

KENJI TASHIRO

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is August 20, 1980. I, Yoshino Hasegawa, am privileged to interview Mr. Kenji Tashiro here at the Fresno County Library, 2420 Mariposa Street, Fresno, California. Mr. Tashiro, what is your present address?

MR..TASHIRO: My present address is 42092 Road 128 in Orosi, California, 93647.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Before we get into the interview proper, I would like to have you give us your full name, your place and date of birth, and your place of longest residence.

MR. TASHIRO: My full name is Kenji Tashiro. I was born November 5, 1920 in Orosi, California, although my birth certificate says Visalia. My place of longest residence would be Orosi.

MRS. HASEGAWA: So, you are a true native of Orosi. Why did you say you were born in Orosi, but you were registered in Visalia?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, the reason is, as with many of the births in those days, a midwife was involved, and from what I can gather, the midwife lived in Visalia, and when she went back to town she registered my birth and just listed it as Visalia.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When and where did your parents come from in Japan?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, my father first came to the United States in 1902, arriving in Seattle. I really don't know that much about his early years in the United States, but he did tell me that he worked quite extensively in through Colorado and Nebraska, working for the Union Pacific Railroad. Then he went back, I don't know for how long. He may have gone back to Japan twice, but he came back to the United States again in 1906. And I think he worked at odd jobs and was married to my mother in about 1912 or 1913. They located in Selma, where he sharecropped a vineyard.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your mother and dad's marriage arranged, or did he go after her in Japan?

MR. TASHIRO: I think it was an arranged marriage, and they were married in San Francisco.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then it would be like a picture bride arrangement?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, not all together, I don't think. I believe that my father knew my mother's family and some of my mother's folks were already in San Francisco at that time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then, would your mother be a yobiyose?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, I think so; her parents were living here, in San Francisco.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then she was educated in Japan?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: She didn't grow up here.

MR. TASHIRO: No, she didn't grow up here, she grew up in Japan.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then they came to Selma and established their home there. What year was that that they came to Selma?

MR. TASHIRO: I believe they came to Selma shortly after they were married, so that would put it around that time, 1913 or 1914.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What are your recollections of your childhood and your growing up years? What was it like, the area, the people, the way the Japanese were treated?

MR. TASHIRO: After sharecropping in Selma for a few years, my dad bought some property in Orosi, and I was born in Orosi. I think he bought the property not too long after he was married, but the family didn't actually move from Selma to Orosi until about 1918. And of course, I was born in 1920, so I have no recollection of Selma at all. Of course, the whole area is much different than I remember it as a child. We lived about five or six miles east of Orosi along the foothills, and water was very short and there wasn't too many irrigated acres then, what we would now consider permanent crops. Much of the area between Orosi and east to where we lived was dry-land farming, mostly in grains during the year. There were a few orchards, citrus, and some vineyards and some deciduous fruits.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did your dad have on the place?

MR. TASHIRO: He planted some oranges and some lemons and a small vineyard. We had the oranges and the lemons until recently, but the vineyards, the soil was much too heavy for vineyards, so I think the vineyards were removed not too many years after they were planted. I was still a young boy when they were taken out.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you remember anything about your elementary school days?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, I sort of remember the first day I went to school. I knew how to speak English because I had a couple of older sisters and an older brother, and of course, we always spoke English at home. And so it was sort of exciting, but scary, the first day of school, not knowing anybody, but I enjoyed school.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were there any other Japanese people there besides your family?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, as a matter of fact, within a mile or a mile and a half of where we lived, there were at least three other families that I know for sure were there. And there were children about my age, within two or three years, and we played together at times, as well as playing with the native white children that lived close by.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What nationalities were in that area? Were they Germans or just a mixture?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, yes, they were assorted, just a mixture, not what

