NARRATOR: SATOSHI KUWAMOTO

INTERVIEWER: IZUMI TANIGUCHI

DATE: November 4, 1999

IT: Okay, today is November 4, 1999, Thursday, and we are here interviewing Kuwamoto in Fresno. First, would you state your name and where you were born and the day you were born?

SK: My name is Satoshi Kuwamoto and I was born in 1922 and I am seventy-seven years old. I was born in Fresno and lived most of my life here in Fresno. Actually, I was born right down on E and Ventura Street and delivered, I was delivered by a midwife. In those days, I guess most everyone were delivered by a midwife. There were two in town. And it's—her home was made like a hospital so I'm sure my mother had a long stay over there.

IT: Do you want to tell us where in Japan your father came from?

SK: My father came from Hiroshima, Ushitamachi. And—

IT: And when did he come here?

SK: Well, my recollection—I understood that he came in 1916. His uncle had a business in Sacramento and that is where they first came—first they came down to Sacramento. He came down to Sacramento and worked over there for a little while and then he and his brother decided, that is not correct, the brother had come down to Fresno much earlier to Fresno, and had opened a business so my father came much later to join him so there is a history behind what they were doing. In other words, we had a general merchandise store in which his uncle had come down to Hawaii in 1898 and they had opened the business

for a couple years and then decided they would go to greener pasture and they came to Sacramento and opened the business over there.

My father's brother, who was quite a bit older than he was, was helping him for a while and then he came down to Fresno. I am not sure of the date but I think it is around 1910 or so. He came to Fresno and opened the Aki Company General Merchandise Store. And the store in Sacramento was called Aki Company, too. So my father came quite a bit later. I believe it was 1916 after he got out of the Waseba University. And helped for a while, he even had gone to Four C's College here in Fresno then so he had pretty good control of his English. He could read and write fairly well. And then after a few years he went back to Japan and got married to my mother, who also came from Hiroshima, Misasamachi. There are quite a bit of people from Misasamachi in Fresno. So it's not like going to a real strange place because they knew—she knew people here from Japan. And that's after they got married, I was born—or I think they came back to the United States in 1921. My mother was here in 1921 and I was born in 1922 and that is my start.

IT: Are you the oldest in the family?

SK: I am the oldest of three. I have a brother and a sister. They are—

IT: Did your father then work mainly in the business?

SK: Yes. He—I think he was just, you know, helping out, like helping his brother out, and it was probably a grocery, I mean general merchandise grocery business. And a little bit later on, I don't know when, but they opened a branch hardware store on Kern Street and our—the business itself has moved from one place to another over the years. They were on F Street, Kern Street, Fresno. I can't remember if they were on Fresno Street or not

but anywa,y they have had several moves and what I remember is they were on Tulare Street when I was really young, I can remember going to the business on Tulare Street.

IT: Was the location owned?

SK: No.

IT: Or leased?

SK: No, it's leased.

IT: Was it due to the Alien Land Law or anything like that?

SK: I'm sorry. What is that again?

IT: Was there anything affect by the Alien Land Law?

SK: No, it's just they were in business and they would rent store space and they finally thought that was the best location then. There were other stores in town but the family had the—the family had the business on Tulare Street and then during that time, my father opened the hardware store on Kern Street where Sakata Company used to be. Or became—became Sakata Company opened in the same location later. In the twenties my uncle, the older brother of my father, got cancer and he went back to Japan and just about that time they, instead of having two stores, they combined it. I don't know whether it is—the dates are sort of hazy to me but anyway they combined both the hardware and the grocery business in one location on Tulare Street. For us, it was a fair-sized store. And that is how I remembered it until the time we left for camp.

IT: Did the store handle any imported gifts from Japan?

SK: Yes, a lot of it.

IT: A lot of it?

SK: Most of it, I would say. They had just about everything then, grocery, dishes and then the hardware department, they had the hardware store.

IT: Did your father have to go back to Japan to procure or anything like that?

SK: I didn't hear the question?

IT: Did your father have to go back to Japan to procure some of the things he sold in the store?

SK: No, they had—by then they had importers. I guess there has always been importers out of San Francisco who came down every week or every two weeks to sell us all the import goods. The rest were domestic merchandise so it was easily gotten here.

IT: What was the main line of goods in your store?

SK: Well, I think when they merged—I think the grocery business was the main line.

IT: Were the clientele mainly Japanese?

