>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Good morning, Mr. Kumano.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Good morning.

>> Carlene Tinker: How you doing?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: OK, I guess.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, welcome to Special Collections Research Center. This is where we are conducting our interviews for the Issei to Gosei interview project. And I'm so happy that you've agreed to be part of that. Today is Thursday, April 11th, 2019 and it's 10:02. OK. So let's begin. But before I actually get into asking you questions about your family, let me describe why we call the Issei to Gosei interview project as we did. Technically we wanted to interview people from each of the generations of Japanese Americans or Japanese who came to the United States but that became a very cumbersome name so we condensed it. But also for the viewers of your interview let me explain what the generations are of Japanese. The Issei were the Japanese who came over probably between the late 1885 to about 1915. Those were the early immigrants from Japan. Their children who were born here are called the Nisei, second generation. The children of a Nisei are the Sansei. The children of the Sansei are the Yonsei. And the children of the Yonsei are the Gosei. So we actually have a lot of Goseis around, so we'll be including them as well. Which generation are you a part of?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Third generation, Sansei.

>> Carlene Tinker: Sansei. So your grandparents were born in Japan and your mother and father were born here?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes, that is correct.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. OK. First of all let me have you tell us what your full name is. Your full name, Ralph.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: OK. My name is Ralph Fumihiro Kumano.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And where did you-- where were you born?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I was born in Gila River, Arizona.

>> Carlene Tinker: And that was a relocation--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: In the-- Right, in the concentration camp.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And date of birth?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: March 4th, 1945.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. So you just recently had a birthday.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Give me your recent and your current residence as I know you live in two different places.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, I basically I live in Auberry, California but also I stay in Sanger, California which is our family homestead.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. OK. Good. And how long have you been a resident of California?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: A year after I move-- we moved from Arizona to California I've been here.

>> Carlene Tinker: And so essentially-- So how--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Seventy three years.

>> Carlene Tinker: Seventy three years. So, you have a lot of experience and knowledge and rightfully so. Also-- I know you have a very varied background in education. Can you describe briefly what kinds of occupations you've had and what kind of education you've had.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, I've worked in the farm industry when I was a kid, picking grapes and harvesting peaches and working with the orange trees, the citrus pests that were there. And also going to college I worked during the summers for Hunt-Wesson Foods.

>> Carlene Tinker: Which food?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Hunt-Wesson Foods.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: They make tomato cannery in Davis.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And also with Pet Foods in Sanger. And then once I-- I eventually started teaching. I got a job with-- while I was in graduate school I got a job with the National Park Service for summers.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And that's how you became a ranger [Naturalist. In the National Park service].

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes, I was basically the-- as far as I know the first Japanese American back country ranger, wilderness

ranger we call that-- they call us 90-day wonders since we're up there for 90 days roughly in Kings Canyon in Sequoia National Park. And this is in the '70s--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- and early '80s.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow. So how long were you a ranger?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: For about 12 years.

>> Carlene Tinker: Twelve years and-- but you also taught sometime. Was that before you went to--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: While I was at graduate school I started doing the Park Service and then when I got my permanent teaching job that was the other nine months.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And then your permanent-- your first job was in Southern California.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah, Southern California, La Cañada Flintridge, California and all that.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: At Foothill Intermediate School.

>> Carlene Tinker: Pardon me.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Once you get-- Foothill Intermediate School which eventually became a part of La Cañada High School--

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- which was a 7 through 12 school.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And then how long did you teach there?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And I was there 18 years.

>> Carlene Tinker: Whoa. And then you eventually came here to Fresno. I believe you taught for Fresno Unified.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that true? And where did you teach there?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I came back in the-- I took a leave there because my dad had Parkinson's. And so I came back and helped my mom with my dad. And got a job in Fresno Unified in the '90s and retired in 2003 but I was at various junior high schools such as Kings Canyon Middle School and Tenaya Middle

School. And then eventually I got a job at McLane High School. And that's where I retired after nine years--

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- in 2003.

>> Carlene Tinker: And then also you taught at a community college.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And I also I was the adjunct while I was looking for a job, adjunct teacher or instructor at Reedley College and at the Fresno City College since 1990 to 2012, so.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's amazing. Well, you definitely have a lot to give to kids. I mean, you being a park ranger I think in itself is really a wonderful thing to share with your students. When did you officially retire?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I retired in 2003 from Fresno Unified since that was the basically full time job and then I get the teaching of biology class at City College.

>> Carlene Tinker: How long did you do that?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Until 2012, so--

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- another--

>> Carlene Tinker: So then--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- nine more years.

>> Carlene Tinker: So basically 2012 is when you've-- you officially retired from teaching.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Correct.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Well, we'll get into whatever other activities you are doing later when we talk about your current activities. Now, I usually start our interviews with talking about your grandparents because that I think is really where your story begins. And we want to capture some background information so we can understand where you're coming from. OK. So, let's talk about your grandpa. What about your grandpa? Which on the father side?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes. My grandfather came over from Hiroshima, Japan and at the turn of the century to Hawaii, which at the time was offering jobs to Japanese immigrants for-- under

sugarcane plantation. And then eventually since Hawaii was a territory of the United States at that time-- thanks.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, I think a lot of Japanese did that--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: He-- Right. And so he came over to the states and started working in agriculture since that was his occupation in Japan.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wait. Let me back up a second. Which island did he go to first, which Hawaiian island? Didn't you say he went to the Hawaiian island?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Which one?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I believe it was Oahu, the main--

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- you know the--

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And then from there did he come to the United-- to the mainland?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes. And then he settled in the Sanger area because that was an agricultural farming area.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, he--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And that--

>> Carlene Tinker: He can't-- I wanted to ask about that. Some of the people who came from the islands, you know, when the sugarcanes, they actually went to Seattle. I was wondering why your father-- grandpa came to Sanger. Did he know somebody or is it just the fact that it was agricultural?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: It was-- There were quite a few people. In fact this area in Fresno County was mainly from-- people from Hiroshima. So that's probably where he had some information about coming here whether he had a friend, I don't know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. That's very plausible.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now you said Hiroshima is on the Shikoku Island [Actually on Honshu]. I didn't realize. I thought it was part of Honshu. It is [on Shikoku, then].

