, incarceration, concentration?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Concentration.

>> Carlene Tinker: You would.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: And why do you think that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, for one thing, our civil rights-- well, I'm-- it didn't-- you know, it meant nothing to us. That's why I used the term concentration camp.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right, right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I know people would ask, well, why would you call it a concentration camp. You know, Germany had-- I said, the German concentration camp went to the extreme where they kill people, you know. And, the American side is, we were just denied our citizenship right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. And out of 110-120,000 people of Japanese descent, two-thirds of us were citizens. Yeah. So, your point is well taken. Your point is well taken.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And, you know, when-- at the outset of the war, I remember there were numerous raids conducted in Fresno, say like 1, 2 o'clock in the morning. The FBI would go and knock on a door and they'll say, I want to see the head of the family, meaning the husband. And then the agent would tell him, I'll give you 20 minutes to pack up your suitcase and they haul them away. And those family, they weren't told where their-- the husband or father was until a month later.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Oh my god.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that because they had some affiliation with Japan, or?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, they took-- what they did is they rounded up as soon as they can everyone that was a Japanese language school teacher or if you were a Buddhist minister, or if you were, say, a prominent head of the Japanese community. Those are the people that the FBI picked up right away.

>> Carlene Tinker: I see. It wasn't because they actually had ties with Japan.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, no.

>> Carlene Tinker: It was just sort of by coincidence they had some affiliation with the culture. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I know of some families that didn't see their husband or father for years sometimes. In fact, my cousin's wife and her sister don't even know where their dad was picked up and-- or where he was sent after he was picked up. They think it was Santa Fe or Crystal City.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: OK.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, which where two of the main ones that--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. OK. So, you were in an area that got-- in Fresno that got sent to Jerome but there were some people who went to Gila. Do you know how that happened?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Well, I understand that Highway 99 was sort of a dividing line. So if you were west of 99, you went to Jerome. Now, I don't know if this is actually true.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, I think it's true because even for Fresno Assembly Center, that went to-- the city was-- they have certain-- I don't know how they came up with that but they had boundaries. And so even the City of Fresno Proper, it depend upon where you live, because there was another camp in Pinedale.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, yeah, that's right. Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: So, where you live determine which camp you would go to.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: So in fact, Fresno Assembly Center, on the south side of the camp, I forget what the name of this road there, but it was all farmland. And, while we were in camp, there were Japanese that lived in that area hadn't been evacuated yet. And the Japanese farmer would cut the cantaloupes and he would roll it across the road and roll it underneath the barbwire and we would have cantaloupes to eat, I never forgot that.

>> Carlene Tinker: And here is another thing. I talked to somebody from Sanger. OK, Japanese American, and evidently, they didn't even have to go to the assembly center, they just gone on the train and went to like Rohwer or Jerome. So, anyway, let's talk about Jerome a little bit completely different, I understand. What was Jerome like?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, it was-- As far as preparing Jerome for the evacuees, it was a little bit more organized in the sense that the barracks were more sturdy looking and I think we had-- I think there was no window. I mean, there was a window but it would just-- one of those where you prop the screen off, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But, building wise, I thought Jerome was a little bit more appealing to live in here.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. No, was it made out of tar paper, did they--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, it was-- yeah, it was all--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, tar paper. Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- all tar paper.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now, what about warmth? What did you use to keep yourselves warm?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, see, it wasn't-- you know, we got there in early winter, so I remember the weather changed abruptly, you know, and so they were still in the process of building a camp yet. And the whole camp, they didn't have enough stove to put into each corners. But our family, we were lucky because there was an infant in the family, so we had top priority to receive that. And so, our surrounding neighbors that didn't have it yet, we would invite them over to our place to keep warm during the winter.

>> Carlene Tinker: I'll be darned.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: I'll be darned. Now, I understand that the camps had mess halls and rec halls. They probably tried to make life the same as it was for you if that could be possible. They had churches, they had schools, is that true?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that true? But, I understand that the bathroom situations were pretty bad.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, Jerome was a lot better than Fresno Assembly Center.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Because Fresno Assembly Center, I remember the bathroom, it was, you know, isolated and they didn't have urinals and toilet bowls. It was-- They constructed out of wood. It would be an elongated thing and they would cut the holes in, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my gosh.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And some places, they had-- at least they put a toilet seat on there, but it was a big water tank. And when that water tank got filled up, it would send down the water.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, dear.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: So if you're-- everybody made it a point not to sit on the end because-- but that's how the bathrooms were in Fresno Assembly Center.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. What were they're like in Jerome? I understand they were--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, Jerome, it was all-- they have individual toilet bowls and they had urinals, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah, that's why it was a real improvement from--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, compared to what you just described, definitely. But I know that there was no privacy, there were no walls separating each toilet, isn't-- and I think that was true in a lot of the camps from what I understand.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But Jerome, it was-- to everyone, it was a luxury because you had individual wash basin, individual toilet, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But, other than that-- oh, and they even had a special building where they had ironing boards.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, for the-- I've seen pictures of that, yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Now, what was life for you-- life like for you there, and you went to school?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Did you go to school?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Unfortunately--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- they had school began, so,

>> Carlene Tinker: Did you do that every day or just like--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Not every day.