SK: Mostly Japanese. On the hardware side or the department was mostly the white people.

IT: Now what schools did you attend?

SK: Locally?

IT: Locally.

SK: Oh, I went to the Lincoln Elementary School which is still there and went to Edison and to Fresno High School. And I started Fresno State, I guess I went a year and a half when the war started. And later on, I, when we went to camp like every other students, we were trying to get out to finish our education and I ended up in the University of Missouri out in Rolla, the School of Engineering.

IT: Did you get a degree in engineering then?

SK: Well yes, I did get a degree in Geological Engineering.

IT: While you were in elementary and high school and so on, who were your playmates? Were the Japanese or Caucasians or—

SK: It was quite a mixed group. They were Caucasians and Japanese. I can't remember very well but those are the kids I remember through junior high and all that. I'd say they are mixed. I mean, the Japanese kids we went to school from the house and at school you played baseball with all the rest of the kids.

IT: Did your parents have any contact with the school like PTA?

SK: Well, I don't know if they have—I don't think they had a PTA. My mother did go to language school over at the school there at Lincoln School.

IT: Did you participate in any athletics at school?

SK: You mean over at—

IT: In the school?

SK: At what level?

IT: High school?

SK: I tried everything and I was never good at anything but I was all out for track and all those light weight basketball teams.

IT: Did you belong to any clubs at school?

SK: I don't remember if I belonged to any. Maybe, I can't remember if there was a Japanese Club there or not. I just can't remember.

IT: During these years did you have any problems like racial prejudice?

SK: Not really because when we participated in sports or anything there were no problems. At the school most of the friends were Japanese, we went to Japanese school, and we never had any—never worried about that problem because we played among each other.

In other words, we had our own team and although I belonged to one of those seventy pound, what they called seventy pound leagues, you know, like I would you know, we were all approximately seventy pounds and we would have a basketball team. And we, this was inter-city league I guess and we played in that league.

IT: What kind of activity did you have at church or scouts or picnics? Lessons in music or kendo or something like that?

SK: I was a Boy Scout once. When I was twelve years old, the Congregational Church had a troop there and that's where I belonged for several years. The scoutmaster being Frank Ferrar and his friend was Milo Rowell that came along and they would tell us stories. We met Friday nights and every Friday night, they would come and tell a story and that is one of our fond memories I guess. We went camping. We did a lot of things.

IT: You said you went to Missouri Mines in Rolla and when you graduated, did you look for a job?

SK: I was looking for a job and opportunities were not very great then. It was wartime and I looked at one or two possibilities that was with the government and the pay was very low. I felt that maybe I needed a little bit more education and I went over to Minnesota and I guess I went to Minnesota for a master's degree and stayed for about a month, which was when my father passed away and I had to come back and kind of straighten out the business because he just opened up. And my mother not being able to speak English fluently, needed some help. And when he was ill, they told me to come back and help out for a year before I resumed my education but that never happened. My father passed away and I said well, I'll stay another year and kind of help straighten out, and one year became two years and it ended up being in (inaudible) for fifty years.

IT: When did you get married and how many children and so on?

SK: I first got married in 1951 and I, we had three children, my wife died early. She had gotten stomach cancer and passed on. And I was, brought up the kids with my mother, my mother's help until I met Sachi again. I had known her when I was a young man and real young, and she was working out of New York and she came down for a vacation and came down to the store and saw her and dated her and every time she came, we saw each other and finally we got married.

IT: Now where are your children now?

SK: My first child was a son and he is an attorney in town, in Fresno. And my second daughter got married with a chiropractor and she's living out of town in Fairfield and that is where their home is. And my third daughter got married just recently, two years ago. She married a young man—a young man from England so that was two years ago.

IT: Where are they living?

SK: They live in Seattle. The funny part of it is, my youngest daughter went to the University of Washington. She was an Ag major. First she got out, at Davis, went off to, out east to Washington, to D.C. and not much future there, I mean and Ag major and decided that she'll come back and go for a higher degree with the University of Washington. And in Econ and she got her master's in Econ and liked the area so well that she never did come back to Fresno.

IT: Do you want to take a break now?

SK: Yeah.

IT: If you can tell us about life in Japan Town before WWII?