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: No, it's southern Japan island, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. I learn something every day. Yeah. OK. So your grandpa was a farm laborer. What about your grandmother?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: My grandmother, he knew the family back in Japan and so back in those days if they needed a spouse they would have what they call a picture bride. And so he would send his picture back to Japan and they would communicate. She would send her picture and then he-- she-- that my grandmother eventually came over to the United States when he was here and--

>> Carlene Tinker: Was she a lot younger?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: She was one year older actually and-- But the picture that he sent was his younger brother so-- well, there's a miscommunication in age. But anyway-- so they got married and settled in Sanger in the Sanger area. And that's when my father was born in 1910.

>> Carlene Tinker: 1910. And then what about your maternal side, like your grandmother. Do you know anything about that line?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. My grandmother actually was living in Hawaii at the time, on Hawaii and that line eventually came over to the United States. I never met my mother's grandfather or her father actually. But, you know, my grandmother on her side I knew--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- and she lived in Selma which she was about 12 miles away from Sanger. So we lived in the same area--

>> Carlene Tinker: So you had a chance to meet that side as well? Oh, that's great. So your dad was born in 1910. And what about your mom, how did she get into the picture? Was she living in the Sanger area at the time when [inaudible]?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, she was born in-- My dad was born in Fresno and my mom was born in Biola which is to the west side of Fresno.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And then eventually moved to the Selma area. But my dad met my mom I guess through friends at the time they have matched marriages and so.

>> Carlene Tinker: What's the Japanese term for that?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I think baishakunin. And so they had a matchmaker that matched them up and eventually got married in 1938.

>> Carlene Tinker: Were they essentially the same age as well?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: My mom was born in 1916. So six years younger.

>> Carlene Tinker: Six years younger. Yeah. So obviously that worked out pretty well. They had five children, right?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Do you want to name the children?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes. My-- The first child was my oldest sister, Shirley Yasue. Then came-- and she was born in 1939 [1940]. And my next sister was Irene Yukiye and she was born in 1940 [1941]. And my brother, older brother was born in 1943, Thomas Masaru. And then I came along in '45. And then my younger brother Carl Shuji was born in Fresno in 1946.

>> Carlene Tinker: But wasn't your youngest brother conceived in camp?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes. He was conceived in camp but he was--

>> Carlene Tinker: So technically there were three, three who were--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Born in camp, correct.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Let's see here. What were their experiences, your grandparents and your parents? Did they face a lot of discrimination?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, it was the usual discrimination I suppose all immigrants faced before the war because they were different and trying to make a living here. And so you get racism or discrimination because people don't understand--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Now--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- the other cultures and the people.

>> Carlene Tinker: They were farmers, right?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: What crops did they grow?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: My father was basically a farm laborer. So he worked with the grapes to the Thompson's raisins--

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- in the area.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Yeah, I know that a lot of Japanese who came were strawberry farmers and that was a critical crop because that can't-- there were a lot of people who were not Japanese who were raising strawberries and there was this economic conflict and probably the basis of a lot of racism and discrimination. And I'm sure that's true with raisins too. OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. We had after the war we were growing strawberries even in Sanger with the Fresno strawberry exchange. So that was profitable--

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- at one time because the Japanese had the whole market in the central California.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Yeah. And now the local people, the local immigrants, the Hmongs have really encroached on that crop--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly, yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: -- and a lot of them are raising strawberries then they have the stands along the roads. Yeah. So your parents were married by baishakunin and they had five children. Now, tell me what was their experience like in 1942 or 1941 when the-- when Pearl Harbor was bombed, what did your-- of course you weren't born yet but you have ideas in about what they were experiencing. How did-- What do you think they felt? They're not citizens, right? Your parents? No, your parents were--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: No, my parents were citizens.

>> Carlene Tinker: Your grandparents, but yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: My grandparents were.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. But all of a sudden your grandparents I think were still alive at that point, weren't they?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. So their home country is at war with the United States. Pearl Harbor gets bombed and then in 1942

February 19th the Executive Order 9066 is declared and war is declared and all of a sudden we have to move as Japanese to evacuation camps. OK. So how did they experience? What were their experiences like during this time?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: That I don't know because my parents, the grandparents never talked about their experience.

>> Carlene Tinker: Very typical, very typical.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And so they kept that part quiet and I've been more aware, I probably would have asked them questions but at that time they were-- they kept silent on those issues and, you know, a lot of the things when I was growing up we never knew what happened until--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- much later.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Right. Well, OK. So then all of a sudden we are told that we have only a short time to pack up our things and move. We were told that in probably March. OK. And then California is divided, the whole West Coast is divided into two military zones. Military was zone one and two, is that correct?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: That is correct.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. So, obviously they had to do something with us because that was the declaration that we had to be moved from the West Coast because we were seen as the potential enemies. OK. So your parents were living in military zone 2, is that right?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: That is correct.

>> Carlene Tinker: How did that designation occur? Was Highway 99 sort of the dividing boundary or is that just coincidental?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I think it was 99 and also East West was either highway 180 or Belmont Avenue. One of those streets going east and west because people to the north of Sanger went into a different camp in the one south of 180 or Belmont.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Well, in the mean time while these camps were being built-- and there were 10 of them as I recall.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Two of them in California. All right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: But the others were east--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: -- of California. I happen to have been in Amache which is in Colorado. OK. Well, the barracks and so forth were not built at that time. So what happened to the people who were waiting? We had to get out of our houses and stuff, where do those people go?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. Once the western civil-- what is it called, the Civil Defense Association put the posters on the telephone poles about the evacuation, people had six to two weeks-- six days to two weeks to pack up and get rid of property and get ready to move. They either had to sell their property or find friends to take it over. But anyway mainly people in-- war zone 1 because that was critical. They were closer to the coast. And so, they had to go to assembly centers and then eventually to the permanent camps. Whereas we were in war zone 2 and so all we have to do is check in to the office of the WCCA which is part of the War Relocation Authority and got our family number and ID tags. And then they told us we got to-- have to go to the camp on our own. So we were able to take a vehicle which is--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- my dad's pickup and-- or truck and go all the way to--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, but you didn't--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- Arizona.