>> Carlene Tinker: Every day. Now, what did--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: In fact, some of the teachers were Caucasian.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, all Caucasian. And did some of them live on the camp grounds or did they--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, I think they drove--

>> Carlene Tinker: Outside.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And that was also a huge issue because if you were living inside the camp and, let's say, you were a doctor, Japanese doctor, Japanese American, the maximum pay you could get was $19 a month.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, the doctors got a little bit more. I think my dad, he was working in the mess hall, I think he got about $14 or $16 a month.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, not a whole lot. But, if you were a Caucasian teacher coming on to the camp, then you've got whatever the teachers on the outside were getting considerably more.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: They might have been getting a little bit more, you know, because not everyone was willing to work, I mean, teach Japanese kids and--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, because you were aliens, right. Yeah, what did you do for entertainment? I understand that there are a lot of woods around that you like to go--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: -- and explore. Did you like to do that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: There was-- Actually in Jerome, there were portions of the camp-- there were no barbwire boundary.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, really?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Because of the vast forest.

>>Yutaka Yamamoto: But--

>> Carlene Tinker: But you have--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Now, and then, some would go in and get lost and they walk into like Little Rock, one of the towns, get picked up by the police and then--

>> Carlene Tinker: Let's back up, you said, there are no-- there were no wires, no barbwires.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Not like Fresno Assembly Center, you know, where--

>> Carlene Tinker: Really? Then you have guard towers?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, they have guard towers but--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. But you could actually leave easily?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well--

>> Carlene Tinker: Or did you do this--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It's the portion of the camp that we live, it was all forest, you know, virgin forest. So they just assumed that even if they walked out there, they're eventually going to come back because-- you know. Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: So-- But then, where did you say some of the people walked to? What town?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Little-- I think Little Rock, one of the major--

>> Carlene Tinker: Really? Wow. I had no idea on that. OK, so you were in Jerome from about November '42 and then in February '43, there was this questionnaire that was distributed. And the intent of the survey was to find out who was eligible to leave, who was eligible to be drafted, is that right? Do you remember anything like that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No.

>> Carlene Tinker: This is a loyalty?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It was a loyalty, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Loyalty, they wanted to-- but there were all kinds of issues that they were trying to uncover, you know. Part of it was like, we're trying to get young men to be drafted and, of course, that's amazing to me that here we were in prison and then they wanted to draft us-- or draft our young men.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right. And then on top of that, the two questions came up were that each family had to reply yes or no.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, what were those two questions?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, one was, would you renounce allegiance to Japan and pledge allegiance to the United States government. And the other one was, would you be willing to serve in the Armed Forces, which was, in my estimation, the most stupidest question they could have.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: We're already denied our right and we put-- we're put into camps, you know, and now, the government has nerve enough to come up to you and say, would you serve in the Armed Forces?

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: You know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. The one that's about Armed Services, that's 20-- question 27 and the other one about question 28, if you were-- the one about renouncing your affiliation with Japan, well, these people and most of the Isseis, obviously, were didn't a have a country, right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: If they deny that, they would be country less [If they answered "no" to #27 and #28, they would not have any country]. Right. So, as a result, how did your parents react to that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, my dad answered "no" to both.

>> Carlene Tinker: Did he?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: The minute he did that, we were designated to go to Tule Lake .

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Now, did you guys sign it-- did they sign it in front of you or how did-- how were you involved, did you have any idea what was going on with that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I think each family got that questionnaire and then they have to answer the two questions and turn it in. So at that time, my father put down no on both counts.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, right. Now, was he ostracized for doing that? Were there a lot of people who answered no, no?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, not that I'm aware, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. I was wondering if he were stigmatized, you know--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, that happened after the war ended.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And everybody went back to their original, you know, cities and things. And then there was a period of time where-- in all of the Japanese community, that became a big issue.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, did it?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right. In the sense that as far as like the majority felt that those that said “no” to the questionnaire and got sent to Tule Lake, they were branded as, I guess, un-American, you know. And I remember back in the late '40s and '50s that after we all, you know, came back to our towns, the JACL was still active around that time, you know. Yeah, and that's where a lot of the controversies started. They were saying that they put the label “no-no boys”, you know. And they ostracized-- then especially those that refused-- some of them were sent to the penitentiary. Yeah, in, I think, Oklahoma Penitentiary, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: For refusing to serve.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right, yeah. Now, the Japanese-- JACL, Japanese American Citizens League, that started maybe in the '30s, is that right, 20-- mid '20s, something like that. What was their position on all of this?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, see, that's another controversial thing. You can look at it from two viewpoints, the JACL organization, since the war started, they wanted to-- their goal was they wanted to show proof that everybody was loyal to the United States. And, I found out a lot of this later on in life, but when the World War broke out, the JACL was instrumental in telling the government like the FBI bureau and things. I think, you know, this minister or the head of the Japanese community, you know. They, in their worst, suggested to the FBI that I would consider these people subversives, you know. Yeah. And that's where the rift started among the JACL and the general Japanese community. I remember in camp, there were instances where JACL members were beaten up by Japanese so-called “fanatics”, you know. Yeah. Yeah. So like, you know, like [Mike] Masaoka [20 years after WWII, called “no-nos” disloyal] and those.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, that's what all that stemmed from.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Stemmed from, yeah. I'll be darned.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I mean, there was a lot of beatings going on in the camp because the more majority-- well, not the majority but those that were loyal to Japan, yeah, you know, especially those going to Tule Lake. They-- If you had any connection with the JACL, your life was in danger.