SK: Well, I'm going to start in from the early part of the thirties, which I remember pretty well. Most of the businesses in Japan Town, or so-called China Town, were predominantly Japanese although there were a few businesses on the east side or across the track, meaning the Pacific Railroad was the dividing line. And the other side, there were a few Japanese restaurant business which catered to the packinghouse and they did pretty well. Almost all these Japanese restaurants that were there, and we're not talking about Japanese food, just American-style restaurant and there were quite a bit of people in the packinghouse who came out for an early breakfast, lunchtime, and it is very busy active part of Fresno. At night they were open. Sundays they were open. And it seems there was more activity going on in West Fresno than elsewhere.

Oh, almost every other house was a restaurant run by a Japanese which catered to the packinghouse and all the other type of people that came into town over the weekend so it was a very busy life for them. We had a streetcar running through West Fresno down F Street. The, where the Greyhound Depot stands right now, used to be what we called the commercial park. And that is where the Chamber of Commerce was and the streetcar went around that circle there right in front of the F Street Depot. I could, and most of the hotels were run by Japanese and there were several. And the Japanese businessmen would come down to Fresno and the West Side Hotel was one of the hotels that they stayed. In fact, almost every block had a Japanese hotel. There were Japanese bathhouses where some of the families went to take a bath like in Japan and they had these social club, or if you came from Wakayama, their old—I don't know whether they called it social club but that is where they gathered.

IT: Ken-jinkai.

SK: Ken-jinkai, we had our Japanese Association, Hiroshima ken-jinkai. The secretary to the Japanese Association was a paid employee that they had hired and this—

IT: Was the Japanese Association the spokesman for the Japanese community?

SK: Well, I guess. I don't know whether, what they really did. I thought it was for the welfare of the Japanese community. Whenever they had a problem they went over there and the secretary would help them out. In fact, they had the Japanese Association all over California. In other cities if they would have Japanese there would be an association where they would try to help with their problems. In Fresno it was on the corner of Tulare and F Street, the second floor of the old bank there. It was the Bank of America. The last occupant was the Bank of America. In fact, it was a Japanese bank years before, then the Bank of Italy came in and then it turned out to be the Bank of America. But the second floor was the Japanese Association and I can't remember what other business was up there. I have to look up some of the old Japanese directory to find out. There was a dentist or something up there.

IT: You said that on weekends other people came to town. Were they farm workers?

SK: Mostly farm workers and a lot of Mexican people came and during the week you hardly saw them. A lot of other people were in town, a few, and I think they were playing and going to lottery house and keno tickets were being sold for a dime.

IT: Who were selling these tickets?

SK: The Chinese.

IT: The Chinese?

SK: Uh-huh. The Chinese association. I don't know if it's an association but a few of the families were involved.

IT: Was it considered legal then?

SK: I think everything was illegal. It was illegal but it was opened. In other words, nobody did anything behind closed doors, it was just like another store. You could walk in there. I seen Chinese (inaudible), you might say, that is selling tickets on the street. I was too young to know what was going on nor did I participate. I didn't know anything about that until I got older, much older. By then the authorities had clamped down on that type of activity and—

IT: Now during the week—during the weekdays things were slower because of the people coming in town on weekends?

SK: No, I think people were coming in. Well over the weekend a lot of people came in to buy their weekly grocery and that was not necessarily just the farm people. Everybody came in and everybody came to buy groceries and on the whole it was an active place. The downtown stores were all closed on weekends so it was a chance for merchants in West Fresno to cash in on some of the businesses. We had a lot of Japanese restaurants so I'm sure a lot of people looked forward to coming to China Town.

IT: When the families came into town, did they have special places to go on weekends?

SK: No, well, they had the bars and I don't know what they did other than to go to the park and it was a much smaller group than what we had right now. We had theaters. In fact, we had two theaters. One was owned by a Japanese and the other one, the theater was owned by probably Frank Tuck's family, and the people that ran the theater were Japanese. And all these kids, you know, of West Fresno kids, a lot of them were white, the Italians, and Germans, and they spent there all the time in West Fresno. A lot of people said they would come down to just sneak into the theater, you know because those

were times, those were the times when things were hard and so every time I see someone from the old days, oh, that is the place I used to sneak in. And then we had this Japanese theater. It was I don't know what they call it, Japanese Opera House or whatever, and we had Japanese movies, oh, maybe once a week. The men would come in and he would be the spokesman or he would run the show and this was before the talkies. He would stand up on the stage with a light and a table and he acted out every part, in other words, whether it would be female or male, he acted each part and you don't see any titles, he just spoke the Japanese characters or whatever needed to be said to promote the story and that is the way the theaters were.