you might call a settlement of any ethnic group.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You said you spoke English at home, you didn't speak Japanese at home. You went to Japanese school though, didn't you?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, what I meant to say was, we spoke English between the children, but with our parents we spoke Japanese. Yes, I went to Japanese school, but I wasn't much of a pupil as far as Japanese school was concerned. I guess I went more to play than anything.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did they have Japanese school in Orosi, or did you have to go to Dinuba?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, the Issei of that area, there were quite a number of families, got together and formed a doshi-kai, and the doshi-kai bought some property in town which had a large hall on it and a couple of houses. And the houses were converted to classrooms, and we had Japanese school there every Saturday, as I recall, and I think it was for the whole day.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you have teachers coming from somewhere?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, there were three different senseis, teachers, during the time that I went. There was Reverend Oishi, who lived in Dinuba and was pastor of the Dinuba Japanese Methodist Church, that came to teach. And, I think, following him there was a Mr. Uyeno that lived in Visalia, as I remember. And following him, there was Reverend Imai who was also the pastor of the Japanese Methodist Church in Dinuba. I believe that he was probably the last teacher before the war.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What are your memories of your high school years?

MR. TASHIRO: Pleasant, I might say. I enjoyed my school years. I was active in football. I never was big enough to play on varsity, but I played junior varsity for four years of my school. I would say on our junior varsity team, there was four or five Niseis. In fact, I think there was probably five Niseis, or at least four, classmates of mine.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Who were they, are they still there, do you remember their family names?

MR. TASHIRO: There was the Katayamas, they were twins; and there was a Saita; and a Kititani; and a Shinoda, two Shinodas. One Shinoda was a little older. He was a Kibei, but anyway he went to high school with us, and he was a classmate. The Niseis of that age weren't very big; most of them were on the short side and they weren't too heavy.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I'll bet your team was a good one, though.

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, I would say that, because of the fact we played together for four years. And, after the first year, of course, we were veterans, and so we had some pretty good JV teams and won the league championship at least a couple of times, I remember.

MRS. HASEGAWA: So, football was your extracurricular activity. Did you encounter any kind of prejudice in high school or in elementary school? Do you recall any instances?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, I don't recall any instance that was directed to me as a person. As I look back on it now, of course, there was this subtle discrimination, but I can say, I think, without reservation, as far as I, myself personally, I was treated well and respected.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Why did you decide to go to UC Davis instead of to Berkeley or some of the other schools?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, probably the biggest reason that I went to UC Davis was the fact that my brother had gone there for three years, and, of course, being raised on a farm, I was agriculturally oriented. My brother went there with the idea of going two years for a non-degree course, and then he decided he liked it so well that he decided he wanted to back the third year. I was out of high school actually three years before I went to Davis. Anyway, I decided I wanted to major in plant pathology, and at that time, UC Davis and Cornell were considered the two top agricultural schools in the nation, and it was only natural that I went to Davis.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you do with that? Did you finish at Davis?

MR. TASHIRO: No, I -

MRS. HASEGAWA: You went to the University of Wyoming?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, you see, as I said, I graduated high school in 1938, and then I was out for three years, so that put me at UC Davis in the fall of 1941. And you know what followed after that.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I see. Have you been able to make use of pathology? You did finish up later with the same major at the University of Wyoming?

MR. TASHIRO: No. You see, of course war broke out on December 7, 1941 and I don't know, it's hard to recall now our feelings at that particular time, but fortunately, the administrators at the school were very level-headed and compassionate people, and they made a plea on Monday morning following the December 7 Sunday to the student body for them to keep their cool and to treat the Nisei students there kindly. I might just add that I stayed in a house with about 15 Nisei boys just off of campus. We bached there. Of course, when the news came over the radio Sunday morning that war had broken out with Japan, we couldn't hardly believe it. We didn't really know what to do, but all those that were in the house with me, and probably most of the other Nisei students at the school at the time, stayed to finish the semester because it was just a matter of a couple of more weeks. But most of them didn't return for the second semester. There was a provision in curfew law, there was a curfew established after the war broke out, where the Japanese people could only be so far from home, and so forth during daylight hours, and they were confined to home after dark. But there was a provision in that directive that allowed students special permission to continue in school, and so I applied for and was granted that permission to return for my second semester, so I was one of the few Nisei students that returned back to Davis for the second semester. And of course, I think we finished toward the end of May in 1942. I went back home, of course, and helped through the summer. And then we were evacuated to Poston, Arizona Camp III in the early or middle part of August, as I remember.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you went back to Davis for the second semester, were you treated any differently?

