DR. KIKUO H. TAIRA

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is May 28, 1980. I, Yoshino Hasegawa, am privileged to be in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Kikuo Taira at 258 South Meridian Avenue, Fresno, California, 93702.

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
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DR. TAIRA: My name is Kikuo H. Taira. I was born in Fresno, California on May 27, 1911 and have lived the longest in Fresno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: First we want to find out what part of Japan your parents came from and why they settled in this area.

DR. TAIRA: My father Tomotaka Taira came from Niigata, Japan and spent his younger days there, then was educated in Tokyo. Then he came to the United States. He came to see what could be done, to make a little pile, you know, and then go home. I think everybody's original intention was like that. However, unlike other immigrants, he didn't come here flat broke. He came with funds, which was unusual in those days. He came over as a newspaper reporter for some newspaper in Tokyo, so they supplied him with funds before he came.

Now I think he first landed in San Francisco. Then somebody found out he had a little money, so they kind of worked a con game on him, and he lost whatever money he had. So, he had to make some money. He was kind of a clever fellow, good with his hands and quite educated for immigrants of those days. He had a college education. Also, he was rather mechanically oriented, so in San Francisco he decided to take up a trade. There was a Japanese jewelry on Grant Avenue, and he took a few weeks' lessons from him. He stuck around and observed and did a little repairing, and he mastered the watch repairing technique. So, he came to Fresno as a watchmaker.

Now, the reason he came to Fresno was that someone told him that this place was opening up, an area that was going to grow. The one thing about Fresno in those days, about 1904 or 1905, was that people would say, "Do you want to go to Fresno and die? Anybody that goes out there is gonna get sick and die. First it's hotter than heck and second it's disease ridden, so anyone who goes to Fresno, it's tantamount to asking to get sick and die. It's that bad!" So a lot of people tried to dissuade him, but he thought he'd give it a try anyway. So he settled here and was here until he died.

He did a lot of things. First and foremost, he was a watchmaker. That was a steady job. Before the war, probably between 1928-30, there was a Japanese newspaper correspondent here named Mr. Ino. He was a "New World" reporter. Anyhow, Mr. Ino passed away, and that left an opening for a newspaper correspondent for the San Francisco newspaper, representing the Fresno area. Of course, he knew the people in San Francisco so it was easy for him to change. He did that until the evacuation. Post evacuation, he was old, of course, so he was semi-retired and just puttered around with watchmaking next to my office for a couple of years. Then he became ill and passed away. So, roughly, that's the outline of his coming to Fresno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What year did he come to America?

DR. TAIRA: I think around 1903-1904. He was in Fresno at the time of the San Francisco earthquake, so that means he was established here already.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was your mother with him when he came?

DR. TAIRA: Well, he married a couple of times. I think he was married when he got here, and she passed away. Then he remarried. That was the mother I knew originally. Then she died in 1929, and a few years later he married again. The last stepmother passed away a few years ago.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you have brothers or sisters?

DR. TAIRA: No. I'm an adopted son, you see. The only son in the family.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you recall about your childhood days in Fresno?

DR. TAIRA: I grew up on the West Side of Fresno. It was a very tight community--Japanese community, in which everyone knew everyone else. We all lived fairly close to each other. From about Ventura to Mariposa, with few exceptions, the houses were occupied by Japanese.

MRS. HASEGAWA: All on this side of the tracks?

DR. TAIRA: Everything was west of the track, because they had regulations in real estate that they can't sell to Japanese on this side of the track. Except in ancient days, about 1905, if anyone wanted to sell to them they could. I was one of the first ones, I believe, to come over on this side. When I bought the first place, this side of Butler, my real estate agent went around and asked everyone in the block if it was all right to have a Japanese move in there. That was about 1946, I'd say. With the exception of one man, everyone said it was all right. Imagine! Even in 1946 he had to ask whether it was all right if we moved in. Today you look and say, "Do we WANT to move in?" not "Do the neighbors want us to move in?" Anyway, because of these restrictions, the Nihonjin were concentrated in one area.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What other nationalities lived in that area?

DR. TAIRA: Oh, Chinese, because of Chinatown. But the Chinese don't have many private homes, because they lived in their place of business. Then on the west side of town, toward Ventura, lived what was known as German descent, but not from Germany. They were Volga Germans or Russian Germans who were originally from Germany but had settled in the Volga River area, so were Russian by territory. But they had carried their German culture with them, the language, and the German Lutheran Church, and everything. Just like the Nihonjin settling in California bringing the Japanese culture with them. The parents of these German kids wouldn't stand for any nonsense any more than the Japanese parents, so our community was pretty tight, and so was the German community. Now, on the north of Fresno Street, on the west side, was a big Italian settlement. And then on the fringe area and in between were the blacks, totaling roughly about 1,000 persons-- prewar, that is. Now, it's a tremendous number! So, a lot of my acquaintances got their start on the west side. One of our mayors--Hyde and also Ted Wills--originally came

from West Side. Now we are scattered all over the city. But those were the elements of ethnic composition.

The school I first went to was Lincoln School. The population was tremendously German with a smattering of Japanese, and equally small group of Chinese, and a few Mexicans, Italians, and very few blacks. The Armenians were mainly south of the tracks near Butler, so went to Emerson School. There you have the ethnic layout. The Japanese community was west of the Southern Pacific tracks and predominately north of Ventura or Santa Clara and Fresno Street and then back to near Edison School on California Street.

MRS. HASEGAWA: There was quite a bit of prejudice then?

DR. TAIRA: QUITE A BIT!!! Enough to be evacuated! That's all evacuation was, prejudice! We were at war with Hitler and no Germans were evacuated. In the First World War they said the Germans were bad, so the people of German town got it hard.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you remember what happened to those people during the war?

DR. TAIRA: They took it very hard. I didn't think anything of it because they were all my classmates--no more German to me than anyone else. I don't know what it was like at home, but in school no one considered them Germans.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Maybe that was because they were the majority of the whites there.

DR. TAIRA: That's probably right. And they were well-behaved and like everyone else bought war bonds, war stamps. They were accpeted by the teachers--no difference ever shown in school.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How old were you when you were adopted--were you a baby?

DR. TAIRA: So I was told.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you do for entertainment during your elementary years?

DR. TAIRA: My life was centered around the Buddhist Temple. Not that I visited the temple area in the sense of chapel, I don't mean that. The temple ground was our playground, so we all congregated there. I never did know any other playground except the Buddhist Church ground. Every day after school that's where we gathered, and when it was time to go home, everybody was in walking distance; three or four blocks from the temple grounds. You might say it was the epicenter of the Japanese community, plus the fact that there were Japanese stores all along the way; Kern Street, "F" Street, "E" Street, Tulare.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you go to Japanese school?

DR. TAIRA: Oh, you bet! That was there, too. Every day after school we had to go to Japanese school, and on Saturday mornings. As far as our folks were concerned, it was mandatory. At the time that Japanese school was established, there was quite a bit of argument whether they should have a Japanese language school. On the one hand was the group that

maintained that the Nisei should have some Japanese background, knowledge, and heritage. The other side said, "No, that's a deterrent to integration, if you do anything like that. The less you know about Japan and the more you know about America, the better it is." I heard there was a pretty good argument in the community. But, finally, the side that said we should have a Japanese institute established the Japanese language school. And, then, in Fresno there were two Japanese schools. One was at the Buddhist Church. Then the parents of the Congregational Church thought their children out to have one, too, so they had one there. So the biggest churches, the Buddhist and Japanese Congregational, both had language schools.

Majority of older Nisei of Central California all understand Japanese even though they may not be able to speak it well. I thought that was a natural phenomenon for all Japanese in the United States, but I found out that it wasn't. The more "countrified" the place was, the more Japanese language was taken up. In Los Angeles, if a Nisei spoke Japanese, they kind of looked on him with awe, but here it was common.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I've heard a lot about China Alley. What do you remember about it?

DR. TAIRA: China Alley is an alley that's located between "F" and "G" and runs all the way up and down to Ventura, I guess. The reason it's called China Alley, is that the three or four block area from Kern, Tulare, to Mariposa had a lot of old stores on both sides of the alley. Interspersed here and there were Chinese establishments. And in between them, up and down, were Japanese stores and restaurants.

MRS. HASEGAWA: They must have been very small stores then.

DR. TAIRA: Yes, just small shops. Nori Masuda and his father used to run a little store in China Alley--a typical little store that sold Japanese candles, little knick-knacks, and toys. I used to eat "tokoroten" and all those things over at that store when I was a kid. You tell kids now about "tokoroten" and they don't know what you're talking about. And "kintoki," we always used to eat that. People know kintoki a little better, but tokoroten, they ask "What's that?"