IT: In other words, there was a narrator.

SK: Narrator—just they call him Benchi (??) but he would bring down a new movie. There were several I think, but often we—different people would come down and show those old samurai movie or any of those.

IT: Did they have talent show?

SK: Well, we did have talent shows. The Japanese community used to have those over there. They were very colorful. They had Japanese kimonos and all the things that went into that, and there would be male people like they do now. They got together and they promoted a play, dances or whatever.

IT: Did they refer to them as "shibai"?

SK: Yes, and different groups had on different days and different occasions. They would have plays. They—

IT: You mentioned before talking to you mentioned meshi-yas very Japanese.

SK: Oh yes. That's what—I was going to tell you what that was. There were several meshi-yas in town, Japanese restaurants and some nice ones. And the Issei, they were young on those days and they would really have a good time. They were out every night and I wondered how they could afford during the hard time, how could they afford to go out every night and drink the saki all night and have fun.

IT: Were they married Issei or single Issei?

SK: Married, both.

IT: Both?

SK: I knew the businessmen were getting together maybe twice or three times a night, I mean a week. I heard one of the businessmen a little bit later in life tell us Nisei, you Nisei don't know how to have fun. They were out with the waitresses then. They would drink all night long and they can hold their liquor very well. And then I knew it went on almost every night. My father used to come home late every so often. In fact, you wonder how they kept it up because times were tough. But they didn't seem to miss anything.

IT: Did they have parties? What kinds of occasions did they have parties?

SK: I don't know whether this was here. If a young Nisei got married, there would be parties but on their own, there were parties all the time. They go from one Meshi house to the next. In other words, they go to one place and maybe the next night another shop. There must have been, oh, possibly half a dozen places to go. They would frequent all of them and go from one place to the other.

IT: When a Nisei got married, what was the routine for the ceremony and reception?

SK: The ceremony and reception in the Japanese restaurant, either Japanese or Chinese restaurant. One of the larger places was the Frank's Café. Tanaka used to have a

restaurant on F Street. It is still there. And the second floor was a banquet hall and that is where they had the parties. Other parties were held at the Chinese restaurant. For a while the Chinese had benefited from all the marriages that went on because they were the only one to have a place large enough to hold five hundred people.

IT: In 1939 the government instituted the military draft. Did they have parties for the draftees? The Nisei draftees, do you recall?

SK: Some families did. When the young men went off to, well, service, the Dantai or the family and the friends all saw him off, like they went to the railroad station and he's taking off to go to the service, all the people and friends came to wish him well.

IT: Did they have what they call a (inaudible)?

SK: I'm sure they did, yes. We were by then, well, I guess I must have been about sixteen or seventeen when they were going. When the older Nisei were going and I'm sure they had some parties but I never did go to any of them because I think I was too young at that time. But I did go to some—well, I did go to the SP Station to see some of the people off when they went to the service.

IT: Now, you mentioned Japanese restaurants and your father's business and so on. I understand there was a hospital in Japan Town.

SK: There were two hospitals. (Inaudible) Hospital and it used to be east, E and Mono Street, right on the corner. There used to be a brick building and that was the Japanese Hospital. And the other hospital was downtown on E Street where between Tulare and Third Street and that was the Japanese Hospital. Dr. Hashima used to have his office over there and I can't remember, I think they had patients there in the hospital. If he had any surgery, it was done right there.

IT: He was a surgeon?

SK: He was a surgeon. But I remember going over there. He had all the equipment and if there is surgery, it was done there and the hospital was there, too. They had nurses and it was small by today's standard. It was a very small place but there were enough rooms there. I would say possibly ten rooms and he lived right there so you had a doctor all the time. It was the same at the other hospital. Dr. Okinogi had the other hospital and most of the kids had their tonsils taken out at the hospital although they never stayed. They just had their tonsils out. All those surgery or whatever minor ills were taken care of over there. They stayed at the hospital.

IT: I also heard there was a Japanese bank.

SK: Well, that was before my time but it was a Japanese bank. It was the old, I shouldn't say old because they are the old one. The Japanese bank was there and it was taken over when it was failing. I think it was taken over by the Bank of Italy and later the Bank of Italy was changed over to the Bank of America. The Kamikawa brothers had a bank, I think, within the store. It was quite a large operation. They tell me that during the tough times, during the earthquake, they are the ones that helped Ghiradelli company get on its feet by loaning money to them.