>> Carlene Tinker: I'll be darned. OK, now, Tule Lake is one of the relocation camps, incarceration camp, concentration camp in California. And originally, just different populations got sent there. But after the administration of these two questions and how people answered "no"—"no", "no", you, for example, your family got sent there and it became a segregation center, is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Which meant that in many ways, it was more prison like, is that right? Am I correct--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well--

>> Carlene Tinker: What was Tule Lake like?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It's-- It'd became like a prison in the minds of the American government because these people more or less pledged that they're not supporting the United States government and they want to go back to Japan. You know, so that's when they became branded as potential, I guess, instigators, you know, against the American government.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Well, there were a lot of people who were originally in Tule Lake before this happened who said-- who got sent out to the other--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Because they'd answered "yes".

>> Carlene Tinker: Because they answered "yes" and, obviously, putting all the people together who said "no", I mean, that was kind of, you know--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Powder keg.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. I just-- yeah, I don't know.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But then, again, see, those that said no to the questionnaire, a lot of them said no out of frustration, you know, because of the stupidity of the wording of the two questions, you know. Are you going to be loyal to the United States government? In the meantime, we've put you in internment camps, you know. I mean-- And to come out and say, now, are you

going to be loyal to the United States? What do they expect the people to say for crying out loud, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. So, what was like-- I know there was this one group--were they called the Hoshi Dan?. Is that-- Yeah. What were they like?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, they're-- they were loyalist.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. They wanted to go back to Japan.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right. And until they were going to be sent back to Japan, they wanted to show their true feelings to the emperor--

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- while they're in Tule Lake. And so, every morning, they would have calisthenics and marches throughout the camp. You know, they would wear headbands. And then every morning, they would bow east to the emperor, you know. They did things like that. But--

>> Carlene Tinker: Were there a lot of them?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, yeah. And-- Well, that's what the Tule Lake was made for is--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. I mean, like thousands. Probably 3 to 5,000? Mmm, I don’t about the Hoshi Dan, if they were that many.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I don't if it have to go as far as that but--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, that's kind of maybe. Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But they were loyalist, I mean--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- there would be-- it wasn't common to see fist fights between those-- I mean, the ones that were in that Hoshi Dan thing, they were true or you might call them Japanese patriots. They would lay their lives down for the emperor, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Isn't that something?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But, they were-- they never considered-- other people that signed “no” to both the questions like my dad, you know, he signed “no” because he was just angry at the stupidity of the-- having the nerve to ask us, you know, would you be loyal to the United States and would you be willing to

serve anything. So, in Tule Lake, there are two types like my father who wasn't-- he wasn't a fanatic. He would just discuss there with a way the question--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. But unfortunately, you had to be around these people. Now, what happened to those people? Did they actually move-- go back to Japan? Do you think there were quite a few of them?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And, you know, the interesting part about that is those people that went back to Japan, in their mind, you know, they were dedicated-- their allegiance was to the emperor of Japan. While those people that went back to Japan, they went back thinking that the day they arrived back in Japan, there were going to be people welcoming them and saying, you're true loyal citizens, you know. It wasn't like that. When they got back to Japan, they were more or less shunned--

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, is it?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- by members of their own family. And the reason for that is, people were on food rations. See, so those people that came back to Japan, they were ineligible for those ration cards. And so that meant-- the family there have to support those that came back. And a lot of them weren't happy about that, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah, because it was a matter of life and death. I mean--

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- you know, you would eat or you don't eat.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Places were bombed out and so forth. Well, now, your family, yeah, you just pointed out that they signed “no”, “no”, or your dad did because of the frustrations with the issues, the civil liberties and all that kind of stuff, but did they ever want to renounce their citizenship? Did they do that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No.

>> Carlene Tinker: No. Now, did your parents ever want to go to Japan?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, they did go back.

>> Carlene Tinker: I mean, during this time.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, they-- no. Because when the bomb fell at Hiroshima, somehow my dad's parents was able to send a letter to-- you know, to our family. And at that time, they told my dad, don't come back, it's not a place to raise your family. And so that's why we came back to Fresno.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, OK. So you stayed in Tule Lake for the rest of the war until when? When did you come back to California?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, it was in '40s, late '45, I think.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. OK, because the camp at Tule Lake actually closed. It was the last of the 10 to close and I think that was March 1946.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: OK, yeah, it's about that, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. But in the meantime, what was life like for you guys? I mean, you just kind of did your normal thing? You weren't part of this Hoshi Dan group, yeah. So you went to church, and you went to school and--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah, we had no problem.

>> Carlene Tinker: You'd had no problem. You-- I understand too there was a stockade too for some of these guys who are maybe away from the actual camp, is that right? Was there a prison off camp—off camp grounds do you know?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, there was a-- well, there was a prison in camp at Tule Lake.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, in camp, OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But it wasn't-- it was, by no means, a prison per se. I mean, it was just regular barracks set aside for those extremists, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Well, I understand too that there were a lot of situations where there were conflicts between the administration, the people who ran the camp, the Department of Justice, the War Department, WRA, OK, those people, some of them, I think, was his name Best, was he the director of the camp, I think. He was not very sympathetic. He was not willing to negotiate. So, there were a lot of frustrations among the people who live there in their fights. You said fights, well,

between the Japanese associate, JACL and so forth, but other fights too, is that correct? Are you aware of any of that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Not the fights but what I was aware of at that time was when we lived in Fresno, just two houses down was a close friend of my dad. They were friends for a long, long time. Anyway, we all finally ended up at Tule Lake, and my parents would like, every Sunday, go walk across the camp to the other side of the camp where their friends live, you know. Well, over the years that we were at Tule Lake, my dad's close friend, his attitude changed. I mean, he became one of the loyalists, you know. I mean, although they were close friends or, you know, until the war started, we were close family friend. But eventually after we got to Tule Lake and my parents used to always make a weekly visit just to, you know, talk with them and all that, my dad's friend-- his attitude changed. I mean, he started leaning toward the pro-Japanese group. And, before the camp closed, their friendship broke up and they actually did go back to Japan.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, really?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Did they come back?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, no.