>> Carlene Tinker: -- you didn't do that until probably August or September, would that be right?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes. Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Because the-- It took a while for the barracks to be built up and of course a lot of people arrived at these camps when the building was not complete.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Right. And some of them helped build them too along with the Native Indians. Both of the camps in Arizona were on Indian reservation, the only two camps. And so, some of the Indians probably were hired to help.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. You were in Gila and the other one was Poston.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Was in Poston right along the coast of the border between California and Arizona.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And you were in-- which part of Gila?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: We were in the Canal Camp which Gila Camp was divided into the Butte Camp and the Canal Camp.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And the Canal Camp was the one that was further east closer to I-10.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. OK. Now getting back to your family ID, what was the number again?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Our family, our ID--

>> Carlene Tinker: Do you have a--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I think I had it. It was-- I think it's 40896.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, right. And I learned recently after doing some reading that the father of who was-- whatever the number was, he would have a letter A after his name-- a number. And then the mother would be B and then their first child would be C, D, et cetera. And then that's how we got recognized. That was our--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: -- identity.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And so they had nametags that you put on each person as well as your belongings.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Do you want to look for your tag and see if you have that?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes, I have.

>> Carlene Tinker: I see you have a lot of pictures. We'll look at those [in] a little bit.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: So, here's an example of the name tag. This was a poster that was done for the exhibit, the 9066 a couple years ago but this was our family here at the time. But they had the name of the family and then ID number. This one

says, 040896. And so that was the name tag. I doubt if they had this barcode but each of the tags were--

>> Carlene Tinker: You want to point out who those people are in the pictures?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah, I have a better picture of the group here. OK.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: This is a much larger picture of the same small picture that you saw. This is my dad, Thomas Katsuo. This is my mom Chiyeko. This is my older sister Shirley Yasue. This is my-- the younger of the two sisters Irene Yukiye. This is my older brother Thomas Masaru. This is me. And this is my younger brother --

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- Carl Shuji.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. That's great. That's great. And all of your siblings are surviving, right?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: No. Except for my older brother passed away in 2012 from complications with diabetes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. How unfortunate, but very nice picture. Thank you for sharing that. OK. So your family was getting back to the fact that you were in war zone 2 did not have to go to assembly center. And of course in Fresno we had two assembly centers, one in Pinedale and one in the Fairgrounds. OK. The one in Pinedale had people coming I think from Seattle. Is that correct?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes, Washington and also people from I think some from Oregon and some from Sacramento.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. OK. And then the ones from-- at Fresno were local--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Local area, yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. And then of course what you just described about the dividing lines depending on where you lived you decide-- they decided where you went to camp. OK. In my case I was in southern California and even though we had relatives

nearby, I, for example, was in Boyle Heights. My cousin was his-- they were strawberry farmers in Westminster. We got sent to two different places. Yeah. And I was in Santa Anita. And even people within Santa Anita got split up. So they really wanted to mix us up and not have a chance to conspire I guess.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes. I think that there was some type of plan that had to be planned. But a lot of the people, they-- before the evacuation actually started from the Los Angeles area because they knew that area was going to be evacuated first, they came to the valley here and stayed with the relatives. And somehow they got sent to the same camp that they were with the relatives here rather than getting split up.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And so that happened but there was all kinds of movement and--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- splitting up.

>> Carlene Tinker: And what you read is so different from what actually happened.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: I know one family, there was a very short window between the time that the posters were posted to tell us to get ready to get out that you could actually leave on your own volition. OK. And if you had somebody in the Midwest or some place who had a job or who could be your sponsor you could go. So some people left that way. But getting back to your family which I think is really cool. Your family-- your dad had a truck and who did they load up on the truck when he was ready to leave?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. We-- he had my two grandparents and then he had his wife, my mom, and then my two younger sisters, so six.

>> Carlene Tinker: Six people.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Six people on the truck plus the belongings.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. What kind of truck? Do you have any idea?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I believe it was a Ford truck but I'm not so--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And so, sort of like the dust bowl in reverse.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Right, exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: So--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: The whole thing I was thinking of is since that was a distance away I knew at the time later on that there were a lot of service stations that wouldn't sell gas to especially the Japanese. And so I don't know if my dad was able to anticipate that and brought his own gas but I never was able to talk to him about--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- how he would make the whole trip.

>> Carlene Tinker: How long a trip would it be driving from Fresno to Arizona?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, usually by modern car it's about 10 hours taking the freeways but today that was-- that's today but back in those days probably took at least two days.

>> Carlene Tinker: At least two days, yeah. And then of course they weren't served and I'm sure in a lot of places.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. So when they got there things were not really very comfortable, OK. Your dad was a welder at that time, is that right?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And your-- What was your mom doing?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: She is just a housewife.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And she was just caring for kids?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Right. And right-- And at that time, right, she just had the-- her two younger [young] daughters and then-- in '43 my brother came into the world, so. And '42 those-- she might-- he might have been conceived somewhere in that area, so.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. So basically they were in camp for three years, '42 to '45?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: So what were the conditions like? Do you have any idea what they did for a living?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, when we got there all I know was most of those camps were built very similar because of the blueprints. They were about a hundred feet long divided up into four apartments basically and about 24, 25 feet wide. And so each family of six basically got one of those what they call an apartment, 25 by 20. And so in the room there was no partitions. There was just one light and a stove. And so-- And then bunk beds of course so the people had to do with that small space to have their whole family. But if they were a couple then they got moved in with another family. And so without partitions there was no privacy, so they used ropes and blankets to make the partitions to have--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- a little compartment inside the room--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- which is just an open room.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Right. Sounds like all of them were basically built the same.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. They were tarpaper, wood. The construction was very quick. So there were gaps in the wood and so wind would come through and the floor, there was not a carpet. So we had-- my mom would say there was gaps about a quarter inch on the floor and you'd have scorpions or spiders coming through. But eventually as the time passed they were-- people were able to go into Phoenix and purchase some items to help rebuild the inside of the--