IT: That's the chocolate company?

SK: Chocolate company.

IT: And that was the San Francisco earthquake?

SK: Right.

IT: Also, were there garages and service stations?

SK: There were three garages. One where the—right across the street from the Buddhist Church, it was called the O.K. Garage and run by the Inouye, Tom Inouye, and the West Side Garage, where our store used to be, and then around the block near the old Parisian (??) Cleaners, I'd say Inyo and G Street, there was a Liberty Garage. There were three garages. There were a couple of bicycle stores. I think Kebos owned one right next door to—well, Kamikawa Company used to be on the corner of Kern and G, and right next door was the bicycle shop that Kebos ran, and then the Maruko Cyclery which was right next door to the old Bank of America building. And that is the two bicycle shops. That is where the kids went to get their bike and get it repaired. A couple of photographers were in town, George Studio and Frank Kamiyama, they are old-time photographers, the old pictures were all taken by them. Can I take a second off here?

IT: Yeah, and Japanese School, did you go to Japanese School?

SK: Yes, I did. Like everyone that went to church, the Issei father and mothers sent each of us to Japanese School. I started in the first grade and was going through the time I graduated from high school so I was exposed to a lot then but I can't remember a lot of the written work but I was able to retain a lot of my Japanese speaking ability. The words come back every so often when I look at it. The words are familiar but the characters are familiar but a lot of time I just can't remember what, how to read it and yet when I go back and pick up my old composition that I had written when I was in the, oh, sixth or seven grade, you wonder, "Did I write that?"

IT: Now is there anything else you want to say about life in Japan Town?

SK: Wel,l like I say, the kids, the Japanese kids all came out and came to church, church ground, where we had our basketball and baseball field. That's where we had fun. We

never paid any attention to other groups because we had our own group. We played among ourselves and we had plenty to do. We played basketball if like we played basketball among ourselves and if we thought we were good, we'd go and play the city league. We were never that good but—

IT: You mentioned that three churches were located within the same vicinity?

SK: Within the same vicinity. Where the Buddhist Church annex is right now was the two-story Congregation, Japanese Congregational Church. They had a basketball court, combination basketball-tennis court. And they had a big yard and in the Buddhist Church had right on the corner, the highway took it over, but we had our basketball court, combination tennis so the young kids, we played tennis and we played basketball. We had a baseball field. We never missed anything. We didn't care what went on downtown like they do now, they have these soccer leagues. We didn't care because we had our own league. We had a lot of fun. We never missed the others and also if you go out any place you had to go out in the streetcar or something to play with them.

The Methodist Church was across the street from the Buddhist Church. That was just the church alone with the pastor's house. There was no playground there like we had.

IT: Did you play against any teams from other towns?

SK: Yes, we did. Like we would take—that was some of the fun part for us, too. We were little kids but we'd go to Reedley or Sanger and whatever and they had their own team and I don't know how the results were then but I remember going. Sometime in the fall, during the fall, it was a little scary at times. We did go and play basketball, mostly

basketball. I've never played baseball so I was not exposed to it. But some of the other kids did. So we had some pretty good players.

IT: Did you know Mr. Zenimura?

SK: Yes, oh, let me say one thing now that you mention. We did have our Zenimura and another man named Pimentel, they called Pimentel and Zenimura. He did have an auto agency, Studebaker Auto Agency, there on the corner of E and Tulare. We, our family bought at Studebaker car from him. And I think Sam Yamasaki was one of the mechanics for him. And talking about, you don't hear about Japanese having an agency, automobile agency, and that was one of the few that I knew of. Also, when I talked about the West Side Garage where our store used to be, there was an empty lot over there and at night they would they would have sumo wrestling behind the building there. Then on the corner of E and – I'm sorry. B and Inyo, there is a lot on the corner. That was a sumo—well, arena I guess, that is what you call it. And every year we'd have sumo over there. There—a lot of Isse,i they really liked sumo and they encouraged the kids to go out and play—I mean, I went out there and did some sumo wrestling and we were given prizes and things like that and we would get quite a bit of people coming out. And it was held possibly—the tournament was held once a year or twice a year and quite—

IT: Was there sumo tournaments with other cities like Stockton?