>> Carlene Tinker: No?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, I know one family that went but came back after about 15 years, yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: See, there's a lot of them that came back because when they left for Japan, I mean, you know, they were of the mindset that they are loyal to Japan and all that, you know. But once they got back, then they realized they had made a terrible mistake.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And luckily, those that didn't renounce their citizenship, there were a lot of them that hung on to their-- they were allowed to come back, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And then even those, I understand, who did renounce their citizenship, there was a very famous lawyer by the name of Wayne Collins.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, who fought for their reinstatement, OK. And it took about 20 years for that to happen. I'm just looking at these notes here, yeah. The-- Apparently, there were just all kinds of infighting, you know, and you probably as a youngster weren't aware of that. But, yeah, they came up-- that armed guards at curfew. And unfortunately, for you-- or fortunately for me, I happen to be in a camp in Colorado, Amache. And our director was just the opposite. So, my memories are quite different from you, and quite different. So, anyway, in '46 or '45, late '45, your family moved back to California. They didn't go-- A lot of people went to the Midwest, others came back. And as you pointed out, you were very fortunate to be able to come back to Chinatown, now Japantown. And Mr. Lamoure had all your stuff. That's just amazing.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And the other amazing part is the laundry property. When my dad came back, he found that original property was vacant. And so, he started the laundry business again.

>> Carlene Tinker: Just right off like nothing happened, so to speak.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Now, did the Lamoures continue to be in Japantown or in Chinatown for a long time?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: They eventually-- One of his son took over the business and he expanded, that's why-- what's the name of that? It wasn't called Lamoures anymore. They-- Anyway, he opened up about five different branches and that was the starter of the trend where, you know, they would open up shops, you know, throughout the city. So it was a well-known dry cleaning shop.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now, did he actually live in Chinatown? No, no.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No. No, he lived on, I think, around Fresno area there.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Yeah. OK. How old were you when you came back? So you were nine when you went in, so--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: So, about, what, 12, 11 or 12.

>> Carlene Tinker: Twelve, and then where did you go to school when you came back?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I started-- I went back to Lincoln Elementary.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But at that time, I didn't know-- my dad and I, we didn't know what grade to start with, you know, because I was out for three years. So we just took a random thing and said, I'll start from the sixth grade and that's what I did.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But then when I got to Edison, those that were my classmate before the war, they're about three years ahead of me. And so by the time I graduated from Edison, I was 20, I think. Yeah. The rest of my classmates were, you know, 17, 18, you know. It was--

>> Carlene Tinker: I was just the opposite. When I came back in Colorado, they had A2, B2, you know. A2 was the first semester, A2. And when I came back, I guess I was in A2. And so I was out of sync and I was going to start school in the fall. So they asked my mother if I-- where she wanted to put me. So they said, well, we don't want-- no, they asked her if she wanted me to be bumped up or stay behind. She said, bumped up. I don't think she knew what that meant, but I did. And so when I graduated from high school, I was 16.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. That didn't mean I was a whiz or anything. It was just sort of accidental.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah. I got a lot of strange looks too when they said, how old are you and I would tell them, you know, 17 or 18 or 19, you know, and said, you're still in high school yet, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: So you graduated from Edison, OK. That's a great school. So, what did you do after high school?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: From high-- Well, by the time I graduated in '52, the Korean War had started in 1950, I think. So, you know, we all had to register for the draft and we knew how close our number was to be called, you know. So a lot of us-- In fact, there was about six of us, we all decided that we would volunteer into one of the four branches, you know. And so, a lot of our group, there was-- my friend and I, we joined-- volunteered, we joined the Navy and then I had three other friends that joined the Air Force and there's about five or six that volunteered for the Army. But we all felt that two extra years compared to being drafted was better than not coming back.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yes.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And--

>> Carlene Tinker: And why did you choose the Navy rather than, you know, the other branches?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, the reason I chose the Navy was just before I graduated, my folks sent me back to Japan to look up my grandparents to see if they were doing-- you know, if they were all right and everything. And that was 1950.

>> Carlene Tinker: '50, OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Two days after, our ship left San Francisco, the Korean War started. And, by the time I arrived in Japan, my father was worried that I was going to get stranded, you know, and he thought, well, a war is going to start and everything. So he immediately purchased plane tickets for my return trip instead of waiting, you know, to come back on the ship. Yeah. But, luckily, you know, the war never got to the point where, you know, I would be stranded in Japan and all that, so.

>> Carlene Tinker: Where-- If you enlisted, now did you actually serve in active duty? Where did you--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, yeah, four years active duty but--

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, where did you go?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, eventually, I ended up in Japan. But other than that, I mean, my four years-- I was on the ship for four years.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, really?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. What was your role? What did you do on the ship?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, my job was-- I ran what they call a ship store. It was like-- I sold jewelry and stationery things, all those things that you would see in a five-and-dime store, you know. So--

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, who were you selling these things to?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: To the shipmates on the ship.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, it doesn't sound like you had a really tough job.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, it was a--

>> Carlene Tinker: You picked the right one.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: O, yeah, yeah. I--

>> Carlene Tinker: And you did that for four years?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now, in the meantime, I forgot to ask you, do you speak Japanese?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: How did you learn how to do it?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, because I was in Tule Lake for three years. And during that time, I didn't go to an American school. It was Japanese school.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, that's right, that's right. I read that.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And the Japanese school was six days a week.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, that's how you learned it. Oh, I thought maybe because your family spoke only. But, that's right, I do remember that.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, my parents spoke Japanese but three years, I was going to a Japanese school. The day that the war ended, my folks told me, all right, you can quit Japanese school, you can go sign up for American school, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now, could you speak English as well?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: That was not a problem, OK. So, when you came back to Fresno, you could still speak-- you can still speak-- do you still speak Japanese?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Good for you.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, because my wife was a native of Japan, so.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. OK. So when you came back after the war, what did you do after you came back, were you married at that time? No?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No. After I left the Navy, then I started to work at the Buddhist church.

> >Carlene Tinker: Oh.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: I worked there for 14 years. And then it got to a point where, you know, by then, I had a son and daughter, and the future then looked too nice to me so I applied for a job at the post office. And I passed the exam and everything. So I stayed there for about 34 years.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, that's what you retired from, OK. What did you do at the Buddhist temple? I didn't catch that.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It is a-- Well, the title was executive secretary.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, yeah. I recently heard that the temple has been sold. Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: They sold it to a Burmese group.

>> Carlene Tinker: Isn't that something? It's going to become a monastery. Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: And then I heard recently that they were taking a tour and they went-- these people from Burma went downstairs and they saw this Buddha and they said, where did you get that, apparently, Burma sent that statue, is--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Have you heard that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: That was-- Yeah, while I was employed there at that time, it was-- that's right, it came from Burma, it was donated by a Burmese group and it was carved out of teak wood.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, teak wood.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But eventually, what happened is the change in the humidity and the weather, it split, you know, the wood. Yeah, I don't know whatever happened to that though.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, apparently, they saw that and they brought it upstairs.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, then they must-- oh, OK.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah, I just heard this. Yeah, I didn't know that, yeah. All these things I'm learning.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It is about that tall.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow. Isn't that amazing? OK. Now, how old were you when you got married?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Forty.

>> Carlene Tinker: Forty?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Forty, no, wait a minute. No, it's 30-- 30 something, I guess.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, you were older?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: And whom did you marry?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: A girl from Japan.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. How did you meet her?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: That's-- It's kind of an interesting story. While I was in-- just before I got out of the Navy, the ship I was on went to Japan for a six-month tour. And, I didn't know it at that time but when I got there, my parents wrote to say that my cousin in Hiroshima was getting married. And, so I got a 10-day leave and I went down to the wedding, for my cousin's wedding. Well, the girl that my cousin married was-- even-- around back in the '50s, it was more or less arranged marriage, you know. So-- And what had happened was my cousin's wife had a younger sister. And I didn't meet her at that time, but after I got out of the service and while I was working at the church, they sponsored a choir tour of Japan about a two weeks trip to Japan. So I signed up for that because I was a member of the choir at that time. Well, I wasn't aware but before that, my parents took a trip to Japan and I guess they started some campaign to find a potential wife for me. Well, what had happened was my cousin's wife had a younger sister that was not married. And, during this choir's trip, when I got to Japan, my parents and her parents had arranged to have a little family gathering and then all that, you know, and an official meeting, you know. Which-- And at that time, I was unaware of what was going on, but I do recall when our choir tour disbanded and we're ready to come back to Fresno, my cousin and his wife and her younger sister came to the train station to see me off. And

people don't believe it when I tell them this, but for some reason, I don't know what made me say it, but I motioned to my cousin and I said, listen, I said, I don't know when I'm going to come back to Japan, but I will definitely come back sooner or later. And I said, when I do come back and if your wife's younger sister is not married, I said I'm going to marry her. And it became true. I mean--

>> Carlene Tinker: And so that came true. So when did you go back to get her, or does she--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, so what we did is we agreed to correspond for a while just to split up and kind of think about it, you know, to see. And after a couple of months, well, during that time, we were writing to each other, and I finally got to the point where I said, well, do you want me to come back to Japan for the marriage, you know, she says no, she says, I'll come to you. And so she came and we were married here.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now, was she a lot younger than you?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, we were only-- she was three years younger than me.

>> Carlene Tinker: Three years, yeah. And she was from Hiroshima.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: She was.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: That's the other sad part is that, she was in Hiroshima when the bomb fell. And, she wasn't injured at that time but she was in that zone, you know. So, she became qualified to receive an allotment from the Hiroshima government for having been in that critical area.

>> Carlene Tinker: What do you mean allotment? Did they did--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: From the epicenter, if you lived, I think, like four miles from the epicenter, you were eligible for this compensation from the government, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: And how long did that continue?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: How long did she get it? Oh, until she passed away.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It wasn't a great big amount or anything like that, but, yeah. But, after I retired, we used to go for a

daily walk to Woodward Park. And the path that we took, we would always climb up the Bluff. And then walk and then come back down again. Well, whenever we climb that first Bluff, she would always say, well, I have to rest for a while because I'm out of breath, you know. And that continued every day. And so the next time she went for her annual cardiograph, you know, to a heart specialist, I happened to mention to the doctor about, you know, she always runs out of breath and all that. And he was the one that said, well, you know, I think your wife has what they call an MDS, Myelodysplastic syndrome. And I said, well, how does a person get that, and he says, well, from overexposure to radiation. And, so he told me to contact our primary physician and I told him what had transpired. And he immediately made an appointment for her to go to the cancer center. And so she was under their care for eight years. I had to take her every other week for her-- they would, you know, check her blood.

>> Carlene Tinker: So it was a blood cancer?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, it turned to be-- it turned out to be leukemia.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, leukemia.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. But it didn't-- the signs didn't happen, and for years, right, you said eight years.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, she was under their care for eight years.

>> Carlene Tinker: But, I mean, the bomb fell in 1945, yeah, but until-- she didn't show any symptoms until then?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But after she passed away then looking back over our married years, I became aware of, you know--

>> Carlene Tinker: There were signs that you didn't recognize at the time, yeah. Yeah. Well, it sounds like though she survived a long time.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well--

>> Carlene Tinker: I mean--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- not long enough.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, I understand but, yeah. Have you-- I'm sure you've been to the center, I happen to have been with my mother to the museum and the site, you know, and the big bombed out building, yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah, she-- When the bomb fell, she was at school. And, they saw that plume of a smoke-- the cloud, you know, the radioactive cloud. And so they all ran out to look at the cloud but at the same time, the so-called black rain started to fall. And they thought it was a novelty and so they were just frolicking outside. But evidently, that was--

>> Carlene Tinker: That's how she got exposed.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Exposed, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Well, I'm very sorry but your story is very-- you know, I really haven't addressed the issue of racism or discrimination. Obviously, you felt that when you were growing up after the war started, you know, when your teacher kind of shined you on, she didn't acknowledge what's happening to you. Have you ever experienced any racism or discrimination either then or now as an adult?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: You mean after the war started?

>> Carlene Tinker: Even before.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, before. No. Before the war, no, I never did, never did.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But after the war, after we came back to Fresno, maybe-- for about two years maybe, I felt racism.

>> Carlene Tinker: What years was those?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: A good example was in Chinatown, there were a couple of instances where just for no reason, you know, somebody walking by would say, dirty Jap and things like that, you know. In fact, I remember one-- recall one incident where I was walking with my younger brother, and this Caucasian, he was drunk, but he-- as we were walking by, he kind of walked towards my younger brother and he looked at him and he said, you goddamn Jap, you know, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: So this would be in probably the '50s?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Early '50s.

>> Carlene Tinker: Early '50s.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But other than that--

>> Carlene Tinker: How about your parents, did they ever--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, no, no. Oh, no, I take it back. After we got back from camp, I would say, oh, maybe the first year, because our shop was on G Street. At that time, the main town of-- shopping area of Fresno was Fulton Street. And where the laundry was situated, it was just-- she would just have to walk across the railroad track and she was in Fulton Street and she can do shopping and anything. And I remember one of the major clothing stores at that time was-- I can't remember the name of that store now, but I remember when she came home and she would say she stood at the counter for half an hour and, you know, sales people walking around and not one of them came to wait on her, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Was that Gottschalks?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No.

>> Carlene Tinker: Where was it on Fulton?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It was on Fulton and the Kern Street.

>> Carlene Tinker: Fulton and Kern Street.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Walter Smith.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, I'm not familiar with that.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, OK.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. OK. This was your mom?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: What about your dad? Did he ever have any outright--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, no. But my mom-- you know, and at that time, Fulton Street was-- it was a real-- the center of the shopping center, you know. And like Woodworth, they had-- they used to have the soda fountain counter there. And I remember my mom came home once and she sat there for about 30 minutes and

nobody-- no waiter came, you know. She wanted to have a glass of Coca-Cola.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But other than that, we didn't have--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah. But--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, but the other thing too I remember was we wanted to go swimming, you know, our group. And we went to this one-- there was a swimming pool located on H Street. It was called Crown Plunge. It was-- The unique thing about that was it was the only swimming pool in Fresno that was indoors.

>> Carlene Tinker: Was it on H?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm, H Street.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Where the Dale Bros. Coffee used to be, I don't know.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But anyway, we went there and a girl, the cashier says, do you boys have a health card? And we said, what do you mean a health card? And she, well, you're supposed to have a health card from the Health Department stating that you don't have, you know, tuberculosis or things like that. And so we walked out, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: How old were you at that time?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, that-- I was probably about, what, 15 or 16 years old.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, oh my gosh.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: So we finally ended up-- we started to go to Weymouth Pool out on Whites Bridge by the Chandler Airport.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, wow. That way out there.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right. But we used to ride the bicycle from Chinatown to Weymouth, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Now, was your house in Chinatown? You guys lived in Chinatown?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Whereabouts is the house, so was the house.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: We lived right there off of the corner of F and Mono.

>> Carlene Tinker: F and what?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: F and Mono, Mono Street.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, OK. OK. So, but as an adult after those couple interest-- incidents, you don't feel like you've had any problems?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No.

>> Carlene Tinker: Being Japanese American?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No.

>> Carlene Tinker: No.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No.

>> Carlene Tinker: When you were--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But when we would go to movies, you know, say like Wilson or Towers and things like that, we would always go in groups, groups of four or five just in case, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Just in case, yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But we never encountered any problem.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. How about your wife being from Japan, does she ever experience any negative feelings from anybody?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, no.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now, where you live now, where do you live? You live out by Fresno State or in Northwest of Fresno State.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It's off of Sierra and Millbrook in that.