>> Carlene Tinker: On, can make it a--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- room, putting a carpet and putting in curtains and things like that to make it livable.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Well, I know life was pretty boring for people. So your dad was a welder as I've said, but he didn't do that for a living in camp. Why didn't he not do that?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, he was basically, yeah, he was a-- I would say when he was working as a job before where he

went to camp he was a farmer at one time and then he quit that because of the crop loss and decided to go on a different direction. So he was good at fixing tractors and mechanical things. So he bought a shop and he became a welder making farm equipment and vineyard wagons and clothesline poles and things like that. And so that's what his occupation was at the time. He also was a land leveler. He had a Caterpillar tractor and he would go out. This was in the '30-- late '30s and early '40s. He would pull out grape vineyards and level the land. And at that time I was looking at some of his books and it said that he worked 18 hours at $1 an hour--

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- doing that type of job. But at the time the area in the Sanger area was not exactly flat, so having a Caterpillar and leveling the land was pretty good business.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: So you are always working. And so that's what he did.

>> Carlene Tinker: So he was very skilled--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And he was skilled and somehow he learned about welding. Whether he went to school or I know he didn't go to college, he graduated in-- from Edison Technical School in 1929 with a high school diploma. But he might have got some type of training because he became an excellent welder.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And--

>> Carlene Tinker: So when--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: So when he went in camp one of the things that they asked him is, "Do you want to be a welder?" And at that time welders would get quite a bit an hour. And if you were in the camp the highest salary you can get if you were a professional was less than what the private that was guarding the camp would get, which is-- at first it was $18 then it went up to $21 but still that was $18 a month, not an hour. And then if you were a skilled person you got 18. And then the-- If you were unskilled you got as low as $8 a month. And so some of these people if they didn't have much to do and they wanted some pocket change, then they would work for that price. But my dad wouldn't do the welding because he said, "I should get paid a lot more."

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And so he was kind of put on a black ball list because he didn't offer to work, because they had to call in someone from Phoenix to do the welding.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my goodness. So what did he do instead? It must have been really boring?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Oh, yeah. So they did hobbies, you know. He was-- At that time, he was 32 and so he was still pretty good athlete so he bought-- brought some baseball [equipment] and some of the older people had old timer's games that they played baseball. And during the idle times they did hobbies like make things from wood that they found either throwaway wood that the camp was throwing away or go out if they were able to get outside, pick up some of the desert plants, the mesquite and the ironwood and the palo verde and things like that where they could use the wood to craft different items.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, I noticed that you brought a couple of things that he crafted.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. That-- Well, some of the things that they crafted were these canes and you could see the different types that they made. So they had equipment to use and I don't know how crude the equipment was where they had actual tables or things or just regular handsaws but this one here was made out of ironwood because you could see the different color. Ironwood is a very strong wood but that--

>> Carlene Tinker: I noticed how they fused the handle to the [cane].

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's from the--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Where they could put it together but they would make all kinds of plaques and statues and things out of ironwood because it was a very heavy wood.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, now would also-- didn't they build little birds and they make little--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah, my dad also made birds-- I don't have examples because they are being shown in a museum but we have a book where we had some of the artifacts that was photographed. And so, some of the bird pins that you see in this book here.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: My dad was able to collect them after the camp and you could see the steps that they went through, the artwork of painting them and cutting them out and sanding them and then putting--

>> Carlene Tinker: And they became pins?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes. And then they would trade with people at different camps too. So not just the Gila Camp but the other camps also knew about bird pins and they were making them as a hobby.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, I actually-- my mom had one. I don't know what happened to it, but yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: But there was-- yeah. All kinds of different things that they would make out of wood or the women would sew different things plus they were making what they call handbags--

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, yeah, totes and--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- with-- totes with the extra ironwood handles and things like that. But, you know, they had to be creative and then make these things so that they can use this furniture or they could trade someone else for some other item.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. I know some beautiful pieces of chest of drawers and--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. Those that were skilled, man, they-- yeah, these carpenters, they could make all sorts of tables and--

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- and chests and chairs, all kinds of different types of chairs.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Yeah. There is a woman named Delphine Hirasuna has written a book called "The Art of Gaman" showing some of these priceless things. They are just amazing. And to figure out to understand that people were doing this with very rudimentary tools and so--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. It's just amazing. By the way, I just said that word gaman. What does that mean?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Gaman actually is a-- means perseverance through these times that you go through without showing any blame or anything. They just tried to do these things or make these things and keep the respect of what they were trying to show by making these things in the camp.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Right. And then there's another idea that probably allowed these people to combat boredom and the fact that they were incarcerated that was-- what was that expression, shikata ga nai, would you want to explain that?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. Shikata ga nai means what's the use or also it means it can't be helped. You're in this situation and you just put up with it the best you can.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right, yeah. It is what it is.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly. And so you don't fight it. You just have to go along with it.

>> Carlene Tinker: That must have really carried these people through.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly, especially the older Isseis and the Niseis. The-- some of the younger kids, of course, they would-- they like to rebel on certain things because they-- they're a little bit better educated and they knew that, you know, we should be in this situation.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: We were in camp with [out] our civil liberties and without a trial of which is against the constitution.

>> Carlene Tinker: Absolutely.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And the younger kids realized how come no one is rebellion against this?

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: But the older people, they just went with the flow.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Because they didn't want to toss waves and they figure that in the end that everything will come out, you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Come out the way it should but you never know. And that's why some of the younger kids were always combating. You know, they would have arguments with their parents or things like that in camp.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, one of the things that happened during the time probably about 1943, '44, there was a very questionable survey that was administered.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Oh yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: You want to talk about that?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: There was a-- we call the loyalty oath that was passed by our government. And the reason was they wanted to get some more soldiers and so they saw an opportunity that all these 10 different camps had almost 60-- 6000 Japanese Americans in it. And so some of them were of age and so the loyalty oath actually was given to people that were 17 years and older. And so if they were going draft up the Japanese Americans then, of course, they wanted to make sure that they were loyal. And it wasn't given to any other group of Americans but the Japanese Americans had to answer the two questions, which are very-- both very controversial. Question number 27, are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United Stated on combat duty whenever ordered? So this is, are you willing to fight for the country? And my dad, of course, said “no” because he had his wife and kids and grandparents in camp. And so he wasn't willing to risk dying for the country if that happened and then he didn't know what the situation would be for the family, you know, who's going to take care of them. And so he answered “no” on that one. The second one basically was to-- against-- It was basically against a lot of the Isseis which were not even American citizens. So they couldn't even be naturalized. And had they answered this one then they would be people without a country. So they were put in a quandary and the question said, will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces? And here's the kicker, forswear from any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor to any other foreign government power or organization. And so, that one was confusing. And so here, like my dad, he didn't have any idea of the emperor personally. He wasn't a Japanese national so he answered, of course, on that one, “yes”. He would forswear that. But if you were an Issei and you were a Japanese national and you couldn't have the American or US citizenship, then you're going to forswear against the emperor and therefore, you're a person without a country. So--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. So your dad and mom, I assumed, she answered the same way--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Correct.

>> Carlene Tinker: They were “no,” “yes.” And “no” on 27 and he has--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. But if somebody answered “no” on both of them, what happened to them?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. They're “no”-- They were called the “no-no boys.” And then some of the camps such as Heart Mountain, there was a big constituent of the “no-no boys.” And they actually had meetings and even riots in those camps. But most of the camps if you were a “no-no” then you got sent to Tule Lake, which was a segregation camp. And so they already had about 15,000 but all these people that were “no-nos” started going there and became the largest of the 10 camps. And so they had to move people from that camp to other camps--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right, right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- because basically, in the long-run, what they were going to do with all these “no-no” persons were going to be exchanged. They're going to either send them back to Japan exchanged for prisoners of war, and that some of them I think did go back early in the days but the most of them stayed at Tule before-- because of the-- they couldn't the arrangements of shipping them across the ocean.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. And then now I understand there were some people who voluntarily left expatriated who did go to Japan and some people actually renounced their citizenship.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Citizenship, yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And I think in the long run, those people who decided not to go to Japan and not to, you know, after they have done it, they fought for their citizenship to be restored and it took about 20 years.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: And I think there was a lawyer by the name of Collins who was responsible for reinstating their citizenship.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And some of them, because they are called the renunciants since they lost their citizenship, I think one person paid $25,000 to get a citizenship back.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: So it was something that should have been restored easily without having to go through these channels.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my god, wow.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Because the people were put in this situation where, you know, you-- it's a dilemma. What do you-- What choice do you take? Just like these loyalty questions.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Well, I understand too that the loyalty question survey that had these questions in it were mistakenly given to groups of people. Wasn't it just supposed to be going to the young men or am I wrong on that?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I don't know but all I know is that everyone over 17 and older.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- took it and then the-- and then a lot of the Isseis, if they didn't understand the question and they left it blank or they put a question mark, that was the same as saying that it was a “no” and so that's what they did. They didn't even go back and requestion them.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And then Tule Lake becoming the segregation center and having all these people who were supposedly pro-Japan. I mean there was hostility and fights. And I guess there was a stockade.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes, yeah. Tule Lake also had a stockade which is much like a Guantanamo of recent times and where they-- people would get beaten in the stockades.

>> Carlen Tinker: Oh, yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And there wasn't a very good hospital there so there had-- they had all kinds of problems with the people getting hurt and not--

>> Carlene Tinker: There's a current movie. Let's see, what is that called, Allegiant? No, not Allegiance. There's another movie about Tule Lake, young man whose grandfather I think was there-- produces. And the name of the movie escapes me at the moment.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. I can't think of it either.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, but-- And also this pro-Japan group that was in Tule Lake, the Hoshi Dan.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes, yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: They were very militaristic and they used to march around.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah. Which I think in itself is interesting that before-- If you were not that committed to go into Japan and having this going on around you and you got sent there because you said "no," "no," oh, I mean what I volatile situation it was. Yeah. Well, fortunately--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: That was one of the camps that the-- the commandant I would say or whoever was in charge of the camp, they actually brought in tanks to quell the riots and--

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: One of the few of the camps were, you know, the military had to intercede to get peace.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right, right. I do remember this.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow, wow. So anyway, getting back to your parents, they stayed there until 1945. How did they get back to Sanger? Did they drive the truck again or--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. After the-- what was winding down then people were being led out of the camp. And eventually, the camp was going to be-- were going to be closed. But people started leaving the camps going to-- Most of the jobs they could go to the East Coast but the West Coast was still kind off limits until the camps were closed in '46. But some people were able to go there and explore to see if they would be able to get back to where their homes were, if they were be able to have them saved.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yes. I recall they were given a pittance of severance, what-- $25 for the bus ticket and--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And a free-- yeah, and a bus ticket or a free ticket anywhere. So that was that. And my dad at the Gila Camp, the only ones left were a few of the Hawaiians that they brought over but-- And then the Indians. But they closed the

Gila Camp first [Sept. 28, 1945] and then they moved to the Butte Camp was the last one of the two camps that closed [Nov. 10, 1945, last to leave were 155 Hawaiian Japanese brought from Oahu]. So my dad was the last Japanese American out of the Gila [Canal] Camp and he never signed out so he never got his $25 for each of the people. So the government still must owed some money there.

>> Carlene Tinker: But he still had his truck there? And the same truck.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes. He was able to drive the truck back to Sanger. But--

>> Carlene Tinker: But now he had two more-- two more children.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. He had two more children but one less [more] because my grandfather [died in camp] -- I will show you the picture. This is a early picture of my grandfather but he was born in the 1880s and then he died in 1943 from intestinal disorder. And then my grandmother did survive the camp and lived to 1953, so she was able to come back out of the camp.

>> Carlene Tinker: She came back with--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. How tall was your grandpa?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: That I don't know.