SK: That, I don't know. I can't remember. We never did go out of town. But I don't know if the other town had the sumo grounds like we did, an actual sumo arena. Also, I would like to say, in the younger days, back in the thirties we had this wrestling, like this, there is one Ryan's Auditorium and I remember Hamanaka, he was one of the wrestlers, and it was something that all the Isseis went to and I used to go with my father and when

Hamanaka was introduced as a wrestler, we all went, you know. I don't know whether the wrestling was fixed or not but anyway, the regular wrestling like we have right now.

IT: There was a Japanese wrestler named (inaudible).

SK: I heard of him but I can't remember.

IT: He used to combine a little judo with the wrestling.

SK: Yeah, the name is familiar but I just can't remember. We had a Japanese boxer, Kunitogo, it's a Kunishige and I didn't—I used to hear about him fighting although I didn't know him till quite a bit later in life, I came across him and he used to tell me about some of the things but he was active. He was a pretty good fighter.

IT: Well, do you think we pretty well covered Japan Town?

SK: I think so. Yeah.

IT: Well, we'll move on to the WWII period. When and where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

SK: We were—I was in our hardware store helping when I heard about it on the radio.

IT: And what was your reaction to it?

SK: I couldn't believe anything like this was happening. It was just so—it just never thought someone would be fighting, you know. I mean, like the United States fighting Japan. It just so unbelievable I didn't know how to think then.

IT: You said you were working in the store. Where you going to Fresno State College then, too?

SK: Yes. Just started, 1941, yeah, I had just started that year. No, I'm sorry, it's the second year.

IT: Now, you mentioned about S.G. Sakamoto you had—

SK: When the war started, S.G. Sakamoto quite a leader in Fresno. He sent a telegram to President Roosevelt saying that our community was behind the war effort 100%. We would do anything to help with the war effort and in so many words that is what he said. And—

IT: Was S.G. Sakamoto Issei?

SK: Issei, right.

IT: And what kind of business did he have?

SK: He was an insurance agent although he did a lot of things, too. He was farmer at one time. He sold seed. He tried everything, let's put it that way. But he had—he was pretty sharp. And—

IT: I understand later on he had a restaurant.

SK: He had a what?

IT: A restaurant business?

SK: No, that's his son.

IT: That's his son?

SK: His son had the business. He was a little man but still he was our—he was the leader in our community.

IT: Now when—when the 9066 came up. You went to camp?

SK: Uh-huh.

IT: Which camp did you go to?

SK: Well, we went to the Assembly Center and the Fresno Fairground was the Assembly Center. And that is where we went. I think it was sometime in—I can't remember, May of '42 we went over there.

IT: And where did you go from there?

SK: Well, the rest of the Fresno group went to Arkansas. I had an aunt in our family, in our family group that had, she had a broken leg and couldn't tolerate the cold weather and Dr. Hashiba had said that it would be better if she could go to a warmer climate and we decided to ask whether we could go to Arizona. And we were allowed to leave for Arizona for a better climate. So the other people in our group, for some medical reason, they were given excuse—I mean, permission to go to Gila, that is where we went.

IT: Gila?

SK: Gila. And there—

IT: Which camp in Gila?

SK: Camp Two.

IT: Camp Two?

SK: Camp One was the people from the Central Valley and they were all filled by the time we got around to Gila Camp Two, one of the corners, I mean, we were at the edge of that camp.

IT: Was that Lot 28?

SK: Lot 28.

IT: The same as Zenimura's lot?

SK: Right.

IT: I was in 66.

SK: Were you in 66?

IT: Yeah, the other corner. Now what was life like to you in camp?

SK: Well, when we first went to the Assembly Center, that was all fun, no work. I mean, what little work we did, we worked the pantry or in the kitchen. We had, all we did was eat and have fun. They had dancing classes. Nothing but just to play. The best vacation we ever had then. Now when we got—after we went to Gila was a little different. For us, just a small group, block 28, it is small group that went into camp that we didn't know. There were people from other cities and they were all strange people so it was rather hard to start over and make friends. If you are going to high school, then it would be okay. I think you could make friends. But when you are out of high school and your friends are limited. In other words, you go to work all right but there isn't the closeness. They are all strange people. It took months before you started making friends with some of the new people that you came across.

IT: To retract a little bit. What did you have to go through before going to camp? What did you do with the business?