>> Carlene Tinker: And your neighbors accepted you wholly?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, yeah, no problem.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Well, I'm glad to hear that because I know from talking to other people, Fresno was very divided racially up until the '50s, OK. Is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: If you-- Like you went to Edison and that was the west side, right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: And you were part of the lot of the minority groups if you want to call them that, right? Italians, Germans, and Chinese--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: That's what the Edison was made up of minorities.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah. And it wasn't until after the '50s that you got to cross this-- the railroad tracks, so to speak.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: More or less.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, even where I live, I live over by Fresno State. We looked at the property deed and there was a covenant saying that they couldn't sell to Armenians, Japanese, Blacks, Africans, so forth. So, I mean, this is up by Fresno State. We're talking supposedly North Fresno at the time. And then I think that, well, happened in the '50s, something like that.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: See, back in the '50s, there was only three high schools, Fresno High, Roosevelt, and Edison.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah. Fresno High was considered for whites, Roosevelt was for more or less Armenians and then Edison was for Black, Mexicans, and Orientals.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And then at that time, we were called Orientals, right? How things change.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. As you identify yourself, when you were introducing yourself to somebody, do-- how do you identify yourself, am I Japanese American or I'm so and so? Is ethnicity a real big issue with you?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, Japanese American.

>> Carlene Tinker: Japanese American. And then do you also identify yourself with your religion? Is that a big thing?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. So you’re very involved in the church, in the temple?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: More or less.

>> Carlene Tinker: Do you sing in the choir?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Not anymore.

>> Carlene Tinker: Not anymore.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Let's talk about your children. OK, your children are not going to be Yonsei, they're going to be sort of half Sansei because your wife was born in Japan, sort of the next generation.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Sort of complicated.

>> Carlene Tinker: What are your kids like?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, they're--

>> Carlene Tinker: How old are they?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: My son is-- My daughter is 50 and my son is 55.

>> Carlene Tinker: And what do they do?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: My son is a physical therapist.

>> Carlene Tinker: In town here?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm. He works at the Little Creek. And my daughter is a school teacher.

>> Carlene Tinker: And where does she teach?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: At the Storey Elementary.

>> Carlene Tinker: And what grade?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: First and second.

>> Carlene Tinker: First and second. Are either of them married?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, no.

>> Carlene Tinker: Neither one. Yeah, my kids aren't either. We're not going to have any grandchildren.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah, same here.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now, do you still go back to Japantown, Chinatown?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Do you meet with any buddies?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Every Friday, there's four of us. We meet at the Central Fish.

>> Carlene Tinker: Do you?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And we drink coffee in.

>> Carlene Tinker: And reminisce, reminisce about the old times. Yeah, that's fine.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, we used to have about seven or eight of us. It's down to four now.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah. I know another one in your group, he's in his 90s now, isn't he?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Gary Tsudama.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And you're kind of in the late 80s and I'm turning 80 this year. Wow. I never always thought that anybody beyond older than 30 was, you know, one step in the grave. I remember my aunt and uncle were going dancing and they were in their 30s. And I said to my mother, you know those old people still dance. Yeah. But times change as you get older, right?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Everybody else is sort of younger than you. OK. So, let me just summarize. I find your story particularly interesting because I've never met anybody who answered “no, no” to the loyalty questions. And so I think that your story will be particularly interesting to anybody who happens to look at your interview. So, that in itself is a huge thing and it's a big contribution to our interview project, but also the fact that you were born in Chinatown, Japantown. I mean, your family goes way back and that is a huge thing. You are definitely a native San Joaquin Valley resident. That's wonderful. And then surprisingly, because my mother actually was here in the '20s and so forth and experienced lots of discrimination and so forth, your story doesn't seem to be colored with that or peppered with that. And that is also very gratifying. And each story that I'm hearing is so unique. I really appreciate you're

sharing that with me. I'd like you to show your booklets here that you shared with me and tell me a little bit about each of those books that you share. Want to hold them up?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Mm-hmm.

>> Carlene Tinker: And tell me about them.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, actually, these two books came about because Tim Taira [assumed spelling], he was the one that got a hold of these. I don't know how we did it, but back in Washington, he got in touch with somebody and, anyway, he came across these. And then the reason-- especially this one is because--

>> Carlene Tinker: You want to hold it up in front of the camera?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh, because it has pictures of Fresno Assembly Center and a lot of the people in this booklet are from Fresno.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, that's particularly valuable.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And what is the title? Read the title.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Japanese Evacuation, Wartime Civil Control Administration, San Francisco 1942.

>> Carlene Tinker: 1942, OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And this one is mostly Tule Lake. Well, that was the reason I got these two.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Is there anything left at Tule Lake? Have you been back there recently?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No. But they do have a pilgrimage--

>> Carlene Tinker: Do they?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: --every year. It's-- I think a number is over 5-600 people go every year.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, wow. Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But the Tule Lake-- the former Tule Lake camp, there's no landmark remaining. The only so-called landmark is there was a mountain next to the camp called Castle Rock. And then on the other end of the camp was another mountain, it was like a shape of an abalone so it's called Abalone Mountain--

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, is that right? Well, were there probably volcanic origins--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: It was a extinct lake, the bottom of the lake. That's why when we were there, it was a popular pass-time to look for seashells.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that right? Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: They would-- Like my mother, she would get the seashell and then make pictures like a portrait, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, that was a real art. I've seen several of those. Yeah. There was somebody I talked with in Hanford who had--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Oh OK.

>> Carlene Tinker: -- something like that. Yeah. And maybe a couple of years ago, when it was the 75th anniversary for Executive Order 9066, we had a lot of people-- we borrowed a lot of stuff for the exhibit. And I think that one of them was that. So, tell me if there's anything that you'd like to share that I have not asked you about. Is there anything that I've left out that you'd think is important to tell?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, the one incident that I was-- stands out is when we went to Fresno Assembly Center maybe about a month or so afterward rumors started that they were going to start a school again for all the youngsters, you know, because up until then since we went into camp, we never had a classroom. And so, at Fresno Assembly Center, they decided to open up a school in the racing track and the stables nearby. So what they did is they cleaned up the stables but they couldn't clean up the smell of-- you knew it was a stable, but they put tables and benches in there and each stable was one class. And, we had to go to school there every day.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my goodness.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And--

>> Carlene Tinker: You had to put a clothespin on your nose so you wouldn't smell the smell.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, we eventually gotten used to it. I mean, you know, because a stable, I don't care how much you scrub it, you're not going to get that stable smell out.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, gosh, yeah, yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: But--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Well, looking back at your life and how you've been treated, how do you feel as an American citizen? Do you truly feel them as an American or do you forgive the government for what they did? Naturally, we don't agree with what they did.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, I--

>> Carlene Tinker: How do you feel about that?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: No, I still consider the United States as the greatest place to live.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah, despite what had happened-- what we had to go through, but more so our present time that we live in now, there's no better place than here, yeah. But, getting back to the school thing, the thing that always stood out during all these years is the fact that here, we're having a school conducted in a stable and yet every day we went to school, the first thing we did was we would stand--

>> Carlene Tinker: And pledge allegiance.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Yeah. The incongruity of all of that and the fact that we are being treated like second-class citizens, but still in spite of that, we respected the government and pledged our loyalty.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: That's-- That would be the one thing that, you know, I would like to emphasize what we went through, but every day--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Right. What was I going to ask?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah. I mean--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- it's just unbelievable, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Why exactly did you agree to be a participant in this project? Well, why did you want to tell your story?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, because more and more, I became aware of a lot of-- the public, some of them were not even aware of what transpires, you know. Yeah. And it's-- Because of that, I took upon myself too that whenever I had the chance, I would do my share to give this-- pass this information on, you know. Even when I-- After I retired from the post office, every Thursday, there's about 15 of us, we gather for breakfast every week. And when I first joined that group, 90%-- 99% of them, they never do about that. So, once I joined, which has been a number of years now but they would ask me questions about it and, you know, I would tell them what it's like. Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. And if we don't tell, nobody will know.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Nobody would-- Right, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: And obviously, one of the lessons of history is hopefully to not repeat it regardless of what it was. And unfortunately in the current times--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Still happens, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: -- still happens, and that's what's so discouraging. So discouraging and it just takes a few crazy people, I want to call them, you know, like John DeWitt and the people who were encouraging the president at the time to relocate us because they-- you know, they had very strong feelings. And fortunately, there were some strong people who fought against them. But, unfortunately, it only takes a few to fuel all of these fears and ill-treatment of people. Yeah. And we know that's going on right now. OK. Well, finally, I want you to tell me how-- what is your legacy? What would you like to be remembered as, or how would you like to be remembered as?

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, I guess, I would be like to be remembered as a person that-- -- respected all other human beings regardless of who or what they were, you know. Yeah. And, we're all in the same group. I mean, we all feel the same things, you know, emotionally, physically. But most of all, I guess I would like to be remembered as someone that people could depend upon me as a friend. Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: That is so important. And hopefully, your children, when they hear your story, will respect you for that. And obviously, they've learned that lesson.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: And, you know, I feel fortunate because my two kids, they're aware of what I've gone through. You know, when the war ended and then we all came back to start our lives over again, our Issei parents during all those terrible years that we spent in camp, for some reason, the Issei people, they never passed their experience down to their kids and it all boils down to a Japanese trait which is-- it's called gaman, to endure, you know, to grow with a punch, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's right, to persevere.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: To persevere. And also, the other saying shikata ga nai, you know, when we were in camp, that is what it is and they just kept trudging along going ahead, not letting things get them down. I have to really admire, you know, your parents, my parents, our parents for doing that.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah. You know, because I was unaware of that feeling, in other words, you know, it came out years ago. You know, they would say, you know, the Isseis, they gaman, you know, and they never spoke about the camp experience. And that's true because when I look back on our family, I never recall my mother or father talking about camp experience, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. And I, myself, I have the same thing that my mom and dad never talked about.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah. And when I realized that, I thought, that is amazing, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: That a group of individuals would feel the same-- you know, in other words, they say what's done is done and just going to have to--

>> Carlene Tinker: That's right.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- to go on.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Unfortunately, some people don't ever do then, but for the bulk of them, the majority of them, they did, and they are proud examples to follow. Very great examples. Yeah, I have two-- from my mom's family, I still have two-- an aunt and an uncle and I'm going to be visiting next month there in their late 90s. Yeah. But they never talked about it. They never talked about it. So, I'll--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah, that's another reason why, you know, I-- whenever something like this comes up, I'm willing to participate because, you know, I like to have the future generation, especially the Japanese generation know about this, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's right. And for our children too, because your children and my children are so far removed from our grandparents and our parents. This is something for them to know and to learn about themselves as well.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Right, right.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: To me, that is very important--

>> Carlene Tinker: It is.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: -- to get our kids know. Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Yeah.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Yamamoto.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: OK.

>> Carlene Tinker: It's been a pleasure and--

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: Well, its been my pleasure also.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah. So, we will have you in our history books in a short time.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: OK. Thank you.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, thank you very much.

>> Yutaka Yamamoto: OK.