MR. TASHIRO: No, I wasn't treated any differently. I can't recall any instance where I was directly discriminated against or bad-mouthed or anything like that.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you still live at this house?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, I stayed at the house, of course, I can't remember now exactly how many, but I think there was maybe one or two other students that returned, but the majority of them didn't come back.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you recall about evacuation and your experiences in camp? What did you do there?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, I don't think I ever will forget that long train ride. Of course, in mid-August it was 100 degrees or so. We left from Visalia, and it was hot and stuffy in those cars, and we were always shunted off to the sidings for other trains. And I don't think I'll ever forget all the tunnels we went through, going through the Tehachapi Mountains. We arrived at Parker, Arizona about mid-afternoon the following day, as I remember. It was a long, hot, dusty train ride. Then buses took us to Camp III, and our family got settled in our assigned barracks. But I didn't care for that camp life, that's for sure. I couldn't wait to get out of there. I was only in camp for about six months, I think, from the time we arrived in August until February or the end of January when I got permission to go to the University of Wyoming. That's how I put that quarter in at the University of Wyoming. They had what was known as a student relocation program through the War Relocation Authority. And I applied at a number of schools. And although the University of Wyoming wasn't my first choice, I thought anything would be better than staying in the camp. So, I decided I would go there since I was accepted. There were a number of other Nisei there when I arrived. There was one fellow, I can't recall his name, but he was from the Livingston area, and he was there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was your major there?

MR. TASHIRO: I was still pursuing an agriculture major there, but of course, along with that we were taking the required subjects for English and a few other things.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were there just a quarter, you said?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, I was there just one quarter, and the reason I wasn't there any longer was that somewhere along the line from the time I left camp, or maybe shortly after I arrived there, I contracted scarlet fever, and I was confined to the school infirmary for two weeks, as I remember. And I had a history of TB, so I mentioned this to the doctor, and he rechecked, and I guess the fact that I had contracted scarlet fever brought back my TB, and so, I, through the offices of the War Relocation Authority, was sent to the Phoenix Indian Sanitarium in Arizona. And, I spent a whole year there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were all by yourself then, there was no family or anyone else with you. You must have been lonesome.

MR. TASHIRO: There were a number of other Japanese patients, I guess, from the camps. There were two camps in Arizona; Gila and Poston. And, so there were about seven or eight boys and men there, as well as the same number of girls and women who were confined in the adjoining wing. So, I spent one year there, and in June of '44 then I went to Chicago where my oldest sister and my brother-in-law were residing at the time. And, I spent some time with them, and then since I had a history of TB I was told that I should get a periodic checkup. So, I had a checkup, X-ray, from a doctor in Chicago, and although I had an arrested case and I was okay at that time, he advised that I not stay in Chicago because it was smokey and all this. So, I left Chicago, in October. I only spent three months there with my sister and her husband, and I went to Denver. I knew some friends over there, and so I rented a room in a boardinghouse and stayed in Denver from October to late January or February.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where in Denver did you stay? What street?

MR. TASHIRO: You've got me now, it's been so long ago. It was out from the inner city; it was out more towards, well, I wouldn't say it was towards the outskirts, but it wasn't downtown. More in a residential area.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Oh, how long were you in Denver?

MR. TASHIRO: Oh, I guess from October until about the first of February. Just a few months. I think by then the restrictions had been lifted, so that the Japanese people who wanted to could return back to the West Coast. We still had our farm, and we had someone caring for it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did you return to Orosi?