SK: Well, we were given—wel,l I guess we knew we had to go to camp so we must have had a couple months to get rid of your property, of the merchandise and all. And we put on a sale and I don't know how much we—how much merchandise we got rid of but we had a neighbor—International Drug, they said we'll watch out for your stuff and your goods and they helped us store the things that we couldn't take with us. So they took the merchandise and kept it in their basement. After about a year or so they had to move again so they, some of the things got lost during the move and so, you know, not because they did the best to help us with. It is just an overwhelming job for them to try to watch out for their own things. In moving their—they had drug store, and they moved their own things and watch out for ours, too.

IT: Did your store take a loss?

SK: I'm sure we did. I can't remember what was there and what was lost.

IT: Now how long were you in camp?

SK: Well, we went to Gila in '42, and October, I guess within the year I was already in Rolla, Missouri. We had a chance to go to school and I stayed approximately a year. Not quite a year but—

IT: Were you in the military?

SK: No, no, I was being drafted. I was drafted and ready to go 'cause I had passed my physical and my father had passed away and then they gave me a six-month extension and the war was over and they finally decided I could stay at the business and help the family. The only war I ever did was I had two years of ROTC in Missouri. It is nowhere near what the actual soldiers go through but we did go through all the manuals and marched and everything else.

IT: You didn't go through the loyalty questionnaire?

SK: Yep.

IT: You did?

SK: Uh-huh.

IT: Were you in Rolla or in camp?

SK: No, in camp.

IT: In camp?

SK: Otherwise you wouldn't get out.

IT: So when did you get back to Fresno?

SK: Well, that was in ‘45. My—I had received a telegram asking to come back and help with the store because my father was ill. That was the first telegram I got, and the next one he was already dead. So I came back.

IT: That was 1945?

SK: 1945 I was in Minnesota and I just withdrew from school and came home thinking maybe I could help and straighten it out for a year so, when your mother is the only one there and she couldn’t run it, but the business was there. So—

IT: Was there any difficulty in restarting?

SK: Well, in a way when you say difficulty, those were days of shortages so anything you had you could sell so I guess, in a way it was easy to get started.

IT: Now what about housing, when you came back from camp?

SK: Well, we owned our own house.

IT: You owned your own house?

SK: Well, we never had any problems. The church was a hostel, is it hostel, and that is where the people from camp were staying before—before they got settled. But we were fortunate and we were able to go right home.

IT: So now what was—did you locate the business in the same place that you left it?

SK: No. No. We found a small place on Kern Street. We worked all that after he got back and that’s my father. He just sort of rearranged everything so we could get the business open and I don’t think he had just set it up and then died. He never—he himself never had a chance to do any selling. And I came home and then just went ahead and stayed in business.

IT: Was this on Kern and F?

SK: On Kern Street where Central Fish is right now.

IT: Is right now?

SK: Right now.

IT: When did you move into the Kern and F place?

SK: Well, before then, we purchased the building, with a partner, we purchased a building where the bank is—Bank of—do you know where the Union Bank is right now? And we remodeled part of it and I opened the store. We transferred from the old store because we had some problems with the second floor leaking on us. And we had all kinds of problems so when the lease was over, we moved over to the corner of F and Kern where the bank is right now. Then in fifty-, 1959, the present location was available so we moved across here to a larger location, a larger building.

IT: So did your business grow from moving to a larger place?

SK: Well, when we got into a larger place, yes. We grew quite a bit when we moved into that particular building. We had to use more people. The business did increase.

IT: How would you say that wartime and staying in camp, how did it affect your life? Did it change your life plan?

SK: Well, I never thought I'd be in business like I did. Ever since I was a child, you know, we were always helping at the retail store and I always felt that was just a little too much work and never did like it. I never did like it so I thought I'd find something else to do and I never did get a chance to pursue what I had studied for. And ended up with a business that I not—I didn't particularly like but made the best—made the best effort to make a go.

IT: Did you join any service clubs?