>> Carlene Tinker: He looks pretty sharp.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: But I imagine my dad was 5'5", 5'6" so, you know, he was probably short too.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, how tall are you?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I'm 5'7" and a half, 5'8", but I'm the tallest in my family but my mom was 4'10", so--

>> Carlene Tinker: Whoa, you didn't have a chance.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I didn't have a chance because I didn't have all-- I have a lot of short genes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Were you going to show us another picture of your--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. I just wanted to show a picture of-- oh, my parents in their early days.

>> Carlene Tinker: Beautiful.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And there's my dad and there's my mom but this is in the early 1940s.

>> Carlene Tinker: Beautiful.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. Before they had all the kids and then the latest picture-- let me just show you. Well, this was a picture that was in 1959 of the family. So when we're a little bit more--

>> Carlene Tinker: Very handsome.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- away from the end of the camps and--

>> Carlene Tinker: What year did you say this--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: This is '49.

>> Carlene Tinker: '49.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: So this is about 15 years after. And so--

>> Carlene Tinker: Not '49 but--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: This is '59.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, '59, I'm sorry. I heard '49.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah, 1959.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And so--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. We were-- I was in high school and my sisters graduated so--

>> Carlene Tinker: Which one is you?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And I'm-- I can't even find it, oh, this one right here.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, the tall-- and, yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: OK.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. So your parents came back to Sanger, what did they do? Did they find everything gone?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: OK. My-- We were kind of lucky because the local constable, we didn't have a police department in Sanger back in '42. And so the constable, Charlie Dever [assumed spelling] stayed at our house and watched the house and the shop. And so our property was pretty much saved except for other things that happened. But we were able to get back our property. When we came back from Gila we had three other families that also came with us because they didn't have a place to stay. And they wanted to come back to the West Coast. And so our shop was a metal shop with cement floor. And during the wintertime it could get very cold in there because of poor insulation but that's where the family stayed inside the shop and on the-- they-- I guess they probably put wood or some type of insulation on the floor so you could sleep on the floor and live there. But one of the things that we use was to-- would not be used today because of the danger was smudge pots with oil or kerosene.

>> Carlene Tinker: You had those inside?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And we had inside but thank goodness that the shop wasn't airtight.

>> Carlene Tinker: I'm going to say carbon monoxide.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And so-- Yes. The danger of carbon monoxide, you hear about these people, the family that goes to sleep but never wakes up. So, luckily that never happened because it was so airy and a lot of the place this gas was probably able to get diluted or escape which was a good thing.

>> Carlene Tinker: So what did your dad do when he came back? Was he-- did he resume his metal work?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes. He was a-- The whole thing is he loaned a tractor to a friend of his and the tractor after three years, the friend was supposed to take care of it but he used it and ruined it. And so my dad was so mad that the tractor and the truck that he loaned the person to take care of. He just took his acetylene torch and just cut it up into sections. And so when we were a kid we saw this whole pile of tractor parts and truck parts and we never did ask him why it was there but later found out that that's what it was, the tractor that he had loaned. And he was so upset that he just cut it up.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: But he was able to still weld and do his business and--

>> Carlene Tinker: So then he became-- not I was going to say he did things for auto but now--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah, he fixed cars. He--

>> Carlene Tinker: He did do that too?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. We had a gas pump so he was able to sell gasoline and--

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- and service cars and then mostly, he was making farm equipment like vineyard wagons and things.

>> Carlene Tinker: But he never went back to the farming part [inaudible]?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: No, no.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And then he eventually, he got into auto wrecking and became fairly successful doing that so--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- buying cars.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. OK. Let me see here. OK. Let's talk about you growing up. Now, you're back in California, your parents are pretty settled. They didn't have to start from scratch.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly. That's why we were lucky. So I was able to start off my elementary-- kindergarten and elementary years at Lincoln School which is a couple of blocks away. And that's where--

>> Carlene Tinker: Is it still there?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: It's still there. That's one of the classic small town schools but-- went there and then eventually went through the whole Sanger Unified System, graduated from Sanger High School in 1963.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And then moved on to University of California at Davis.

>> Carlene Tinker: You went there directly after high school?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And then graduated there in '67 as a entomologist, that was my major, which I changed several times but that really fit the-- my growing up years working on farms and then agriculture.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now, when you were in high school or elementary school, did you face any racism or discrimination?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: We had racism but it wasn't to the extent where other families faced. We never had our house shot at.

>> Carlene Tinker: Which somebody did on--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: There are people in the rural areas that people would go by and shoot up their house. I don't think anyone was killed but things were damaged. They would take a baseball bat and knock down their mailbox, things like that, yell out names, you know, in the middle of the night. We faced some discrimination walking the wrong town and having people drive by and yelling out names like Japs and things like that back in the '50s.

>> Carlene Tinker: How about when you were in school though?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: But then in school there wasn't much because a lot of the-- my peers were also immigrants too. A lot of Hispanic kids and so we didn't have the big distinction between races such as black and white.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Although the Asians--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- are a little bit different than the other races but still we got along with most of them pretty well.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And your teachers were, you know, nice to you? They--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah, for the most part. Yeah. I didn't feel slighted at all that, you know--

>> Carlene Tinker: And you were in activities where-- what you wanted to do.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: You weren't kept out of things. Yeah. OK. So when you went to Davis, was that the same? In other words, did you feel any racism there?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: No. Davis was OK. The only time we felt the racism as a family that I recall was when we went in the early '50s to Los Angeles. My dad went to pick up some parts and we're coming back on Highway 99 in San Fernando and we stopped at a restaurant and they wouldn't serve us so we walked out.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: But things like that happen but that was one incident that still-- stays in my mind.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Because we see people going in there and eating. We're sitting down at the chair but no one came up to us and so we just walked out.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Well, that was good that you don't have a lot of memories like that.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. But for the most part it's been pretty good but--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. So then you went to Davis, you got a degree in entomology.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Entomology, yes, study of insects and so--

>> Carlene Tinker: Little insects. And then you-- Did you--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: At that time, the Vietnam War was going on because in '68 that was one of the heaviest times of the battle [Did not go because of 2S student deferment from 1963-1967. Reclassified after graduation, went to Selective Service Office in Fresno, flunked physical due to “flat feet” and classified as 4F]. And I-- Because I had a [inaudible] and I finished college, I was thinking of either getting the job as an entomologist or going to graduate school. So I applied at graduate school and I got in at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. But the entomologist job was a part time job down-- there down at Imperial Beach so I declined that. And once you decline it, you're back on the bottom of the registry for the state. So I went to grad school where I picked up my teaching credential and my masters. And then I eventually from there started teaching in Southern California in '71.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. And between being a park ranger?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And right. As also being a park ranger.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right, right. Now, let's see here. You're very involved in the Japanese American community. I'm curious about what has motivated you to be so involved.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, to tell you the truth, because my family didn't talk about the internment years and things like that, we were kind of kept out of the loop. And even at our high school we didn't learn much about World War II and the internment because we just got up to the end of the civil war actually in US history. So we were kind of either naive and/or uneducated on that aspect. But we heard stories about the camp when my dad would have friends over at the garage and they would talk about the old days and so that's where we would get bits and pieces of information. But in the mean time, when we-- was-- when we were living in that-- at that time things were going along pretty good as far as comfort with us. And so I was just going to college and I wasn't involved in any of the Japanese American organizations because I had other organizations. And I know that they were doing things with the redress and trying to get the Civil Liberties Act passed in 1988. But for some reason, I was-- My mind was on teaching and coaching and doing other things at the school. And so once I eventually came to the Fresno area then I got involved in the local Japanese American Citizens League in the Sanger chapter. And then I got involved in other groups dealing with the Japanese community. But it was a little late but it's better late than never. And so that's why I'm involved in the Shinzen Garden and Sanger Historical Society and trying to use a lot of volunteer time for these nonprofit groups.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, you're doing a wonderful job and I'm sure everybody appreciates that. You mentioned the redress. Let's talk about that a little bit. How did that affect your family? Did they receive money, reparations money?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes, of course, anyone--

>> Carlene Tinker: But first of all, what was the redress? What-- Tell us a little bit about the Civil Liberties Act.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: First of all, the redress was trying to-- I remember back in the '50s, my-- I saw some old letters where my dad was trying to get compensated for some of the property lost. And he was trying to go to court and trying to establish, you know, the value of these things and whether he

would get any compensation. And at that time, they were going to only give 10 cents and a dollar.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And so one of the things-- I know a lot of those lawsuits and things didn't go through. Some people made some money but as a group, the Japanese organization wanted-- it basically wasn't to restore the amount of loss because the loss today would be or at that time when the redress was offered was would have been in the billions but-- So it was basically a symbolic fine so that the government did something illegally against the constitution. And so they were given a fine so they don't-- they won't do it again. And just as some type of slap on the hand because if you just let things go without any type of compensation or retribution then, you know, things can be forgotten too easily.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right, right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And as Thomas Jefferson said, the biggest threat to our American freedom is to ignore the constitution, and that's what our government did. And so you got to keep them accountable. And so that's what the redress was that being formed by the JACL. And they had to go through many years of trying to get the money available for this. And by the time the redress actually looked like it was going to be favorable and a lot of the congressmen start voting for it, almost half of the people on the camp, 60,000 of the 120,000 passed away. So they didn't get any redress my-- like my two grandparents on my father side, they didn't get anything. And then my younger brother, of course, he was born-- conceived in camp but born outside of camp so he wasn't offered anything. But the-- My father, mother, and the four kids got the $20,000 check for being in the camp. And we also got along with that an apology-- -- from the presidents. There were different apologies but one of them was, of course-- the last one was by President Bill Clinton. And here's the White House memo that said, we apologize for having you put into the camps. And so that was it. But there was one from Ronald Reagan all the way to--

>> Carlene Tinker: Wasn't Bush?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Bush, yeah. Also was involved in one of the letters. But they send out the money in segments. And so the last one I think came in the late '90s. And then-- I mean mid '90s and then I think the Peruvians also were trying to get some money for their time. And I don't know what the Hawaiians

were able to get any redress because they just found some camps there and, well, they were also involved in getting--

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, that's an interesting thing about the Peruvians, FDR and the government of Peru wanted to get rid of the Japanese there. So they were sent here to Crystal City as I recall.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And I just read recently I think they got $5000.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: OK. Yeah, they did get some I think.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And then that's also true, how about the Canadian Japanese?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. There were some Canadian.

>> Carlene Tinker: They were put in camps as well.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: And I believe they got $5000 I think. And that's an interesting thing too about the Canadian Japanese. I met someone recently who was a teacher in Canada and part of their curriculum is to teach about the internment camps for Japanese-- Canadian-Japanese which I thought was wonderful. I don't know if all of them teach that but it's part of their history as well.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, yeah because a lot of people didn't realize they had camps, so same with the Hawaiian Islands.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right, right.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: People didn't know and then now they're finding out that there are over 20 camps there in various islands.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. I know that the Peruvians, they had no country to go back to.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly, because see, when they were-- they actually immigrated well like-- my grandparents came to the United States. They migrated to-- immigrated to South America and wanted to establish a new life there. And so, a lot of them own businesses and stores in Peru. And not just Peru there's also Central America and Mexico had Japanese. But our government made deals with each of the leaders of those countries because

they were saying the West-- whole West Coast was in danger of Japanese invasion so we got to get these Japanese moved. And so the Peruvians-- The FBI went over there and just pulled them out and they left their family there. A lot of them were married to Peruvian citizens and-- but the men were taken to Crystal City, Texas and they-- When they got there they never gave them back their citizenship papers so they were people without a country once the war ended. Where did they go? They didn't have a passport to go back to Peru so it-- They were-- it was a crazy situation there.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, it seems like even worse than us.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly. Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, poor people. Well, let's-- you're-- I know you said your parents don't-- didn't talk about camp as well as my parents didn't either. Have you ever visited Gila?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes, I did in the early 2000s and went to both the Canal Camp and the Butte Camp. Not much left except the Canal Camp had probably out of the 10 camps the most fishponds.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, really?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: The people-- people were-- Because there was a canal going by and so there's some water available and they were able to use the desert rocks. And I don't know if where they got the cement. They might have been able to buy it or get it from the camp administrator but each of the barracks basically had a little fishpond.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's interesting. Yeah, because in our camp we were in the high desert and I think they had the internees build only one koi pond. And all the rest of the places, we have gardens but no fishpond.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. They had-- But a lot of the camps like Manzanar had victory gardens as well as a major pond. They had-- I think Manzanar had two major koi ponds, so--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Yeah. I do remember seeing those.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: But they didn't have individual ones--

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Well, that's interesting. Yeah, I didn't know that.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: -- right outside the barracks, so-- But the Canal Camp, we had a lot of them. So you could see the

foundations that's left of the blocks and then the fishponds are still there.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now does Gila-- Do they have or have-- the internees have reunions?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Not to the extent that the other camps because they're on Indian reservation.

>> Carlene Tinker: See, Poston I think does.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: I think--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Poston because it's right there on a major road there, goes right through the Poston Camp from Parker to Ehrenberg along the Colorado River [Across from Blythe, CA on I-10. On the road north to Parker, AZ, one would enter the Colorado River Indian Reservation where the Poston Concentration Camp was located]. So they do have annual reunions there. But Gila, since it's further secluded to south of Phoenix there-- I know they have a Phoenix JACL but every once in a while you-- they could have tours with the Indians being guides to the area. But they haven't had major reunions since I think the late '90s and early 2000s. That's when my mom went there for the last time.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And when did your mom pass?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: She passed in 2005.

>> Carlene Tinker: 2005. And your dad?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: 1990.

>> Carlene Tinker: 1990. Oh, that was-- yeah. We got our check in 1992 for the redress. Yeah, so we-- but he got it. Was he alive at the time?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yeah. So he was able to get it. And since my younger brother never got-- my mother gave my dad's to my younger brother so he was able to get something.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's nice. OK. Now, we have lots of things that you might want to show some pictures that maybe that might be interesting to our viewers. You have anything in mind?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: The only one main thing was one of the key things of the Japanese being evacuated from the West Coast is because in California the Japanese had probably 90% of the truck farms. And so they were-- all the vegetables and that--

and things like that, fruit trees also were by Japanese. And even in the Delta area we had a Japanese that had like 5000 acres who was called the potato king of California. And so there were some big farmers at the time but the Japanese were so productive in the raising of the crop per acreage that a lot of the other farm groups were-- wanted the Japanese out. That's always been the taste because they were competing for the goods. And so there was all these groups such as the Native Son-- Sons of the Golden West, and the American Grange, and the American Legion. All these groups wanted the Japanese off the West Coast. And even when they were put in the camp they didn't want them to return. And so here's an apology, a little late but this is by the California State Grange. And the president had apologized for what they did and--

>> Carlene Tinker: But what year-- When was that letter?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And this letter was in 2014, which is pretty late but this says, examining our past we recognize that the Grange was a leader in organizing opposition to Japanese immigration beginning in 1907. Along with the American Legion, the State Federation of Labor and the Native Sons of the Golden West, the grange was active in the Asiatic Exclusion League. And so this Grange passed the resolution in 1907 was stated that aliens living in the United States should be barred from buying and owning land. So this had to do with the alien land laws also. And so there was all kinds of things that happened that the people didn't know. And one of our main people that was a member of the Native Sons of the Golden West was our ex-attorney general and governor and eventually Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren. And so, you could see where some of the racism occurred back then. And I think in his memoirs he regretted it.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, and yeah. I think Warren actually apologized later, didn't he?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Yes. He apologized way after he was--

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, but still better late than never.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Never, exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Now, is there anything else that we have not covered that maybe you would like to share with our audience?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I think we-- I can't see anything else.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Well, the main thing today was to understand where you came from, who you represent, and to share some of your stories about your past, your parents, and yourself. One of the questions I like to ask everybody is what do you think your legacy will be? How do you want to be remembered?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, basically helping out the Japanese American Community, not just the Japanese American but just helping out people. That's why I was into teaching is I wanted to help the kids. And then also another part of my legacy is because I love nature. I'm a biology teacher and an ecologist. Working in the national park was a dream of mine that came true, hiking up there in the high sierra for almost 12 years all summer long. It's one of those dream jobs like being a John Muir who I learned about later, but yeah, it's cool to be associated with nature, getting back to the beautiful things that Mother Nature put where sometimes human society has all these problems. When you get up into the park it's-- you go with the flow because everything is so beautiful and so peaceful.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Well, Ralph, I think your goals have been achieved. I think that people will remember you for what you've done, not only for your family but also for the Japanese American community as you continue your association with the Sanger JACL, Historical Society [Sanger Historical Society] and other active-- well, Shinzen Gardens [Shinzen Japanese Garden] also, yeah. And I don't know how you keep it up.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, I'm slowing down but one of my big prizes that I-- if I'm still able to fish that's the thing I like to do the most. And so--

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, where do you work-- What kind of fishing do you do?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I'm basically a bass fisherman and a trout fisherman but--

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, in lakes?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And the trout fishing is in the high streams and lakes. And so, the reason I retired when I was 58 years old is because when my dad retired when he was back in 1975, he had Parkinson's and one of his goals was-- when he retired he wanted to go fishing and he couldn't do that. And so I said I'm not going to end up being denied for a few years at least something I wanted to do. And so I'm all square now. I've been retired for-- since 2003, so that's 16 years.

>> Carlene Tinker: And have you gotten any fishing?

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: And I've been fishing and doing everything I have so my bucket list is pretty well filled and so--

>> Carlene Tinker: Good for you, good for you.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: I can go into the sunset anytime with this--

>> Carlene Tinker: With your fishing pole in hand.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: With my fishing pole and smile on my face, exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, thank you very much, Ralph. I certainly have appreciated your participation and I'm sure others will.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Well, I appreciate. I hope people can learn from the story because if you don't remember what happened in the past, then you're doomed to return it or repeat it. And so that's what the Spanish American writer George Santayana said that. And it's true that you got to learn about from the past so things can change in the future.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Well, I hope that our current politicians take that in--

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: Exactly. Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: It worries me.

>> Ralph Fumihiro Kumano: It always does. Well, thank you. I appreciate it.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Thank you.