MRS. HASEGAWA: That's because they don't sell them any more. Where was your father's store?

DR. TAIRA: My father's store, at that time, was on the corner of Tulare and China Alley. He was renting half of it. On the other half was this little door with a Chinese sitting in front of it on a little counter-like thing. That is all he did. When someone came he unhooked the latch. It was an entry to a gambling place. It took me a long time to understand that!

My stepmother had a shooting gallery across the street. There were two of them in the block for entertainment--using .22's you know. I used to think it was just natural to have a shooting gallery. Nowdays you try to find a shooting gallery and you don't see one. I haven't seen one for 25 years, except at fairgrounds. So that was an unusual business at that time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you become good at shooting?

DR. TAIRA: My mother wouldn't let me touch a gun. But she was an expert shot. She was a regular Nihon woman; didn't know a gun from beans, but my father thought it was a good business for her to run. At first she couldn't even shoot a gun! Well, better learn, she thought, so she practiced and pretty soon she was an expert shot!

MRS. HASEGAWA: Wasn't it unusual for a woman to run a business?

DR. TAIRA: In those days, yes. Most women helped in their husband's store or restaurant, but not as a proprietor.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I guess that your dad and mom were pretty liberated then, beyond their times.

DR. TAIRA: I didn't think so. I guess I thought it was natural. When you are a kid, you don't question what your parents do.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you live over the store?

DR. TAIRA: No, we had a place over here where my office is now. A one-story house that looked something like the Meux home, built in 1890 era. My folks bought the property and the house. That old house burned down. My father moved his business from there to the "F" Street place next to Cal Theatre. Cal Theatre used to be known as Nippon Theatre before Ben Nakamura took it over. Next to it, which is now Cuca's Restaurant, is where my father had the store. We lived for a long time behind that store, then he said we were going to move back, so he was having it repainted. During that process, one morning somebody woke us up and we went dashing over there, and the whole place had burned down. Later on, he built this wooden apartment building. So, we did have our own home, but a lot of people were old Japan style--store in the front and lived in the back or upstairs. Japanese in Japan do that, too, so they thought nothing of it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: As a child, then, did you encounter much prejudice?

DR. TAIRA: We did not counter any prejudice at school, because every group was a minority. We were good friends and the Japanese kids were well respected, and so were the German kids and Italians. No one was rich, all middle class or below as far as economic status went. So, we got along all right, multi racially.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How about your everyday life?

DR. TAIRA: Not much prejudice, because we were a close community.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you recall anything about your childhood that was particularly humorous or sad?

DR. TAIRA: Sad, of course, when my mother died. I was about 11. First time I ever heard of any mother dying. You think death is reserved for very old people, meaning not your own mother but some old obasan, that's natural. I had not attended many funerals either, because that's elder's affair, like getting married; funerals, sickness, nothing to do with kids. That death was a shocking event. In my immediate circle no one had their mother die, I was the first.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then it was you and your father for a while?

DR. TAIRA: That's right. Then he remarried simply because I was too young, and he thought he better have someone look after me. He was doing all the cooking and everything, so some friends in San Francisco told him he should remarry and have someone take care of me.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was she a lady who was already in the United States?

DR. TAIRA: She lived in San Francisco.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then what about your high school days?

DR. TAIRA: I went to Edison Junior High, then I went to Fresno High School. That's where I had my education the last three years in Fresno, and I think school was very nice. I didn't feel unpleasant about going there. The teachers were all nice, and if they were prejudiced, I did not encounter it. I didn't go to places where you invite prejudice. I was too busy. First of all, we had to tear back to Japanese school, and when that was through we had to eat, then study, so I was busier than all heck. I was also doing a lot of Boy Scouting, so that kept me busy with a troop meeting every week and then patrol meetings and outings.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Who was your leader?

DR. TAIRA: It was a Hakujin man named Mr. Beebe. I don't know what he did, as I only saw him at the meetings. Then he went "north" and never came back. Then after that the Congregational Church had an excellent Scoutmaster named Mr. McGinity, and he was a very capable man.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It didn't matter whether you were in the Buddhist or the Congregational troop?

DR. TAIRA: Boy Scouts didn't matter. The Reverend Fukushima was the pastor, and he treated me very nice and was absolutely good to everyone, so we had a good time there. So that's my extracurricular activity which kept me busy all the time. No time even to go to football games.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were you involved in any other kind of sports?

DR. TAIRA: Just YB teams. I'm not good at sports, so I dabbled in basketball, judo. We had our own "barn" for judo--put sawdust down for mats. I wasn't serious, but went once a week. Because of that, I know what judo means to a kid, so I helped in some organizing, the administrator's end, not the teaching end of judo. I leave that to the experts.

So my high school days were occupied with Boy Scouts, YB work, and I was in the high school cadets? Do you know what cadets are?

MRS. HASEGAWA: Not really.

DR. TAIRA: It's military training. It was not compulsory, just for those who wanted to join. It was during physical education period. You could do PE or cadets, same credit. I liked it. It was an inspiration. Frank Matsumoto used to be in Fresno, and he was a captain, which was the highest position in Fresno. He grew up here in Fresno, then went to Harvard, and back to Japan. He became a teacher at Meiji University which was really something. Then World War II came, and he

went into politics after the war and made the Japanese Diet. Takeo Miki, who later became premier of Japan helped him get started in politics. Those two were close all the way through. Frank later became a member of the Japanese cabinet, then Frank suddenly died. So that was someone whom I looked up to, so I went into cadets, too. That kept me busy, too, plenty to do. Plus my schooling, of course. So that takes care of my high school.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you go to college?

DR. TAIRA: I went directly to the University of California, Berkeley. That's where I spent my undergraduate years. I took a little time at it. Instead of the usual three years, it took four years before I went to medical school. In medical school, the first year was in Berkeley and the other years were in San Francisco Medical School. There, internship is part of the school. In most medical schools, the internship is after you get your degree, but in our school we didn't get our degree until we finished internship. Everyone had to spend their internship year, then pass the State Board, then you could practice anywhere. In my particular case, I took one year of residency at Tulare County General Hospital for a little more training and surgery. Then I opened practice in Fresno, the West Side, and I've been there ever since, same place. First one or one and a half years I was on the corner of "F" and Kern, upstairs, then after that I moved to the present location.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was it difficult to get into Med School when you applied?

DR. TAIRA: Yes, come to think of it now. I think it's really astounding that the University of California Medical School Board let in five Japanese-Americans out of a class of 60. That's quite a remarkable percentage.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Are there any other doctors now that went to school with you then?

DR. TAIRA: Yes. But in my particular class I was the only Japanese-American who finished school. Others had family reasons, sickness, or changed fields. So I became a loner and just plodded along and finally finished up.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What were the conditions like at County Hospital where you did your internship?

DR. TAIRA: It was good, very good. Just like any hospitals. I used to come to County when I was a med school student and used to drop in to see the clinic. I knew the first superintendent of the hospital who practices now Dr. Ginsberg--the old Dr. Ginsberg. I'm one of his boys, so to speak.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How does the hospital compare now? Like in facilities?

DR. TAIRA: Facilities are a 200 percent improvement. A lot of the faculty members are now part of the UCLA and SF Med Schools, and they are teaching the interns and residents. We had only local doctors in practice as our supervisors. Nowdays, the staff is composed of highly specialized people. They are trying to make a medical school here, so, as the groundwork for that, they have faculty members here. So, the

facilities are way beyond the imagination compared to the time we were there. I don't know the number of staff, but when we were there they had 10 interns and about four residents, so 14 of us ran the whole place. Then the pay is different. One of the two reasons I came to Fresno was because of the pay. They were paying $25 a month and San Francisco County only $10. And University Hospital at Cal was zero dollars a month. After you've gone through 8, 9, 10 years of school, you are broke and you have a lot of responsibility and debts, so you need money.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were you in college during the depression years? And how did you finance yourself?

DR. TAIRA: My father had to sweat blood to do it. When I went to Cal was 1929 through 1932. It was the depression years. Those were horrible years.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I guess your schedule was too tight for you to work during your school years?

DR. TAIRA: I worked in the summertime. I used to go out and pick grapes, peaches. Probably made around 15 or 20 cents an hour. Picking trays of raisins was 21 cents a tray, that's the rate we worked for, so if you picked 100 trays, your day's earnings were about $2.25.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you live in the dormitory?

DR. TAIRA: I lived in a dorm, the Japanese Student Club, which was built in Berkeley. My father did the right thing for me. He never thought I'd be in Cal, but when they were going to build that dorm, they asked for donations from the people of Northern and Central California. My father donated to it, because he thought it was a good thing and pushed it. Well, that made it easier for me to stay there, and it was fairly reasonable compared to any other place. They said they were charging $50 a month for dormitory and two meals a day and I thought, "My gosh! Fifty dollars a month! How the heck can anybody pay a thing like that?" My place was about $25 a month, something like that.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you go on a scholarship? Did you pay tuition?

DR. TAIRA: No, no tuition. That's one of the reasons I chose Cal.
If you went to Stanford or USC you had to pay tuition, because they were private colleges; Stanford especially. Why, I couldn't think of paying tuition. There was registration fees, though, and lab fees. So tuition was free to residents of California, meaning born and raised in California. So it's my university, and the State Legislature funds the university, so there wasn't any tuition. I don't think it's that way now. Even the state colleges are charging. And, somehow, I always had my heart set on Cal, I didn't know why, and I got to thinking, "Why was it I had my heart set on Cal?" And I went back to my junior high school days when we had what was known as weekly assembly. Everyone gathered in the auditorium and the music teacher led us in songs. And we learned a lot of songs that way when we were kids in junior high school over there in Edison. So, I knew many of the Cal songs before I went to Cal, so I had my heart set on Cal.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You must have liked music.

DR. TAIRA: No. Not like music, I enjoyed singing. Just howl along with

everybody. That's all it was. But she led the whole assembly, and everybody sang.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That was fun.

DR. TAIRA: Yes, it was fun. And you learned a lot of songs that kids don't hear about nowadays. So when my father said where do I want to go and I said University of California, it was all set in my mind. So I applied to Cal and got in all right. Since I started at Cal, I wanted to go to Cal Med, so I applied to just Cal Med. Now I shudder to think what might have happened if I was refused, but they accepted me.

Soon after I started practice in 1938, the war started in '41. So it was only two or three years in between. And, by golly, things were looking pretty bleak in way of international stituation. And it got worse around 1940 and the fall of 1941 before Pearl Harbor. Even before that, when I was in college, in University of California, the Sino-Japanese incident was going on already. Japanese call it incident. That was no incident, a darned big war was going on. The Manchurian Incident occurred first.

Well, that was going on about the time I was in Cal. That time we invited Consul General Wakasagi from San Francisco to come over and give us a talk on the situation and the justification of the Japanese action in Manchuria. And he came over to the student clubhouse and gave us a talk. And that's the first time we ever heard of a Consul General coming over, and we thought it was quite something.

And things were getting pretty hot in the way of Japan and China, and the feeling of Americans towards Japanese went from bad to worse. The Chinese Student Club was saying how wrong Japan was. At the Japanese Students' Club, we didn't say anything and took no part in politics. Whatever was going on was across the sea. We're Americans, and we didn't have anything particular to do politically with Japan across the sea. That was our stand. But, naturally, anything across the sea that harbored ill for Japan reflected on us even though we're Americans, you know how that is. So we kept our eyes and ears open but were never directly involved. That was the state of affairs then. Then when I was beginning my practice in Fresno in 1938, I think the Sino-Japanese War was going on. Then things got bad in 1939 and 1940. 1941 came and it really got bad. And then, finally, this ABC affair. Do you know what that is?

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was the ABC affair?

DR. TAIRA: Australia, British, and something or other, they formed a ring around Japan in the Pacific Ocean to close off Japan in an economic boycott. They were going to boycott Japan in the way of all economic trade unless Japan pulled out of Manchuria and China. Wholesale. Just pull right out. Well, Japan couldn't do that. They had expended so many lives and their whole future life was at stake. So they're not going to budge on that kind of boycott. If that boycott had gone into effect, Japan would have starved, because the ABC countries wouldn't let anybody in to supply Japan with any food or any product. So that meant automatic strangulation and death as far as the Japanese Empire is concerned. That is obvious. So they figured that when they threatened boycott, Japan was going to probably reconsider and change her mind. Now, of course, at that time, we didn't know anything about the Japanese

Army, but the Japanese Army, now that we know about it, wouldn't accept anything like that. So when the blockade went into effect, we knew things were getting pretty hot, and then the next thing we knew, it was Pearl Harbor. The time of Pearl Harbor was quite a thing for us. We were all shocked at first. The worst of our fears came true. Now, it was going to be war. If it's one thing we hated, it was war between Japan and the United States. And this was something that we dreaded, something we hoped would never happen. And there wasn't much we could do about it. But it did happen all right! We were all worried for the fate of all of us here, and then war was declared. And—you can get this from other sources--some of the Nisei fellows were in the Army already. We had the draft going on and some Japanese people were in the Army. In some areas they collected all the Nisei soldiers together and put them in a certain camp compound and took their arms away from them. They had a fancy name for it, but what it meant was that the Nisei were under Army surveillance and coudn't have any arms. They put them in one place and didn't trust you as a solider, that's what it meant. I heard about that.

Well, I wasn't in the Army then. I was in the Reserves, but I was called up to active duty about a month or a month and a half before Pearl Harbor. I had to take my physical at the air base here and that was an Army air base, by the way. You know, where the Fresno Air Terminal is now? Fresno City Airport was Chandler Field by Kearney Road. At that time, 1940, '42, and d-ring the war years, it was an Army Air Field, called Hammer Field. So I went for my physical examination there but not accepted because of my eye. On Monday morning after Pearl Harbor, I got my discharge notice.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Discharge notice?

DR. TAIRA: Yes. That morning, in the mail, December 8th, I got my discharge notice from the Reserve. I was in the Army in the medical corps reserve for about two years before that. When I was in Tulare County General Hospital I had volunteered. I got into the Army Medical Reserves, but, then, when the time came, I failed my eye test. Eyes were no good, so then they just didn't take me. They were particular then. But after the war began, they took anybody. But, before that they looked you over pretty carefully, and if they found any defect, they didn't take you. So that was my Army career.

Then as soon as Pearl Harbor happened, war was declared and all the Japanese had a night curfew. And you couldn't go out at nighttime or anything. You had to be home and all that. As JACL members, we were worried. Nobody could communicate with another person except by telephone, and you couldn't discuss anything over the telephone. So we had to get together to communicate, so we had meetings. Fortunately, the police were very understanding. Wallace was the chief, and so long as we were not acting suspiciously he didn't care. We were Fresno kids and he knew all the fellows and we're not infiltrators from Japan. Nothing like that. So he did not worry about us. And so we had our meeting to discuss what would be the best things we could do for the Japanese in Central California. And that would be quite a chapter in itself. What we'd discussed and what we'd proposed. We sent our representative up to San Francisco to the Western Command to present our views. Mr. Milton Eisenhower, General Eisenhower's brother, was in charge of the evacuation. Not the evacuation then, but in charge of this "What do we do with the Japanese?" type of thing. And so we sent our delegate up

there proposing our views, what we should do and what we'd like to do. We wanted to have help from the government. I won't go into details on that, but we did have that type of meeting to discuss and try to get things done. It didn't work. We had JACL's last conference in San Francisco. We went to that, about five or six of us. At that time, we had our first blast from the Army. And we never could forget General DeWitt who was the man that was head of Western Defense Command. He sent his adjutant general over to the meeting. He was a cold, stuffy kind of guy. Some of the thing that he said really riled us. But we were in no position to say anything. And, first, we wanted to know what the justification was for evacuation. About that time they had announced the evacuation, that we all had to get out of our homes. Well, the first question was, "What for? Why?" Well, danger, yes. "Well, what's the matter with the Italians? We're at war with Italy. What's the matter with the Germans? We're at war with Hitler." Of course, the attack on Pearl Harbor was Japan, that's true. The immediate enemy was Japan; we understood that. But when the United States was at war with other nations and only Japan was being picked on. That seemed awfully odd. So the question we wanted to ask, first of all, was how come we were being evacuated. And the first answer he gave to that particular type of question was, "I am not here to discuss the pros and cons or why and wherefores of why you are being evacuated. That's an order."

MRS. HASEGAWA: Just like that!

DR. TAIRA: Just like that. It was an order. So you go from there on. Well, then, somebody suggested that since the government that was making us evacuate, maybe they should help us with the moving expenses. "What!" he said, "you know the soldiers are being called up by the draft!" Well, of course we knew the soldiers were being called up by the draft. "Who do you think pay their expenses when they come to the Army recruiting place. It's on their own. How come you people expect anything from the government to help you along?" That was the kind of answer we got. You have to know some of the background to appreciate why JACL had to do some of the things they did. See, it's not like it is right now, today. Today you can go up to Congress or White House and sit down there and yell around and wave banners saying unjust, unfair, and all that. And you can get away with it. It's allowable. The atmosphere in the 1940's was absolutely different. Our voice was never heard. Nobody listened to us. And everybody looked at us with suspicion. It was a tough time to go through. Little things get you mad, too. I had a contract payment for, I don't know what it was, furniture or something. I paid $10 a month or whatever it was, and the man came over to my office after Pearl Harbor and said, "What are you going to do about this contract payment?" I said, "What do you mean, what am I going to do about it. I'm paying it, am I not?" He said, "Yes." "Well, why are you asking then?" was my reply. See, well, anyway, so to evacuation. What led up to it? Of course, there's all kinds of reasons given, but we think it was mostly economic. It really was not the danger. It was economic reasons. And they all started from Southern California. I mean the main push. And I think if you read Bill Hosekawa's book and anyone else's writing you'll find that that's so. And then you still remember this was a national thing and the Toland Committee came over to investigate a so-called the Congressional Committee. I think they had their ideas already set and they just wanted to check up and make sure that it was carried out that way. To anything contrary and they were not willing to listen. They thought it was all false propaganda on our part to say anything; that we were trying to justify the unjustifiable. Example, it's very clear to

them that a McKinley High School ex-student was a pilot of a Japanese plane. You know
what I mean?

MRS. HASEGAWA: I know what you mean.

DR. TAIRA: So faced with that type of thing, it was just an impossibility. I know Mike Masaoka made a real good effort. He was our JACL spokesman, but to no avail.

I don't remember who said it, but some of the government people said, "These are hard times for you. We know that. But considering the hard times, your best possible duty to our country is to be peaceful, as much as possible, and then comply with the government's wish." We were told that if we went against the government's wish then that would mean that they would have to send over soldiers and everything to quell us which would hamper the war effort. So the cooperation with the war effort on our part would be to comply with the government orders.

At this stage of the game, because the country up in arms against us, and if we tried to buck it, then we could just compound the trouble locally and get ourselves killed or families harmed and get nowheres. Because the civilian population is against you, as well as the military, the police department was helpless. They wouldn't protect you for anything. And that's where one of the weaknesses was. You ask for the sheriff or police department, but they could not help you. So we were on our own. And yet, we were not supposed to have any guns or anything, right? Well, we just either complied or else take a chance of getting killed. Not many Niseis were married then, but those of us who were and had children saw no point in just getting shot and killed, because we felt that ultimately the United States would calm down and return to the principle of liberty and justice. The ideals with which we were brought up on.

So, in retrospect, we put our complete trust in the constitution and the freedom of this country. We had complete trust. But we failed to note that things could go haywire. But our ultimate hope was that when everything's washed out in the end, the people and the government would finally understand. So we had to hope for that day. And this is when we threw our lot in, for that ultimate hope in the future, that somehow the American government will understand our position. And, who knows, there may have been spies and so forth. We could vouch for Central California people, the Fresno people. But from other places? How can we say which Japanese is which? We can't vouch for the entire population. Nobody can. So that's what the American government was afraid of. They didn't know the Japanese people, because we were in colonies, communities, tight communities which Americans did not know, didn't understand about. That's one of the bad things about a so-called ghetto community. It's that they don't know what's going on in there. So that's the kind of situation that we had during the evacuation. No one gladly complied, mind you. Fundamentally, everybody was mad. Angry at the government for having done that to us, the citizens. But it had to be that we took it and did the best we could in the ultimate hope that by your action and your behavior the American people will recognize these people were loyal and all right; that the public was mistaken, and the government was mistaken. This would be our best hope. We gambled on that.

And you have to remember, the average age of Nisei was 17, then, not 20 something. Fellows like myself were advanced aged Nisei. We had to do all the thinking.

MRS. HASEGAWA: There weren't very many of you.

DR. TAIRA: No. Nisei movement was in infancy. Most of them were high school kids or younger. So Nisei leaders of the community were only few. That goes for Fresno, Stockton, anyplace. The Niseis were not of age, and the Isseis were enemy aliens, right? What a fix, you know. And the spread in ages between the Issei and Nisei was wide. There were no older Niseis or younger Isseis. Nothing like that, only old people or too young. That's all we had. So the best thing that JACL could do, and I agreed at that time, was that we comply with the government and in so doing try to get two things. One was for ourselves. We thought that we might get a better deal if we said yes, we'll comply and cooperate with the government, do everything we can to cooperate and make things easier for the evacuation. And if we did, that they might say, "Well, if that's the case, why, we ought to give these people a little break. If they ask for something, give it to them."

In dealing with the government, it's give and take. If you try to make it tough on the government at every turn, they, in turn, could get tough with you, too. So, we figured that the best course for the Nisei would be to comply with the government's wish. Cooperate to the best of our ability in spite of our deep-seated dissatisfaction, which even the government would understand. Anybody should understand that. Nobody was happy about it. But, under the circumstances, we cooperated. In return, they tried to do the best they could for us, too. And I think the government tried to do that. They found out that we were cooperating.

The evacuation was in two phases. First was the Assembly Center. I guess you heard about that by now. Here, in Fresno, it was the fairgrounds. I was in the advanced crew to get in that Center. We got in there first; next week other people began to come. So my wife and my kids, my immediate family went in there first. Golly, it was a shack that was built up in a hurry. The carpenters were guys who had been hanging around pool halls that they rounded up, given them a hammer, and presto, a carpenter. That's the kind of people that built it. They didn't even know board from lumber from nail. But they were getting time and a half payment, and in those days a tremendous amount of money, for rapidly building this place. They made all kinds of noise and put up this barrack, shack. I never could forget, the first thing we did when we got into our section of the barrack was to cut off the alfalfa crop that was sticking out from the floors between the boards. Then we had to go way down to the other end of Butler Avenue by the haystack to fill the sack full of hay. That was our mattress. We had to put the hay in a sack and bring it back and sleep on that. It wasn't too pleasant.

And what was one of the really bad things was that everything that was not to the liking of the administration was considered contraband. They used the word contraband. And we came to the point where using an electric fan was a contraband. It was 105' out there in the barrack, and we couldn't use electric fans because it was a contraband, which was a lot of hooey. What it was, was that the wiring was too small and it wouldn't carry the fans. You'd blow the fuse out. That's why they didn't want it. But they called it contraband. I thought that was pretty bad.

Such things we had to go through, and a lot of other incidents in the camp. When you talk about the Assembly Center life and what's happened there, everybody can tell you all kinds of stories. Of course, we had ours, too. We had an outbreak of food poisoning.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Kept you busy!

DR. TAIRA: It was awful. Whole block. Block is so many hundred people. Two, three hundred people in one block section. Whole block got sick because of the stuff that they served. And it wasn't the administration's fault. It was the inexperienced cook, preparing, then leaving food out in a hundred something temperature, because of inadequate refrigeration. Macaroni salad or something, that's deadly stuff in the summer. Well, anyway, people ate that and got sicker than heck. Thought some were going to die.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You didn't have any deaths?

DR. TAIRA: Fortunately. We didn't have any hospital either, although there was a building called a hospital.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is that where you worked?

DR. TAIRA: I sat there and looked at the people coming in. We had no medicine. And then I got after the Social Welfare Chairman who was in charge of the hospital supply. I said, "Now, look, what's happening. Here we need the stuff which I ordered so many weeks ago, and you never got me a thing and here these people are all getting sick. What are you going to do?" He said, "Gee, Doctor, I'll get you anything you want right now." I told him, "I said weeks ago what I wanted. Nothing came." I didn't realize that the Army had an Army's way of doing things.

Even before we got the first supply to open the clinic, they wanted me to put in an order for what we needed six months ahead. I said, "I don't care about six months, I want it today." He replied, "Well, we can't do it that way. That's the Army way." So what do we have in our so-called pharmacy stock? Mitch, our pharmacist, had a bottle of alcohol and castor oil. Three to four things like that. That's all we had. We had rubbing alcohol. I said, "A hell of a lot of good that'll do." Anyway, and then this fellow said, "Get you anything in town on an emergency basis." So I said I wanted an I.V set-up, you know, I gave some injections to some people who are vomiting terribly. Everybody was vomiting and had diarrhea. Just sick. And they were falling down here and there, and so they were brought to the hospital by the stretcher boys. And I sat there –

MRS. HASEGAWA: Nothing to cure them with?

DR. TAIRA: No. They laid them down in front of me, and I look at the people and I felt their pulse and said, "Oh, take them back to the barrack." A few of them that were terribly sick, they were pale and couldn't move and all that. I said, "Leave them for a while." And so the welfare head went off to town to get me a few I.V. supplies. I started the I.V, that helped the patients greatly.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What do you do when they get food poisoning?

DR. TAIRA: Nothing. Nothing much. After a few hours they usually get

rid of the thing. If you can hold out that few hours, you're all right. They will get over it. It's that you ate something bad. That's what it is. You have vomiting and diarrhea. You're pretty sick for a while there. But if they had a weak heart or something, they're liable to go into heart failure and die.

Those were some of the hospital experiences we had. And, finally, it got to the point where we had deliveries in the Assembly Center there. Although there was the County Hospital across the street and any serious cases we could send to there, the people didn't want to go there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Why? Because it was a County Hospital? Or because they were afraid?

DR. TAIRA: No, because of fear and uncertainties. The patients didn't know what they were going to do to them. Remember, now, we were supposed to be dangerous enemies. I don't blame them for feeling that way, and they'd rather be amongst familiar surroundings, although it was very primitive. So we had to be quite ingenious in those days. We had to design an OB table, stirrups, and all. And we tried to train girls to become nurses aides. Fortunately, we had a few nurses, RN's. So they became the nucleus. They could go right to work. And we had only two doctors in camp. Dr. Hashiba and myself. That was all for this Fresno camp.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many people were there in the Fresno camp?

DR. TAIRA: Oh, I don't know. Couple, three thousand, I guess.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Oh, that many!

DR. TAIRA: Oh, yes. And they had one doctor in the Pinedale Assembly Center. Dr. Okonogi went over there. He was the doctor there and they were in hell. Those people, some of the big group there came from Bremerton, Washington was born and raised in Washington where there is cold wet weather and snow in the winter and all that sort of thing. Here in the summertime in Fresno with no fan; 103°, 105° in the barrack. They couldn't eat or anything. They just panted in the doorway and that was about all they could do. That's what Dr. Hashiba told me later. I didn't know then. Well, those were physical things. But it was pretty tough, but we somehow managed.

Then they told us later that that was supposed to be a temporary holding place. That's why they called them assembly center. Instead of leaving us in our homes, they grouped people at assembly centers, and then from there, planned to ship us to a so-called permanent relocation center. So, technically, it was supposed to be a temporary holding area for one month or month and a half at most. But camp building was delayed--camp building of relocation centers were delayed-- so one month became two, two months became three, and so forth. We went in around April, May. We had no dental facility. Somebody started up their own barbershop. And the dentist Dr.Yatabe couldn't do anything. He had no instruments, no nothing, not even a dental chair. So he improvised a dental chair. After about four months, I think he got a few instruments to do something. I don't know. Well, anyway, that's the way things were. Then, by that time, some medical supplies came in, and we could treat some cases in the so-called hospital. It was quite an experience. Before we went into Assembly Center, I heard that they were going to give typhoid series. If

we were going to get typhoid shots in camp, I could think of nothing worse than to go to a strange place and get a typhoid shot and get fever and have to be laid out for a day or two. And knowing where the assembly center was going to be, I thought that would be a hell of a place to get your shots. I thought that in the Fresno area we should get our shots before, when you're at home. Then if you have to lay out at home, fine. Then you could put on your fan or drink ice water, whatever. So with that in mind we started up. Well I kind of instigated the movement to get typhoid shots given prior to evacuation. So I got a permit from the health department and everything else such as permit from the travel office. Japanese could only travel five miles. Anything further than that you had to have a special permit to travel. So we went as far as Hanford to tell everybody that it was best to get their typhoid shots while they were at home rather than in camp where you didn't know what it was going to be like. And I'm sure glad we did it with the conditions the way it turned out.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Could have had an epidemic, huh?

DR. TAIRA: Or anything. So most of the people had their shots outside, and so when we went to camp they were okay. So that's one of the nicer things we thought of, and it worked out all right.

So the relocation began and everyone went to different places. Some groups from Fresno went to Arizona. Most of us went to Jerome Relocation Center in Arkansas. And, up to then, in my life, excepting for Hawaii, I'd never been out of the state. In fact, I'd never been to Sacramento in all my life until that time. My whole lifetime travel was from Fresno to Stockton to San Francisco to Los Angeles. I've never been anywhere south of Los Angeles. In 1930 I went to Hawaii for two weeks. That was almost like going to a foreign country. So it was postwar when I went to Sacramento for the first time or to San Diego, for that matter. So you can see our life was centered around Central California. Then to have to go through 13 states to get to Arkansas, that was really something.

MRS. HASEGAWA: That was traveling.

DR. TAIRA: Oh, sure. In the Arkansas camp, the situation was much better. The facilities were more on a semi-permanent basis. At least it had nice flooring and glass windows and that type of thing, according to the government specification for barracks. And it had a common mess hall.

One of those barracks was wide open inside, and it was called recreation hall. So it was mandatory to have one in each of those blocks. A block had so many barracks, and there was a mess hall, kitchen area, and one area was the bath, shower, laundry area. And then one building was a recreation hall. The rest were all barracks and which were all exactly the same dimension.

The biggest rooms were placed on both ends and then a narrow room and two medium rooms were between. So two, four, six, then. And they were all the same dimension, all the way. I got the big area because I had a big family. My wife, myself, and three kids. So, naturally, that calls for a place for five. That was the way they were assigned. And a couple by themselves would only have the next one which was narrower, a smaller place for two. And the next one there would be three or something like that.

Every room had its steps, and entry. You see one barrack you see it all! The whole camp was that way. Except the hospital. The hospital was built to Army specifications, an Army type of hospital. There was an administration hall and the ward, and you walked down the corridor and you got to another hall. So that's how that was. So relocation set-up was much better. Each camp held 10,000 people. And 10 relocation centers, 100,000. The Japanese population of the United States was about like that; 100,000 total. So we spent three or three and a half years there.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many doctors were there at Jerome?

DR. TAIRA: Jerome had quite a few. Because many of the Los Angeles doctors came there, the Santa Anita Assembly Center. Some of the old-time Los Angeles doctors. Dr. Kuroiwa and others. He was a nice doctor.

MRS. HASEGAWA: For 10,000 people there, would you say, there were 10 doctors?

DR. TAIRA: Yes. I would say something like that. They probably had a complement like that set up. That's what it's called in Army language, table of organization. For one something you have got to have two something or other and you have to have three something or other and four bed and six something. You know, they had that standard. So when you set up something, for so many people, then all that is automatic.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I wonder if there were enough doctors to go around for all the camps?

DR. TAIRA: No. A lot of camps lacked doctors. For instance, I know the Rohwer camp in Arkansas, towards the end, didn't have enough doctors. Well, they had one doctor or two, something like that. But they didn't have so-called Japanese doctors. They wanted one pretty badly, so they sent a delegation over to ask us if one of us would go there. I said, "Sure," because my camp in Jerome was breaking up. They were going to close that camp down. And then people were going to go to whatever camp they wanted to go.

One bunch was sent to Tule Camp. Later, Tule became a Japanese nationalistic group. So they closed one camp down to redistribute. A closing-down process. Jerome was one of the first to close down. So they gave us a choice of going to anyplace we wanted. I spent my days there in Rohwer until the camp neared closing date. I left because of V-E Day.

Well, anyway, war ended in Europe and so I left the camp early to come back to Fresno so my kids could go to school. School started in September, so I had to make that deadline. And just about that time the camps closed down and everybody started to get out.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How did you come home?

DR. TAIRA: Bought an old Buick. And chug-chugged away across. Went to Chicago and then came back to Fresno. Barely made it. We came in at night. Next morning was registration for school. It took four to five days more than we had calculated because of the speed limit.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Oh, I see. What was the speed limit?

DR. TAIRA: Because of tires. Tires set your speed limit. Legally you could go up to 45. But, technically, you could go 35 only, because tires were made of synthetic rubber, and if you go at 40 you heat them up and blow them out, especially in the Nevada desert, in Colorado, Utah, in that area. I don't know how many tires I blew out. I'd speed up a little bit, BAM! So I learned my lesson. Had to go slow. Boy! I don't think anybody traveled that slow through Nevada desert. Thirty-five miles per hour.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was this in the summertime?

DR. TAIRA: Yes. Well, no, not exactly.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Well, before school. September.

DR. TAIRA: September, yes. Early September, and it was pretty hot. That was quite a journey!

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you came back to Fresno, were there lots of Japanese here already?

DR. TAIRA: Only few. There were a few already. Let's see. Who were they? Well, my church place was opened as a hostel. Hostel means like a boardinghouse, a temporary boardinghouse. If there's an opening you could stay there until you found your own place. So you hit there first and then they—well in my particular case we were fortunate. In my place, my old homestead, some people were staying for me. And one was Italian people, and they watched the place for me. And when I wrote them to say I'm coming back, "Sure," they said, "what day are you coming back. We'll get out of here." So they did. And so soon as I came back I was ready to move into my place, which was fortunate. Lots of people moved into the Buddhist Church hostel, then they had to look around for a place to stay and to start up a business or live or what ever. Housing was tough to find then, because of wartime restrictions.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What were your experiences upon returning to Fresno right after the war?

DR. TAIRA: Well, I was fortunate in that I had a home to move into. Many of the people didn't have anyplace to come back to except the hostel at the church.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Was that the old dormitory?

DR. TAIRA: Yes. The dormitory was converted to a hostel, very makeshift, of course. People stayed there until they could find a place of their own. At that time there was a shortage of housing because of the war.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What happened to the Buddhist dormitory?

DR. TAIRA: It was there after the war for about 10 or 15 years. Then we built the present annex, and in order to build it we had to move that building out.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many people lived in the dorm after the war?

DR. TAIRA: I couldn't say for sure, but quite a number; probably 20 to 25 families. The one who would know best is Reverend Fujinaga . He's in San Mateo now. He would remember, because he operated the church and took care of the hostel--a one-minister operation, you can call it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It must have been a busy time.

DR. TAIRA: It was a busy time, all right. Everyone was looking for a place. Some of the Nihonjin were very nice. If they had a ranch or home, they invited others to share it until they got a chance for a permanent abode. Everybody helped that way.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of discrimination did you encounter?

DR. TAIRA: None for me, but I don't think mine was a typical case, since I had my own home and everything. I was lucky for my office, too, as a friend who used that for a residence while we were gone. He was a rare person. At the time of evacuation he said, "Is there anything I can do for you?" I replied, "There is one thing, but it is asking too much. I would like to have someone stay at my place, but I have no money to pay." He said, "Forget it, I'll stay." During the course of the war he died, but his wife stayed on. So in my personal circumstances I was fortunate. Nobody shot at us or anything. I heard that it happened to one who came back earlier than us.

MRS. HASEGAWA: About how old were your children when you came back?

DR. TAIRA: Well, they were in school, the oldest and second one. The top one was about 12 years old, I think. They were fortunate because they were in Lincoln School, and it was an ethnic school. To my knowledge, they had no trouble.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It has been 42 years since you began your practice, including the years at camp. What are some of the changes you've seen in your practice and in the medical field?

DR. TAIRA: Well, when I started out again after the war, naturally, I had mostly Japanese people because they didn't have any regular doctor and since they knew me they felt more secure. Then, as the years went by, they began to latch onto their local doctors. It became inconvenient to come from the country to town when they had a doctor close by. When people got wind that I was back after the war, old patients came back and brought some new ones, so we started to move.

Most of the old-timers welcomed me back, and that made you feel good. I'm talking about merchants and others on the West Side. So my personal experience was very good. I had not encountered any prejudice coming all the way from Chicago-- even in the restaurants. Nobody glared at you or anything-- maybe they thought we were Chinese.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Maybe you didn't look Japanese, because you are so tall.

DR. TAIRA: If they are really curious, they'll ask you if you are Chinese or Japanese. During the wartime, they were probably used to seeing only Chinese, so any Oriental is Chinese to them.

As far as the hospital was concerned, I had no trouble at all. They just welcomed me back into the staff.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Which hospital were you affiliated with?

DR. TAIRA: At that time, two; St. Agnes and Community. I was also on the staff of what is now known as Valley Medical.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Are you still affiliated with these three hospitals?

DR. TAIRA: Well, I dropped some of them, like Fresno County General. I went there as sort of a help to visiting staff, not to take care of my patients there. In those days that hospital was for charity cases or emergencies. If they could pay, they were moved to another hospital. Nowadays, if you are able to pay, they charge you.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Your patients now go to Community Hospital?

DR. TAIRA: Yes, most of them. St. Agnes is way out of the way. It became hard to go to two or three hospitals; a time factor. Today, many doctors send their patients to one or the other, rarely both. Mine go to Community because it's close. Being on the west side, I have a lot of economically depressed people, and they're on Medi-Cal Programs. Not many Nihonjin are in that group; mostly blacks, Mexicans.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I understand that you belong to the West Fresno Rotary Club. Why did you choose to become a Rotarian?

DR. TAIRA: Let me set you straight! In Rotary you don't say you want to join. They invite you! Rotary Club system is different from most clubs. Someone nominates you, then the committee investigates you without your knowing it, and if you are acceptable, they offer you membership. Simple reason is that one of the requirements is that you have to be in an executive position, either in your own business, or in a managerial or executive position. They have classification of jobs and there has to be an opening in that particular classification before they fill it. You can't have two of the same thing.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is there only one doctor in your group?

DR. TAIRA: No, they divide doctors into internists, and so forth. You can't have two surgeons, but you can have an orthopedic surgeon and a plastic surgeon. This is one way to modify it. So, they are very selective.

Well, now, how I got into Rotary. There's a little bit of history in that. They had this club called West Side Merchants Club. They met every week just like a service club. About that time somebody suggested they should join a national group of some type, and the Exchange Club came over and said "Why don't you become part of our organization?" So, apparently, they applied. What happened was they sent their roster to national headquarters and lo and behold, they sent back a letter saying, "If you drop this fellow and that fellow, we will accept your club." Those two happened to be Nisei. It was straight discrimination. Well, the other fellows all got mad and the consensus was "If you can't take them, the heck with you!" So they voted it down.

Well, other clubs heard about that incident and other service clubs all

come to woo us. The fellows listened to each presentation and finally thought that Rotary sounded the best. What they had to offer was most impressive, so a vote was taken and they became the Rotary Club.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did they join the existing club in Fresno?

DR. TAIRA: No, they formed a new one, as there was a need for other club in different areas. So ours became the West Fresno Rotary Club. A few of the charter members were Nisei. We have had a lot of Nisei as past presidents, and I'm just one of them.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of service do Rotarians do? What are the objectives of the club?

DR. TAIRA: The main function or goal of the Rotary is expressed in the motto, "Service above self," so it's a service club; service to others. You maintain the highest possible ethical and moral standards in conducting your business. International understanding is another big field, then community service, vocational service, and club service itself.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What was your focus when you were club president?

DR. TAIRA: I think the major focus was on international relationship. We worked on establishing a sister city club program with Uji, Japan near Kyoto. We have a close relationship with Uji. They visited us, and we visited them. A couple of years ago we went over and they gave us the "double red carpet" treatment.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you have international relations with any other country?

DR. TAIRA: No. Fresno City has lots of sister cities, and that's technically against the principle. Sister city idea is supposed to be like a marriage. If you can think of it that way, then you don't think of having too many sister cities.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many members are in your West Fresno Rotary Club?

DR. TAIRA: Statistically, over 70 to 80 percent of Rotary Clubs in the world have memberships of less than 50. Ours is like that, just about 50.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many Japanese are in your group?

DR. TAIRA: About seven members of Japanese descent. I don't think any club around town has as many ethnic groups as we. We call ourselves the most cosmopolitan club.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You mentioned earlier that you were very involved with the Boy Scouts. Please tell us about that.

DR. TAIRA: I am a little bit withdrawn from it now, except for the Buddhist religious awards program of the Boy Scouts of America. I was involved in that from its inception, in the 50's. One of the 12 Scout Laws says, "A scout is reverent." That means we need to respect other people's religions. The B.S.A. believes that in order to make a whole man, the boys should have a religious background that would make them a

better man all the way around. Now, as a legal organization, the B.S.A. cannot dictate to religious organizations what to do. But they could incorporate religious training and award them their own church designated medal or a recognition of some kind. To make it uniform, they decided to give medals, the rank being equal to the Eagle Scout Badge, which is the top achievement in Scouting. This medal is to show that a boy is Protestant or Jewish, et cetera, and he cannot receive it by just attending church, but by fulfilling the requirements that are on his own religion. The boy has to do a lot of research and studying to earn the medal. Each religion has a special name for their award; the Protestant award is called "God and Country." The award cannot be so easy as to be too simple. Since had many Boy Scouts of Buddhist faith, we thought we should have an award for the Buddhists, so we got to working on that. We drew up a set of requirements, and the B.S.A. had a very understanding Protestant minister who was the director of the religious awards program. He met with us at an official meeting in LA, and we selected a name for the award. One of the names suggested was Sangha Award, which means Buddhist brotherhood. Since the name Sangha is a strong two-syllable word, nothing "sissy" about it, he said, "I go strong for that name." Sangha, officially in the Buddhist term, is supposed to be one of the tree treasures of Buddhist teachings. Buddha is first, the Buddhist teaching, or Dharma, is second, and then the Sangha Buddhist Monks Order, the teachers, was third. Sangha was the Buddhist ministers group, but down through the years in the United States we interpret Sangha as Buddhist Brotherhood, meaning the whole community of Buddhists. In the official narrow sense, Sangha meant just the Monks, 2500 years ago. So that became the name of our award. We went ahead and designed our medal, and I think it's a very pretty and a colorful one. So, we have a lot of requirements that the kids have to fulfill. When they first look at it, they fall over in shock! They say, "Heck, I'll never be able to do a thing like that in my life!"

MRS. HASEGAWA: What are some of the requirements?

DR. TAIRA: Well, we divided them into three sections. Part one is simple, like the life of Buddha and some of the events that took place in his life. Then the second one is about his teachings; cause and effect, characteristics of our life, the 10 evils, nature of self, et cetera, how it's taught in our religion. And then part three is Sangha. That has to do with community service and to the church; so many hours a week. You also have to set up your own altar shrine at your house, and conduct a service with your family. For a boy that's plenty hard. A lot of adults even don't know all of that.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do they have to learn how to say the Okyo (sutra), or whatever?

DR. TAIRA: No, that's too difficult, but we have simple things that they have learned in Sunday School. The Sangha Award, since its inception, has been quite successful, and I feel grateful that had a part in its formation stage.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What about the Silver Beaver Award that you received?

DR. TAIRA: That was an award for many years of Boy Scout work, and no doubt the Sangha Award that I helped on was one of the factors.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Isn't that one of the highest awards given?

DR. TAIRA: Yes, for the layperson, the adult leader. It is given for leadership capacity and service to the B.S.A.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Now, could you tell us about your religious activities, your background. Have you been active since you were a young man?

DR. TAIRA: That is true in the sense of my outside activities. A large percentage of it was church activity. We became YBA members, that's Young Buddhist youth group. And I went to Sunday School and kept that up. When I went to college, I was with this Berkeley YBA. Then in San Francisco, I became a member of the S.F. YBA and served as its president. Around that time we formed the Bay District Young Buddhist League, and I served as chairman. During this time I was also involved in our Young Buddhist League work where I had served as secretary, vice-president, and president--for three terms, I believe.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What does that league cover?

DR. TAIRA: Well, we had this big name, North American League of Young Mens Buddhist Association. It encompassed everything from Vancouver, Washington, Oregon, and California--even a smattering of the east, like Denver, but mostly West Coast. It was the biggest Buddhist league in the US. We had a Pan-Pacific Conference of Young Buddhist Association in Honolulu in 1930, and we had 10 delegates representing our league. We met for the first time with the people of Japan and Hawaii. That was the first time I had ever gone out of California for one of the international conferences.

When I finished medical school, I dropped out of Buddhist activity for a while. Of course, I was a member of the church, but practice days were pretty hard, and to get going was really rough in those days. The Buddhist thing in the post-World War II was different. You know, how your Christian Church set up, the church is backed up by a conference that you can fall back on. In Buddhist circle, we have nothing like that, we're on our own. Many of the trustees, or whatever you want to call them, were Isseis. They built the temples, you know, as the Nisei were too young--remember their average age was 17,20--prewar, so they were not contributing members of the community as yet. During the war, there was a meeting of young Nisei Buddhists like myself who were somewhat adultish. I'm one of the older Niseis around. So we met and formulated a corporation called the Buddhist Churches of America, the name which is now used. It's a formal corporation, incorporated with the Nisei as board of directors. So we now have an American corporation, legal and nonprofit, of course. In San Francisco, they had these national conferences. Now our young fellows go because there is no in-between, it's either older Issei or young Nisei.

We got guidance from the older Issei people, they were there, too, but they had no legal ground. We respected their opinion, however. All of the meetings were held in Japanese, and many of the Nisei couldn't understand it, so they were quite lost. This was the national organization, and we had a kibei who made a good president. So we kept him for a long time, about 11 years. Then we started taking turns. I was probably the third or fourth president. We had a lot of projects going, and I had to go to San Francisco all the time, so I had to use my weekends for that. Then I became involved internnationally, too.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It seems to me that the people in the United States who are Buddhist are much more devout than the people in Japan.

DR. TAIRA: Well, let's put it this way. Of all who claim to be Buddhist, there would be a tremendous number of people, but only so many of those are really devout. I think, perhaps, we are little bit more interested in our church than the so-called fringe Buddhists in Japan. In Japan there's 100 million, but how many of them are temple supporters? I think that particular phenomenon exists because practically the whole country of Japan is Buddhist. So nobody gets excited about it. Here people pay more attention to the church.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Would you say that the majority of the Japanese people on the West Coast are Buddhist?

DR. TAIRA: When the Issei first came, maybe 99 percent of them were Buddhist. But not any more. Nowdays, Nisei are Methodist, Baptist, Congregationalist, et cetera, because they went away to other places after the war. Some of it is due to intermarriage. They take on the faith of the husband or wife. Some of them become Buddhist, too, but the predominate climate in the United States is naturally Christian.

MRS. HASEGAWA: As a loyal and dedicated Buddhist, what do you think is the attraction and the ability for the church to keep their young people?

DR. TAIRA: I don't know that we have the ability. Certainly, public relations-wise, we have much to be desired, no drum beating, you know. We're not too good at that, as far as I'm concerned; that's my personal opinion. I also feel that if people delve into the Buddhist teaching, once they do that, they will find a lot to be gained, I'm sure. If they make a study of the religion, they will begin to understand it better and derive inspiration from it. Most of us are born into a family of Christians or Buddhists, or whatever, and remain in that faith because we don't make any particular study of other religions.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you have very many Caucasians in the Buddhist Church?

DR. TAIRA: Not too many, unfortunately. That's one of the things about the Buddhist temple; we have no new special movement toward getting new membership that I could see. We just get involved in teaching our own children and our children's children.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It seems to me that there has been a special interest in Buddhist and other Oriental religions lately.

DR. TAIRA: That's true, but our temple is not Zen. If we were, that would be another story, I'm sure. Zen is wonderful, but I think our religion is wonderful, too, and the approach is entirely different. Our approach is somewhat similar to the Protestant approach, Martin Luther type of thing. Many who are brought up in the Christian tradition are looking for something new, so they're attracted to the Zen tradition because it's different. For the intellectual type of person, their philosophy is very attractive. One of the most instrumental was Dr. Daisetsu Suzuki, a lay Buddhist, who became a world authority. He stayed at my mother's place for a while, so I got to know him well. He

used to explain to me--Zen--not to make me Zen, but the fundamentals of Buddhist philosophy. He was lecturing at Columbia University to graduate students, and taught a course there. He was quite an inspiration. I'm sure anyone who had heard him and really thought about it would become intellectually drawn to Zen. Just thinking about it is a challenge.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What social and economic changes have you seen in the local community?

DR. TAIRA: Number one, the picture of the old time close-knit, tight Japanese community is not present in Fresno except in small segments. We're a fragmented group now. Business-wise, we cater to Japanese groups, of course. That's why our office is still on the West Side. But that is economics, not social. Personally, I don't know one-half of the present Japanese people. Formerly, they used to come into the Japanese community, and by next day everyone knew there was somebody new in town. It was that small and that knit. That's the sociological change.

Many of the Issei have passed on, and before they passed on, of course, there were mixed marriages. A mixed marriage does not usually stay in the Japanese community, and sometimes does not even communicate with it. My wife happens to be a Nisei. She has ideas that are not necessarily Japanese. She's just an American who happens to have a Japanese face and name, and in that sense she's not too close to the so- called Japanese women, you see?

The Nisei, the Sansei; they live in a different strata of society. Their friends are different. They are not going to seek each other out. The new immigrants from Japan are still Japanese. They are brought up in Japanese tradition, and they maintain a circle of their own, which is natural. If you say Japanese-speaking, that would be another group.

MRS. HASEGAWA: The Issei who have come after the war and the businessmen?

DR. TAIRA: The new Issei and the businessmen. The business circle here is quite small in population. In Los Angeles, it's big. Especially around Gardena there's thousands of Japanese, so they form a sizable element. But in Fresno, there is just a few. Economic-wise, naturally, we have made tremendous economic strides. The Issei, themselves, did it. After the war, Isseis decided to stay here permanently and not go back to Japan any more. Then they built new homes and decided to make this place their resting place.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you observe Japanese traditions in your home at the present time?

DR. TAIRA: In our household, we have some Japanese traditions--I think like in every other household. I think the food tradition is a little stronger. Don't you think so?

MRS. HASEGAWA: Yes, I think so.

DR. TAIRA: Yes, I remember when my grandchildren, and my kid, too, when he was little, like "koko" pickle. They don't know how it's made or anything, but they like the taste.

I like the shoyu taste, because when I was interning and residenting in the hospital it got to the point where I had to have some Japanese type cooking. So I had to go home to eat. I think our kids are that way. I don't think there's anybody in our family that likes to eat straight so-called toast and roast, pork and carrot all the time. So, when I look around and it seems they're all this way. Of course, there are exceptions. All the second, third generation, especially, like some Japanese food. They may not even know the name of dishes, but they like it. They acquire a taste for it. And as far as taste is concerned, the Caucasian-Americans, once they acquire a taste for shoyu, like it, too. It's infectious, and they like it.

A good friend of mine, a doctor friend, I told him about the preparation of teriyaki chicken. He started with chicken teriyaki, but those people experimented and he told me lamb chops tasted elegant as teriyaki. He said only food but Japanese culture will keep on going, even though there may not be a Japanese present.

Caucasian men, originally, get it from San Francisco or Tokyo or someplace, and then she or he would go and teach something about Japanese culture and that will keep on going. Originally Japanese culture, but Japanese will not do the teaching. I think that's good and the way that it should be. That's my feeling about it.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is there any other information about the local Japanese-Americans that you would like to discuss or talk about or anything else that you might think about.

DR. TAIRA: Offhand I can't think of anything right now. Nope. I think, of course, my idealism and all that is that a thing like this war business will never happen again. Any kind of war, but especially a Japanese-American war. That was terrible. I don't want anybody to go through that kind of experience, especially evacuation. From the standpoint of American principles, it wasn't good. Secondly, it really shook us down to the boots. Our idea of the United States, we were brought up on the rights of the individual and protection under the law, and that sort of thing, it's idealism. But it really shook us. We know now that it's only how people believe, it's now what's said on the paper. That's what counts, what is said on the paper doesn't mean a thing.

Remember, we were 17 and 20-year old kids. We would always pledge allegiance and everything, so now you could under- stand how some of the blacks feel. They say, well the pledge of allegiance is for the white folk. Liberty and justice for all the white people. Well, to an extreme degree they might really interpret it that way, because we felt somewhat in a similar predicament. It's for other people who aren't Japanese that was justice and liberty for all, but not for us. We hope that kind of trouble never arises and one of the best ways to prevent it is to know each other's country real well, both good points and bad points. And if Japan thinks the United States has all good points, then they are going to be terribly misled. Same thing with the Americans. Unless they know the Japanese, they are going to make a lot of mistakes and then be bitter about it. So knowing it real well is the first protection. If you know how a guy reacts beforehand, you know that that's his way. Then things won't hurt you as much. But if you expect otherwise, it will hurt. So that's what I feel in the way of Japanese-American relation.

Now, locally, I think, as far as the ethnic group is concerned, the Nisei certainly made a tremendous effort and contribution and the qualities of the Issei, as Hosokawa said, I agree with everything he said about that; about the patience and forebearance and the perseverance and taking it all, in spite of the tremendous odds. That's something you can't take away from them. They did it. In spite of everything else, they did it. I think the Nisei have seen it, of course. Sanseis have heard of it, and I hope that they'll take heed from it and will learn little bit of that quality. Now learning it just intellectually and living it is two different things. And I don't know whether we could really live it out. But I've noticed that some Niseis, their ideals are still alive, and they talk about it. It's kind of a rarity, but I hear it every once in a while. And even though in those who don't understand Japanese much, they have been around enough to have it rub off. So they realize that the Japanese and some of the Nisei are actually a little bit different from the typical general public who don't care about the other guy.

I said to somebody else the other day, as long as we look different, we're going to be identified as a Japanese whether it's native born or Japan born or whatever; others can't tell the difference. They identify you as Japanese first and after they get talking to you and listen, finding out where you're born and what school you went to, then they begin to realize that you're an American. You can't help it. The first thing they look at you, they don't ask if you are American, they ask if you're Japanese, right?

MRS. HASEGAWA: That's right.

DR. TAIRA: So the ethnicity is shouting in our face, in our body. It's only when you get acquainted and others talk to you that they find out you are different, so that the face is forgotten, as Bill Hosokawa said. That really struck me when he said the senator and his assistant came over to see the editorial staff and he saw a Japanese-American sitting there and didn't question you or ask how come. They just talk to him right off like he is the chief of the editorial page. In that case they erase the idea of his looks. They know he's the editor. That means he speaks English. He has to. It's natural.

But in our case, when a person sees us in the street or anyplace else, first thing is they don't know whether we came from Japan or Fresno or New York or where. And fundamental assumption is that we came from Japan, because we look Japanese. So that brings us up to my point in inter-relationship. Every Nisei and Sansei has to, shall we say, feel for the other Nisei and Sansei knowing that their act is going to reflect on the rest of the crowd. And I don't care whether you say I'm so independent, I am not with the Japanese, but the first time some Non-Japanese looks at hime he's going to say, "Are you a Japanese?" You can't get away from that. And as long as you can't get away from that, then your image has to be such so that all of us would be more acceptable in society, and that we'd be known as decent citizens, to say the least.

I don't mean all goody-goody, but I mean as a bunch. If you are Japanese they say, "They're a pretty good bunch of guys." I like to see that. One of the outstanding examples I had of how much that kind of thing meant was when I met a stranger at an airport--I don't know

exactly where it was. Now, what he said struck me more than where I met him. And he asked me right off the bat, are you a Japanese? And I said, well, yes, I was born in this country but of Japanese descent. Then he said, "Do you know Kobayashi or Komatsu," or something like that, "in Florida?" "Gosh," I said, "I never heard of the man." Then he said, "You know, he's a remarkable fellow, we all love him," meaning the man was transferring his love to me now.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Because you're Japanese, because he was Japanese and a lovable person?

DR. TAIRA: And then he said, "He has done tremendous things for our city. He did this" --I don't know what it was, something about park-- "and he took great care of the garden and he made it beautiful so that people love it, and he's not boastful or anything like that. And he really put in the effort and the whole city appreciated it." So this stranger was transferring that admiration and that respect he had for this man to me. I'm one of his boys. I thought to myself, "Thank heavens, this day and age is what is meant by interrelationship." If that Japanese had been a crook and this stranger got cheated, a dirty deal, he wouldn't even talk to me. Most likely he'd look at me like this: Here's another one of those guys I'd better watch out for. That would be his natural reaction, and every other guy until some big thing happened and slowly corrected it. Slowly now, not fast. So, inwardly, I said, thank you to this Japanese man of Florida. Of course, he wasn't thinking of West Coast Japanese or anything, but whatever he did there in Florida is reflecting on us and me now. And this stranger, wherever he goes, is going to be the same way until some Japanese guy changes that. Then he's going to learn his lesson.

Now, then, if every Nisei and also Sansei of Japanese descent here in this country admires the Issei for having done what they did, then he should reflect the sense of responsibility by at least trying to be as decent as possible. By not hurting the neighbors and pulling off stunts of any kind. So that he will gain self-respect, for one thing, and that, automatically, will just influence all the rest of us. And this is what I earnestly hope. For that would be my closing wish, if you want to call it that. And I think if we all worked along that line, then it will make our country a better country. For instance, if Senator Dan Inouye was a terrible man, then the chances for the next Nisei would be slim. But, because Dan Inouye is such a reliable man, others had the gate opened for them.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Right.

DR. TAIRA: That is what I'm saying. The same thing happened to the blacks. Identical. I was following closely Jack Robinson when he got into the major league. He was the first black to get into the New York Yankees, I think it was. He played second base or something. First, he was on trial--no black in any major sport. He was the first one. Everything he did reflected on all of them, and he came out with flying colors. Before that they took blacks for granted. After that it was different. See the first person or the first impression a man gives is very important. And one does not purposely have to think "I'm a Japanese." I don't mean that. But if a man is just decent, that's all he has to be. One doesn't have to be anybody famous, but just an ordinary person; but act with esponsibility. So much for Japanese heritage and responsibility. Thank you very much.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Thank you very much, I appreciate this interview.

DR. TAIRA: Yes. I didn't mean to sermonize, but I just want to outline my viewpoint.