MR. TASHIRO: At first just my brother-in-law and myself, and so as I say, it was around the first of February, as I remember, that we came back to Orosi.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was that in '45?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, it would be the early part of '45.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you got back to Orosi, what was your farm like, did it look the same, did the people take good care of it?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, the people that we had managing the place took reasonable care of the ranch and kept up the house well, so I think we were fortunate in that respect.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I understand that during the war, the crops, the produce from the farms brought in real good prices. Did you realize some of that?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, we had it arranged so that we received the proceeds from the place, of course, minus the salary that we paid the man to take care of the ranch and all the other expenses, of course. But we retained control of the profits from the ranch.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I think you were one of the very few that did.

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, I understand now that it was more the exception than the rule.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That's right. How did your neighbors and the Orosi community react to your coming back?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, outside of a few people there was a great deal of resentment, I think, and hostility. Some of the first people who came back had their homes shot into. We didn't suffer any indignities like that because we lived on a dead-end road, and I think that might have been one reason why our house wasn't shot into, but I can recall at least two instances of shots being fired into houses through windows. We had some difficulty in buying our supplies. I can recall being turned down for gasoline and some other things. I think that it may not have been so much that the merchants were unwilling to sell as pressure from the community radicals that raised the ruckus and put the pressure on them not to sell to Japanese people.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Will you please discuss your career since you returned to Orosi?

MR. TASHIRO: I farmed in partnership with my brother-in-law for a few years, and then we split up and I farmed myself from then on, raising oranges and lemons and vegetables like squash and cucumbers and tomatoes. Of course, it's a lot more now, expense-wise, but we were trying to raise early produce, so there was a great deal of expense in hotcaps and things of that nature in raising those vegetables. And it was risky at best, so gradually I got out of the vegetable business and confined my efforts to citrus. I developed a citrus grove and subsequently sold it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you raised these vegetables, where did you market them?

MR. TASHIRO: Before the war, practically all the vegetables that were raised were sent to commission houses in Los Angeles or San Francisco, and some of it, I can remember bringing to Fresno to the farmers' market. I can't remember if it was called the Farmers' Market.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Growers' Market, was that it?

MR. TASHIRO: Growers' Market, it might have been the Growers' Market, over on the West Side on "G" Street.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you take it to Los Angeles or San Francisco, or was there a trucking company, or how did it get to the markets?

MR. TASHIRO: As a matter of fact, before the war my brother-in-law and brother kind of ran a trucking company, but after the war there were other trucking companies that ran trucks to San Francisco and Los Angeles, so -

MRS. HASEGAWA: They would come to your farm and pick it up?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, but subsequent to that, though, there was a growers' co-op organized. In fact, there were two of them, but one was basically organized by my brother-in-law John Yamamoto. And, he started selling on an F.O.B. basis. When it was first organized, the farmers packed on

their individual ranches, and the produce was brought to a shed where it was accumulated, and then he sold it. A few years later there was some thought that the two groups should get together, and so the two groups did finally get together and called themselves the Cutler Growers Exchange. And, I was, I guess you'd say, instrumental in getting the two groups together because I pushed for it, and I called a number of meetings of representatives of both groups to get them together and to try to combine the two into one group which subsequently did occur. I served, I think, as the first president of the combined group. That organization has subsequently been, well, they're no longer in business outside of a few assets which I think are going to be distributed shortly. The group is no longer active, but it did serve a purpose because it centralized the shipping and the packing, to make things uniform, which was pretty much a prerequisite, I think, for F.O.B. sales where everything coming from the different growers was uniform in quality.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I see.

MR. TASHIRO: I think the organization served its purpose, because the Nisei farmers in that particular area were basically vegetable growers, and tomatoes were the big item. And, it helped them get themselves back on their feet, so they could develop their properties to other crops. Principally, in that area, citrus. So, as they increased citrus acreage, they cut back on their vegetables, and I'd say, for the most part, they are much better off for it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: There are not very many vegetable growers anymore then, they're mostly into citrus?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, as far as the Nisei are concerned. Following the war, of course, after the Nisei left, it left a kind of a void, so some Armenians and others, the whites, got into it. But, for a period shortly after the war, of course, the Japanese were the major growers of tomatoes, principally in that area.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then you marketed all these tomatoes as fresh, then. They didn't go to canneries?

MR. TASHIRO: No, except where the market had gone down toward the end of the season, and if there were canneries willing to take the balance of the crop, it was picked for canning, but basically, it was a fresh market operation.

MRS. HASEGAWA: If you sent it to canneries, where did you send it? There's no canneries around the Orosi area.

MR. TASHIRO: No, it was trucked to canneries outside the area. I think probably to Stockton and San Jose, as I remember.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What changes do you see in the farming practices from your father's time to the present, as far back as you can recall?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, of course, there's a big change in farming. As I mentioned earlier, I lived along the foothills, and all of that area was considered a water short area. And the Friant-Kern Canal was completed and came through there I think in the early 50's. And that brought

surface water to the area, and things immediately began to change. There was a lot more permanent crops put in, principally citrus because it was a good area for citrus. In comparison to my childhood years, in the area from Orosi to home for a distance of five miles there was practically nothing, and now it's all cultivated and green, and there's hardly a vacant bare piece of ground left. And methods, of course, have changed. I can remember my dad following a team of horses or mules behind a single plow, cultivating the ranch. And then the advent of some of the first tractors. I think we got our first Fordson tractor probably in the late 20's or early 30's. It was built by Henry Ford, and it was one of the earlier wheeled tractors. And, of course, from that we went from the Fordson tractor to the Caterpillars and the Caterpillar-type tractors with the tracks. And then, of course, as I mentioned, the surface water that was brought in by the Friant-Kern Canal in the 50's dramatically changed the area and brought in a diversity of crops.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How is the water delivered from the canal to your place?

MR. TASHIRO: It's delivered through pipelines. Of course, in the areas below the canal it's gravity-flow, but in the areas above the canal, it's pumped by a series of lift pumps to the highest ground.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you think that you will be getting water from the Friant-Kern Canal for many years?

MR. TASHIRO: Oh, yes, it's an ongoing thing, and I don't see any cut off of water from the Friant-Kern Canal. Of course, there's only so much and if there is a shortage of rainfall, why that affects us, and we have to take a lesser amount. But I don't see any total cut off of that water for the foreseeable future.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Now, a few years back there was a drought. Did that affect the water supply?

MR. TASHIRO: Oh, yes, definitely. I think we were cut back to one half an acre-foot per acre for the whole irrigation season, where we would put in a request for at least two acre-feet per year. So what happened was we had to depend more on our deep well pumps to pump the additional water that we needed.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your wells must be very deep then?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, along the foothills where I lived, because of the underlying granite, we couldn't go very deep with wells. I guess the average was maybe 100 feet or less. But occasionally we got down between cracks in the granite, and we went down 150 or 200 feet. Those were exceptional, though.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What will happen if they don't get enough water. Will it go back to being the desert or the dry farming?

MR. TASHIRO: Oh, yes, without the Friant-Kern Canal, of course, it would revert back to -

MRS. HASEGAWA: How far south does that Friant-Kern Canal go? How far does it serve?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, it serves an area down to Kern County. It terminates, I think, somewhere south of Bakersfield.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you meet your wife?

MR. TASHIRO: I first met her at a social event in Fresno, probably in the late 40's. There was a group of young people that organized themselves into what was called a 20-40 Club. It was organized, I guess, for purely social reasons, to get the people, as the name of the organization suggests, to get the people between the ages of 20 and 40 together. And we played bridge, and canasta was a big thing. As I remember, we met once a month, and we played bridge and canasta, and we went on outings and snow trips and picnics and things of this nature.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then you came to Fresno for your social activities?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, pretty much. Then I got active in JACL about that time, in the late 40's and early 50's, and I became Chairman of the Central California District Council, and as it turned out, she became my secretary. So, I married my secretary.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Oh, a boss and secretary relationship! Does she work?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, she is working at the present time as a librarian at the local elementary school.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Oh, do you have any children?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, I have a daughter who is 21 and is going to Fresno State. And, my son is 19, and he is presently enrolled at Cal Poly of San Luis.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What are their names?

MRS. TASHIRO: Eileen and Brian.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is your wife's name?

MR. TASHIRO: Ethel, but her Japanese name is Yoshiye.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was she an Otomo?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I see, Now, let's see, you have been active in JACL since you joined the Tulare County Chapter in 1947; and by attending the National Convention in Salt Lake City the following year. Serving in the capacity of President of your local chapter in 1949, as Chairman of the Central California District Conference during 1951 to 1953, the National Second Vice-President during 1954 to 1956, and the National 1000-Club Chairman during 1956 to 1958. You've been very active in JACL, serving on the local, state, and national level since you joined the organization in 1947. Would you like to tell us about your involvement and your personal contributions to the organization, and your observations about the JACL and its future?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, well, I haven't been too active in JACL in recent years, and we're talking about 15 or 20 years ago, and much of my

recollection is kind of vague. But the Tulare County Chapter was reorganized. It existed before the war, about late 1946 or '47. I was asked to attend the meeting, and so I went. Then in '48, one of the first post-war biannual conventions of the Japanese American Citizens League was being held in Salt Lake City, and as I remember, it was being held in July. And, of course, July is a busy time, a very busy time, for the rural areas, and I was probably one of the few people who could take time off to attend. I can't really remember the exact reasons and circumstances, but I did attend. I drove in my car with Tom Shimasaki of Lindsay, who was a member of our chapter, and Marshall Hirose who was a member of the Reedley chapter. We drove from here to Salt Lake City without stopping. It was a long drive. But anyway, we arrived in Salt Lake City and attended the National Convention. And, of course, the principal speaker at that convention was Mike Masaoka, and if you know anything about Mike Masaoka, why he can stir your passions! Anyway, I came away from that convention with a feeling that JACL really had a place, and that if we really wanted to get anyplace in this country as Niseis that we were going to have to organize and work for our own future. So, that's how I became active in JACL. I came back from that convention and was subsequently installed as President of our chapter. At that time, of course, the Central California District Council was an offshoot of the Northern California District Council. Central California had been included in the Northern California group, but some of the old-time JACLers in this area kind of wanted to form a district council of our own because we had half a dozen or seven chapters reorganized after the war, and we felt our interests were a little different than Northern California. Well, the old-timers like Johnson Kebo was a stalwart in JACL at that time, and Tom Nakamura and Fred Hirasuna. Through their auspices we organized a district council of our own. Johnson Kebo served as the first District Council Chairman for Central California, and the I followed him.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Oh, you were the second?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes. And, of course, that was a two-year term at that time. Subsequently it's been changed to a one year term, but I served two years as Chairman of the District Council. Then, following that, in 1954 at the National Convention in Los Angeles, I was elected as the Second National Vice-President of the national organization. I was encouraged by a number of the JACLers in Central California to run for that office, and I consented to represent them.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That's quite an honor!

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, of course, the organization wasn't as big as it is now, still it was national in scope. At that time there was no specific duties assigned to any of the vice-presidents. It was just more or less serving under the presidents and whatever he assigned to you, that was your task. I remember during those two years or in subsequent years, I do remember working on the national endowment fund. Through the efforts of the JACL we had the Evacuation Claims Act passed through Congress, and although it was only a small percentage of the loss that the Japanese people suffered, nevertheless they did recover some monies. And, we felt in JACL that those people who did receive monies from their claims, would be willing to contribute five percent of their claims, or not their claims, but five percent of their awards to an endowment fund. A fund in which the principal amount would not be touched but invested, and the proceeds from the fund would be used to help defray the expenses

of the national JACL.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How much is there in that fund?

MR. TASHIRO: I don't really know. As I say, I'm not active in JACL right now, but the original goal was to raise a million dollars. I don't think that we came anywhere near that amount, but we may have raised a half a million, or maybe a little bit more, but it was a sizable amount. And, I think, through the years that it has probably contributed quite a little bit toward the stability and the expenses of the national JACL.

And, speaking of the expenses of JACL, I might just add here that some of my fondest recollections of my activities in JACL occurred during my term as National 1000 Club Chairman. I traveled quite extensively to numerous conventions and other meetings throughout the country to drum up support for the 1000 Club, and, in the process, met many fine JACLers in addition to having a marvelous time. The 1000 Club originated in the Intermountain District Council at one of their meetings. I believe in Idaho Falls in the early 40's. I think the idea of the 1000 Club was largely the brain child of the late George Inagaki, the first 1000 Club Chairman, and, also, one of the past National Presidents of JACL. As you know, almost all the JACL members were incarcerated in relocation camps at that time and certainly were in no financial position, nor probably even disposed to think of the expenses of JACL. But there was this core of JACL members in the intermountain Region who were unwilling to see JACL die on the vine, so to speak. And, fortunately so. They felt that there must be at least a 1000 hard-core members willing to contribute \$25 a year to help sustain JACL during this time. And so, this is how the 1000 Club came about. At the start of my term of office, the number of active 1000 Club members had already reached probably about 1,600, as I remember. My goal was to recruit enough new members to increase that number to 2,000. And, I'm happy to say, we reached that at a joint Midwest-Eastern District Council Convention in Chicago in September of 1957 which I attended. So, you can see, the 1000 Club has contributed quite substantially to the stability of JACL over the years.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Yes, that's good.

MR. TASHIRO: One of the principal accomplishments of the JACL in the early 50's was what was known as the Walter McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act. We worked very hard for the passage of that act. It was passed and signed into law during the National Convention, as I remember, in San Francisco in 1954. What that act did, basically, was for the first time give Japanese people a permanent status in the United States. Of course, we were citizens, but our parents, the Issei, were excluded from naturalization. And, Japan was excluded from immigration to the United States. Even though through that act the quota was very small, it was at least a foot in the door, and it gave, as I said, a sort of a foundation for the Japanese people as a whole in this country a more permanent foundation. It was sort of a stepping stone to the events that followed. I can't say that we have total acceptance, but things are much different than they were. Through the activities of the JACL and other community-minded people, I think that was the start.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you think that the quota for the people from Japan is still less than for other ethnic groups?

MR. TASHIRO: I don't know. I'm not really familiar with the provisions now. I do know that the quotas over the years have been raised. I don't know what it is now, and I don't really remember what it was when the original act was passed. But, of course, as compared to the Europeans, the quota for Asiatics has always been much less, and it probably still is.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you see as the future of JACL?

MR. TASHIRO: There are a number of very bright young people who have come out of our colleges and universities and who have taken over the reins of JACL. We don't have the pressing goals now that we did back in my time, so it's rather hard now to sustain a very active and really viable organization. I don't know what is going to happen when the Yonseis get here and what their attitudes towards a Japanese organization will be, but I would venture to say that they probably wouldn't have the interest that we as Nisei and some of the older Sansei do. I don't know, there may always be a place for a JACL, but I don't foresee it playing the type of role that it had in the past.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You told us a little bit about the Orosi Nisei Center?

MR. TASHIRO: I think I mentioned earlier there were quite a number of Japanese families living in the Cutler-Orosi area. I would venture to say that it's probably 40 or 45 families of Japanese living in that area prior to World War II. I don't really know when the Doshi-kai was formed, but the Isseis formed the Doshi-kai, and they bought this property in town as a meeting place and a hall. And, of course, when the war came along it disrupted everything, and that was the demise of the Doshi-kai, as such. After the war, some of the older Niseis saw the need for some organization of Japanese people, and with this property owned by the Doshi-kai, felt that there had to be some organization of Niseis, so they formed what is known as the Orosi-Nisei Center. It was principally to oversee the property and act as liaison for the Japanese community. So, even to this day, they sponsor the annual Japanese community picnic, and they help out in funerals and events of that nature.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I think the Japanese tradition of helping families during funerals is really a good thing. It's really helped the families, don't you think?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes. Of course, probably the need now is not as great as back then, but this matter of koden, which is probably historical from the old country, but that, to my way of thinking, is a good thing, because it helps financially in the death of a person in the family. Helps a family to meet its needs.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I understand that the mortuaries really like the Japanese families because they get the cash right away.

MR. TASHIRO: Well, yes, I suppose that comes from the koden, which is a sizable amount.

MRS. HASEGAWA: As a member of the Cutler-Orosi Kiwanis Club: since 1952 and as President in 1957, what reason did you have for joining that organization instead of Rotary or the Lions or some other club?

MR. TASHIRO: Orosi is a small community, and at the time, Kiwanis was the only service club. There was a Y's Men's Club and the Kiwanis Club, that's all at the time. I was asked I was asked to join by the president at that time, I think it was 1951 or '52. The membership was small, there may have been only a dozen members at that time. Gradually, over the years, it has grown, so that in the late 1960's or early 1970's, we had a membership of about 50. It's down to about 35 now.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you think social club memberships dwindle because young people move away from the area, or do you think it's because people have other activities?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, it probably has a great deal to do with it. There's much more happening now that people can get involved in than there was 15 or 20 years ago.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you think was the main focus or project during your term of office?

MR. TASHIRO: I don't know that I really had a main focus, other than to keep an interesting program and to keep the members interested in the club. The main event during my term of office as Kiwanis President was we had a Kiwanis Division meeting. It was a shish kebab banquet, and we had a District Governor of the California-Hawaii-Nevada District of Kiwanis as our guest and principal speaker. For a small club with a membership of 15 or 20 or 25 people that was quite an event, and it made an impression or a name for our club.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were a Director of the Chamber of Commerce?

MR. TASHIRO: Yes, I have served as a Director of the Chamber of Commerce over the years. I don't remember how many years I have been in Chamber of Commerce, but it has been a number of years. I served a three-year term. In the Chamber of Commerce you do the things that the other Chambers of Commerce do. We encouraged businesses to settle in the community, and we're in an unincorporated area, so we have to quite often make our needs known to the county government for consideration for roads and maintenance and things like this,

MRS. HASEGAWA: But usually the Chamber of Commerce is to publicize your city; isn't that the main objective?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, yes, and of course, taking stands on issues that affect the community.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What changes have you seen in the activities and problems of Japanese-Americans during your life?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, there again, there is quite a bit of change in activities from the pre-war days, of course. Japanese-Americans are much more active in their communities through their contributions to school boards and things of this nature. Politically and socially, they are a lot more active than they were.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you do to maintain your Japanese ethnic identity?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, we as a family don't do as much as most families

probably do. We observe New Year's, along with Christmas and Thanksgiving and Easter, of course, but I don't think we go out of our way to keep up traditions.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I think that's the way we all are getting to be.

MR. TASHIRO: Well, yes, more so with the Sansei and the Yonsei, I think, getting more or less assimilated into the general community. I think we are just drifting away from some of those things.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you see as the future of the Japanese as an ethnic group?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, yes, as I said in our discussion of JAACL and its future, it might be a little difficult when we get further down the generations to sustain a purely Japanese organization. There is much more intermarriage, with all groups, and maybe within a couple more generations it will really be a melting pot.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is there anything more you would like to add to this, maybe some advice for the future Nikkeis?

MR. TASHIRO: Well, no, I don't think it's my place to try to advise the younger generations where they should go. I think they'll probably make up their own minds when they come to that. I'd like to say that although I'm not actively involved in JAACL at this time, I still try to remain active in our local Kiwanis Club and Chamber of Commerce, our local organizations, but I don't really regret for a moment my activity in JAACL, and I think that at the time it was the organization to further the cause of the Japanese-Americans in the United States. I think to a great extent it has accomplished that. Certainly not all cases of discrimination have been abolished, but largely it has been. And at least we don't have this outright discrimination, even though there is some subtle discrimination, but we don't feel it as much now.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Thank you very much, I appreciate your taking time to come to be interviewed.