SK: Yes, I did. In the early days there was an Exchange Club in West Fresno and my friend the neighbor, Dick Obakian got me to join that group and I was a member with the rest of the other people, the Chinese people. I guess I was the first Japanese to join that group. And what happened was that the national headquarters of the Exchange Club didn't want anything to do with the Japanese into this group. They told the people to get rid of me because they didn't want any Japanese in the group although we had Chinese in our group, their name was Lee and I guess Lou or, you know, you can't tell what they were. So then they were sort of ignored but with my name, you can't help but know that I was an Asian. And they were told to get rid of him and they said if you don't get rid of him, well, give up your charter. So the group got together and they said, "You just take the charter and shove it." You know, and the people that were there. I guess Dick Obakian and some of the people that were, decided that they didn't want anything to do with that kind of stuff. And they gave up the charter and we became the West Fresno Service Club. And for two years we operated as such. All the members from our group were from West Fresno. And we did some things. We got lights for West Fresno. In those days we didn't have any streetlights. And we worked on the city and we were able to get lights and we got garbage cans for the corners, for each corner, and different things, and we operated as a pretty closely-knit group and got to know everyone until the downtown Rotary Club decided they would like to open, extend, and they took in the North Fresno group and they took us in. And we, when all that publicity came out about the exchange, taking the Exchange Club and kicking us out. We had national publicity. And they, we had a choice of wanting to join whatever club we wanted to. I guess the Lions Club and

Kiwanis, they all offered to give us a charter but they thought—the members thought the Rotary was the best one to get into. And that is how we ended up.

IT: And you joined the Rotary Club.

SK: So then that is how I became a charter member of the Rotary Club.

IT: Did you become an officer or anything like that?

SK: Yeah, I started out as a Treasurer and one year I was the President of the club. I think that was 1975 or 1976, I can't remember right now.

IT: What were your chapter called, West Fresno Rotary?

SK: West Fresno Rotary.

IT: What do you feel is your greatest achievements?

SK: Well, I don't know if I achieved hardly. I don't know if I did anything except maybe, as far as being a Japanese, it isn't that I did anything because I didn't do anything except that the members had backed me and in fact, I may—I didn't even want any publicity but everyone in the country knew the Japanese that was involved.

IT: Well then, how would you characterize—what would you consider the account of the Nisei?

SK: Well, you know, the Nisei—first of all, in those days when I first got out, jobs were hard to get. A lot of the Niseis didn't have too much luck finding good jobs. And as I look back now, I mean from that day and what the kids are accomplishing right now without any effort like we'd have to struggle to get a decent job. They seem to have it much easier. And maybe the country and people have changed over the years. I think the record that the soldiers had, I think that helped greatly, and I think they got to know us and what kind of people we were and I think that helped.

IT: Well, we're getting near the end of the interview. One other question is that, how did you feel about redress?

SK: Well, in what way are you—?

IT: Were you in favor of it or against it or what are your thoughts about the redress movement?

SK: Redress is the—

IT: The evacuation and internment and so on and were given an apology from the President and twenty thousand dollars.

SK: Well, I guess that didn't hurt. But I think people got to know us a little better and I think the outlook from the Isseis have changed during that time. They have become—they have their—let's put it this way. The Isseis had their prejudices and all that—they've forgotten. I think they have become more Americanized than all the other groups that I know of. I think they have become better Americans than they would have.

IT: You've been a member of JACL. Do you think that JACL has done good service to the community?

SK: Well, I think so. I'm from the old school and I thought they could have done more for a Japanese group. But then they were going off for all this racial thing. I don't know whether that is too big of a problem for us to handle.

IT: Okay now.

SK: Excuse me just a second. Can you just shut it off for just a second?

IT: We're at the end of the interview now. Is there anything else you want to say?

SK: Well, it's nice to have gone to—to have experienced a lot of things that are going from Crystal Radio to all we have right now, TVs and all that, computers and such, and I think

on my own I've had a chance to witness quite a change, in a way it seems I'm getting left behind on some of the new things that is coming along.

IT: Do you have a computer?

SK: Yes, I have.

IT: Do you have the internet?

SK: I have the internet but I am still learning. I have had a little bit more difficulty than I might have had a few years ago. Things doesn't come to me as fast as it used to. I'm getting old.

IT: Okay, do you have any questions about the interview?

SK: No, I don't know if I, if there are other things that could be said or I may have missed a lot of things that happened. Some things that happened in my own town or I could have had a little more but I can't remember what some of the things were.

IT: Okay, then thank you for sharing your story with us. The main family story was very important to be recorded in history especially because history books in our schools do not tell the stories of Japanese-Americans' experience. All of the history is about the European descendants. And we hope that the Japanese-American contribution to the total society will be recognized so in the future so we can improve the schools and so thank you very much.

SK: You are welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW