

>> Carlene Tinker: Good morning, Mrs. Ikeda.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Good morning.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, welcome to Special Collections Research Center at the Henry Madden Library at Fresno State.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Thank you.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK! [Laughing] Today the date is Friday, March 15th, and the time I think is about 10:05?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: 10:05. And we are in, as I said, Special Collections. First of all, before we start on my interviewing you, I'd like to give you a little background of our project. The project is called Issei to Gosei Interview Project and I know that is a mouthful. And actually we started out listing all the generations of the Japanese Americans but then it got to be even more cumbersome so that's why we compressed it to Issei to Gosei. And for the viewers, I'd like to take a little time to explain what those generations are. The Issei were the first Japanese to come from Japan, probably in the late 1800s, although there are still people who are coming from Japan now who are -- we would technically call them Isseis. But the ones we're talking about are the ones who came over in the late 1800s. OK. Their children are called the Nisei, the second generation of Japanese. And but the first born in the United States. The third generation, the Nisei's children, are the Sanseis. And I believe you and I are both Sansei.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. And we're the third generation but the second born here in the United States. Our children are called yonsei, fourth generation and third generation born here. And then their children -- and there are some now -- gossei, the fifth generation.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: And the fourth ones born here in the United States. So anyway, this project was as a result of some work that I had done as a volunteer. I talked with a director of the department and said, you know, the stories are really valuable. We're losing a lot of people and particularly from the San Joaquin Valley. So what can we do to preserve their stories? And so she suggested we start doing oral histories and then we thought, oh, she already had a collection. But we created this

separate one. And so your interview will become a part of that project and collection.

>> Debbie Ikeda: That's great. I'm familiar. Yoshino Hasagawa I think started that, the oral interviews, and she got a lot of of the Nisei.

>> Carlene Tinker: How long ago was that?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Oh, gosh. It was probably in the 80s, that I'm familiar with.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. And then I think Dr. Izumi Tamaguchi -  
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>> Debbie Ikeda: Tamguchi Continued.

>> Carlene Tinker: Also continued with that -- Dr. Tamaguchi. And I know at the time that I started there were 146 of these, I think, oral interviews. And we've added -- well, last year I added five and so this year I'm hoping to complete ten.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Wow, great.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah. So anyway, let's start. With the interview, I like to have a little bit of background. First of all, what is your full name?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Deborah Jean Imeko Shikami Ikeda.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh! How come you have so many names?

[ Laughter ]

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, Deborah Jean Shikami is my -- well, Deborah Jean Imeko Shikami is my maiden name. And then I got married and so Ikeda is my last name. But I usually go by Deborah Jean Ikeda. My parents had both an American middle name and a Japanese middle name for me.

>> Carlene Tinker: Alright. Yeah. I, on the other hand, have both non-Japanese first and second name, yeah. Where were you born and when were you born?

>> Debbie Ikeda: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1952.

>> Carlene Tinker: 1952, so seven years after the camps closed.

>> Debbie Ikeda: [Whispering] Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. OK. Residence -- when did you start living in Fresno?

>> Debbie Ikeda: In 1981.

>> Carlene Tinker: 1981.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. We'll find out more about that in a little bit. Marital status?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Married to Dale Ikeda who is from Clovis, California.

>> Carlene Tinker: From Clovis, California. And family members? How many children do you guys have?

>> Debbie Ikeda: We have two children, two daughters. One is a pharmacist at Clovis Community Hospital and the other is an attorney for Cal Trans up in Oakland.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh. So one's here and one's in Oakland. OK. And then educational background?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, I got actually an elementary education degree at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana and then I got a masters degree in counseling psych at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. And then I stood at the joint doctoral program here which was between Fresno State and UC-Davis.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yes.

>> Debbie Ikeda: The DPEL program. And I got all the way through the qualifying exams, passed those, and was starting to write my dissertation when I was made president of Clovis Community College and at that point I didn't have time to write a dissertation so I just stopped [laughing].

>> Carlene Tinker: [Laughing] That happens to a lot of people that get to all but the dissertation. Yes.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, do you think now that you're retired -- I believe you are retired --

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Do you think you'll pursue that and finish it?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, I don't need it now.

[ Laughter ]

You know, I had thought about doing it but my program doesn't even exist anymore.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh.

>> Debbie Ikeda: The joint doctoral program between UC Davis and Fresno State stopped once Fresno State got its own doctoral program in educational leadership. So you know, I probably would have to retake some classes. And my mind is not as sharp as it was.

>> Carlene Tinker: [Laughing] Oh, come on.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And you know -- and what would I do with it? I'm retired.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, I actually -- I didn't know that Fresno State -- this is a digression. But I didn't know that Fresno State has a program, a doctoral program?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes. They have a doctoral program in higher educational leadership or educational leadership for both K-12 and higher ed. They actually have one in nursing. They have one in physical therapy.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow!

>> Debbie Ikeda: So they have more -- you know, and they continue to grow those.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, you know, that's wonderful because it's so difficult for us in the valley to go to a place where they have these programs.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well typically UCs were the only ones allowed to give doctorates out. But because of the need for doctorates in those areas I talked about, the CSUs were allowed to do that on a limited basis, just like community colleges on a limited basis are allowed to give out baccalaureate degrees in certain areas that the CSUs and UCs don't allow baccalaureate degrees. For example, there's one in dental hygiene at -- so there's 19 community colleges that offer baccalaureate degrees and the degrees are in dental hygiene, aviation, areas that CSU and UC do not do doctorates in.

>> Carlene Tinker: I see.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Or baccalaureate degrees in.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Well, you know, I've been away from education. I think I've -- for so long -- I think I've almost retired 20 years. And so many changes happened.

>> Debbie Ikeda: So many changes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, the need is really there. And really, there's going to be a tremendous need for baccalaureate trained nurses. At this point, though, the CSUs haven't allowed the community colleges to do that. So there's a little bit back and forth, tugging going on. But I think eventually both the state and national need will eventually outweigh that and community colleges will be allowed to give out baccalaureate degrees in nursing just because the need is so great.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right, right, yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And associate degree trained nurses now are -- it's not enough training. With the amount of change in the health care profession and what they are asking nurses to do, you really need that baccalaureate degree.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Right. Yeah. It's just amazing. And yes, the need is so, so -- it's scary.

>> Debbie Ikeda: It is because I was on the board at St. Agnus recently and we continued to have to hire what we called travelers and those are nurses -- foreign nurses from the Philippines, primarily -- so they're not permanent. They just are interested in temporary work. And we need to hire those just to fill the need.

>> Carlene Tinker: I'll be darned.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Because in California there's a state law where you have to have one nurse to every five patients. So that ratio creates a need for us to have travelers. And they are twice as expensive as hiring our own but we don't have enough.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh. Well, I didn't know that you were doing that -- hiring foreign people and --

>> Debbie Ikeda: All the hospitals are forced to do that. Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Isn't that something. Well anyway, let's get back to the interview. The focus of our interview project is to talk to Japanese Americans who have lived in the valley for, you know, either have moved away or have come here and we want to know what it's been like to be a Japanese American here. And also if you have a history of, you know, your parents, you can tell us about that as well.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Sure.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. So first of all, let's -- I always like to start with grandparents.

>> Debbie Ikeda: OK.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK? Because that kind of gives us a little background and so a perspective. So let's talk about your grandparents on your maternal side.

>> Debbie Ikeda: OK.

>> Carlene Tinker: Do you know very much about them?

>> Debbie Ikeda: I don't. My mother didn't tell me very much about my grandparents on her side. I do know -- I don't even know where they were from in Japan. But I do know they came here and they opened up a small grocery store in Boyle Heights in L.A. And so they had this small grocery store. And Boyle Heights at the time was an immigrant neighborhood. There were Japanese Americans living there, Mexican Americans, so my mother grew up speaking Japanese, English, and Spanish.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh!

>> Debbie Ikeda: So her Spanish was actually pretty good because her friends. A lot of her friends spoke Spanish as their first language. And then she took Spanish in high school so she was really pretty good. And then in the grocery store she would help and a lot of the people buying things there spoke Spanish. So she learned quite a bit. And then she had two brothers and a sister. And they moved eventually to North Hollywood to try to avoid the internment which, of course, they didn't. So she ended up in her senior year they actually moved. And she worked in the office because she was a clerical student. She was studying business secretarial and she knew how to take shorthand. And so she worked in the office there and she got to know all the teachers because she would check them in. So when she and the family were sent to Manzanar before graduation, she wrote a letter to each of her teachers asking if she could finish her high school work in camp via correspondence. And they all knew her and they were so kind they all agreed to do that. So they sent her the work. She did the work. She sent it back to the high school teachers. They graded it. And the high school then mailed her her diploma.

>> Carlene Tinker: Isn't that wonderful?

>> Debbie Ikeda: So she was one of the few who was able to do that. Now, a friend of hers who went to the same high school -- I guess she didn't tell them she was doing this. [Laughter] He

had to complete his whole senior year in Manzanar. So he was in the first graduating class from Manzanar High School but he basically had to redo his senior year.

>> Carlene Tinker: Isn't that something? OK. Let's shift to your paternal grandparents. Do you have any background information about them?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Now, then I know quite a bit more about because my aunt did a lot of historical background and told us. And so my grandmother was born in a small town called Uchiko on Shikoku.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: The island of Shikoku. And was just outside a larger city of Matsuyama and Matsuyama is known for their hot springs. Her mother died very young, though. So her father would send her to school in Matsuyama in one of those carriers and two men would -- she would sit in this, you know, like carrying carriage and these two guys would carry her off to Matsuyama to go to school and she actually went to catholic school in Matsuyama so she ended up being raised a Christian.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh!

>> Debbie Ikeda: Which is interesting. And then my grandfather was born outside of Nagoya and his family had a farm. He was not the oldest son. So he immigrated to the US. There was a famine in Japan so he came to the United States. And on the boat he met a young man and they became fast friends. Well, this young man was the brother of my grandmother. So his good friend was saying, you know, you ought to meet my sister. I think she'd make a good wife, blah, blah, blah. And so he showed her a picture. And so they corresponded via mail. And she ended up being a picture bride.

>> Carlene Tinker: Ah!

>> Debbie Ikeda: So she came to the United States and they all had to go off of San Francisco, the island there where the -- Angel Island.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: So they were held there but she had an eye infection so they would not release her to come to the United States so she was sent back to Japan. So this went on for three or four years and finally she wrote a letter to my grandfather releasing him saying, you know, you've waited too long. You don't -- I don't hold you to this proposal and I release you to

marry someone else. And he said, no, no, no, I'll wait. So she came again. And this time she got through. And they ended up having eight children.

>> Carlene Tinker: Whoa!

>> Debbie Ikeda: One passed away in childbirth but they had four daughters first. And my father was the first son. And then two other boys, so seven children lived on into adulthood. And the funny thing is when -- I'm on the Kochi Sisters City Committee and that's on Shikoku so we went to Kochi and one of the towns we went to was Uchiko and they have preserved that town. It was not bombed during the war so they have all the original buildings and they've maintained this historic area. And we met the mayor there. And at the time I did not know she was from Uchiko because nobody could remember where she was from. They knew she was from Shikoku but they couldn't remember where. So we had gone through Uchiko. Then we went to Matsuyama. And I come back home and I'm showing pictures to my relatives and I said, oh yes, we went to this tiny town called Uchiko and they all go, oh! That's where she's from!

[ Laughter ]

I just had to -- as soon as I said it, they immediately remembered. Well, by then I was back. It was too late to ask anybody because apparently her relatives still have a hotel there.

>> Carlene Tinker: I'll be darned.

>> Debbie Ikeda: So I could have met some of our relatives there. So at some point I'm going to go back.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And meet them. But my uncle Joe, the second son in that family, actually was the first president of Kellogs Corn Flakes Japan. And so he worked in Tokyo for 30 years and he married a Japanese national. So he's very familiar with that area but even he was not sure exactly where that hotel was. So he was going to be checking around and he's in his 90s now but he's still committed to trying to find them. [Laughing]

>> Carlene Tinker: [Laughing] Well, you better make that trip fast.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah!

[ Laughter ]

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, that's really interesting. Well, you did -- you said your grandfather was the first son in that family?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Second.

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

>> Debbie Ikeda: He was not the first son. That's why he came.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's why he was able to leave.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah, he was able to leave.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, but yeah. So then they married eventually and they stayed here?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And they were actually in Santa Monica.

>> Carlene Tinker: Santa Monica.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And he started a -- he actually studied plants and horticulture in Japan so he started a nursery in Santa Monica and they provided plants for all the big hotels and did their gardening. And so my dad learned to do that as well. And they did quite well. They had a nursery right on a main street in Santa Monica and West L.A.

>> Carlene Tinker: Would it have been South Hill Boulevard? Or no?

>> Debbie Ikeda: No, not that one.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Because that is a street where a lot of the nurseries are.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: I happened to have lived on South Hill Boulevard.

>> Debbie Ikeda: OK. I was close by there, though.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so -- yeah. So when the war hit, they lost everything.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, did they?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Oh yeah, yeah. They --

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so they also were sent to Manzanar.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Now I remember you saying when we talked earlier that your parents, your mother and father, were high school kids at this time. Your mother was able to complete her education first but how about your dad? Was he a lot older than your mom or --

>> Debbie Ikeda: No, he was actually about the same age but he -- or maybe a year younger because he did his senior year in high school at Manzanar. He actually when they went to Manzanar he had worked -- well, he had gone to school at Santa Monica High School, [inaudible] High, right?

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so he was on the football team there and he was on the high school newspaper so when he goes to camp they asked him if he has had any jobs and he said, yeah, he was a reporter. Ha! So they assigned him to work at the Free Press which was the camp newspaper. And nobody knew he was a high school kid because school had not started yet. And so he worked as a reporter for the Free Press and then in September he said, OK, I have to quit now and they said well, why? He goes, well, I have to go to school. They said, you mean you're not out of school yet? [Laughter] He goes, no, I have to -- I'm in my senior year. I have to complete it.

[ Laughter ]

So off he went to high school and but when he was working for the Free Press, my mother actually worked in the mimeograph room at the camp. So she would run off the Free Press because the newspaper at that time was reproduced with mimeograph.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: The old purple, you know --

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, yes, I remember those, yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: You remember the mimeographs. OK. Me too. And so she -- and so they met there and she would always make sure to run his off first.

[ Laughter ]

And so they met there and they did not get married there at the time but they were very serious. And he ended up completing his senior year in high school there. But his dad was one of the

block leaders. They had block leaders at Manzanar. And he said, you know, we want a high school yearbook. We're seniors, we want it. So they presented it to the block captains and the parents because they were -- and they were all men, of course, at that time. They agreed. And so they -- somehow they raised the money and they gave it to the kids to print the high school yearbook. And this is a copy of the high school yearbook that was actually -- this was a copy because Dianne Honda reproduced it.

>> Carlene Tinker: And we'll go ahead and show it.

>> Debbie Ikeda: OK. So Dianne went ahead and reproduced it. And Dianne Honda was a teacher at [inaudible] High School and she found the original high school yearbook in her father-in-law's papers because he had passed away and her husband Larry Honda's dad was in camp with my dad. In fact, they were in the same class. And so they reproduced this and it's called Our World and it was 1943 to 1944. And there's a picture of the cemetery stone they have at Manzanar. And these are the pictures. This is the Parent Teacher Association and that's my grandfather there.

>> Carlene Tinker: I'll be darned.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. I think he kind of looks like Hitler, to tell you the truth.

[ Laughter ]

But that's OK. He was a block captain or a block leader. And that's a picture of my father. This was a picture of the high school yearbook staff.

>> Carlene Tinker: Ah, oh, OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so he was the editor of the yearbook. And then so Dianne redid this yearbook and it's a normal yearbook except for this last picture.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh. Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And I don't know how they got away with this, to tell you the truth. But these are wire cutters.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And you can see he has his hand to cut the wire. And there's the century post right on the back. But his father was a man -- but then the photographer for this yearbook was a man by the name of Toyo Miyatake and he was a famous photographer in Los Angeles and good friends with Ansel Adams.

And so Toyo took all the photos. Well, this is his son Archie Miyatake who was also on the yearbook staff.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And Archie was a good friend of my dad's. And this is his hand taking and cutting -- pretending to cut the barbed wire.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Of course, they didn't really cut it. And the interesting story about Toyo Miyatake is that Toyo was actually a trained photographer and he took a lot of photos for L.A. families but also for -- he was an internationally known photographer.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, is that right?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah! And he was a good friend of Ansel Adams, as I said. And Ansel Adams was hired by the government to take photos at Manzanar. So you see some of his photos, Ansel Adams's photos, of Manzanar and they're typically pretty happy photos. But when -- he was a friend of the camp directors. And when he came to the camp, he told the camp director, you know, you have a very good photographer here in the camp by the name of Toyo Miyatake. You ought to allow him to take photos because this history should be captured. And the camp manager or director said, well, it's illegal for any of the Japanese people here to take photos. And the workaround was that Toyo would line up all the photo and the camp manager hired the wife of one of the soldiers to click the camera because then it's not illegal. He's not taking the photo. Somebody else is. The woman. So for a whole day, this woman went around. Toyo would line up the pictures. Now for photographers, the main thing is clicking, doing the click. Well, OK. But it was a workaround. And so this woman lasted a day and she goes to the camp director and she says, I can't do this anymore. It's too boring. [Laughter] So she quit. So he hired another woman. She only lasted half a day. And finally the camp director said, forget it, just take the photos yourself.

[ Laughter ]

And from that point on, he was allowed to take photos. But his early photos were just photos of dusk and dawn because he would sneak out -- he had snuck in a camera lens.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, yeah, yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And he would sneak out and take photos before anybody else was up.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. There was a story about that as well, and how he --

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes! How he snuck the camera in.

>> Carlene Tinker: Smuggled his lens in.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah! And then he had a friend build him the camera box who was a carpenter. And the family still has those original cameras.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that right?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. Because Archie Miyatake who was the son who was in my dad's class took over the business. And then now Archie's son is a photographer and he has since taken over the business.

>> Carlene Tinker: I'll be darned.

>> Debbie Ikeda: But Ralph Merritt was the camp director. And so as I said, this yearbook is a typical yearbook that you would see. It has photos of all the seniors.

>> Carlene Tinker: And it's wonderful that Dianne was able to reproduce it.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah! And Dianne reproduced it as a class project for her journalism class. And the interesting thing she did was she met with the Manzanar group because the Manzanar group at the time had a reunion group and they met in L.A. And they used to have reunions every five years in Las Vegas and they'd go to the California one. My parents would come out and I would meet them in Las Vegas so I got to know a lot of them. And so Dianne met them and she wanted to update the story of all the high school yearbook staff. So that's what she did. She updated the stories and what they're currently doing now, after camp. And she got photos. And the only one she couldn't get was my father, Reggie Shikami in Chicago. And she and I were talking at church one day and she was telling me about this project. I said, oh, my parents were in Manzanar. And she goes, well, I'm redoing the yearbook. I said, oh, my father was the editor of the yearbook. She goes, what's your maiden name? And I told her and she goes, I've been trying to get ahold of your father and he never returns my calls or emails. I said, he doesn't do email very well. I said, let me call him for you and I'll give him your number and tell him that you're waiting for him. [Laughing] And I called him and I said, Dad, you're holding up this whole

production. You have to write what you're doing now and your current history and I'll give them a photo. I had a photo of my parents. So he did that and sent it and she was able to finish her project.

[ Laughter ]

With everybody in there.

>> Carlene Tinker: I see you were actually an integral part of this project.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, I just got the photo and I had him write what he was doing at the time. And another interesting story is one of the guys in the camp was a man by the name of Ralph Lazzo and he was in my father's class as well. He was not Japanese. He was Mexican American. But he saw all his friends going off to camp and he didn't think it was right. So he decided, he tells his father, I'm going to go with them. And he did! He went with them. And they let him stay. And he lived in the bachelors quarters. He went to school. And he became a counselor at one of the L.A. community colleges.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that right?

>> Debbie Ikeda: So I met him at the Manzanar reunions but I also met him professionally because I was a community college counselor, as you know, and we would go to these meetings together. It was really funny.

>> Carlene Tinker: Did he actually stay the whole time?

>> Debbie Ikeda: He stayed the whole time.

>> Carlene Tinker: Is that right?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. And the interesting thing is they let him stay.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, if you had a fifth of Japanese blood, right? So nobody even questioned.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. You know, Debbie, that's -- if I may call you that.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's what is so intriguing about this project is that in doing the newspapers that I digitized for the library, the incongruities, the inconsistencies. You read one

thing but in practice it wasn't like that. And you know, it sounds like the director of Manzanar was very much like the director of my camp. They seemed to have supported the people, encouraged them to be creative, etc., etc., which is you know, you hear all of these horror stories or you like to -- people going, oh, it was really awful. But I don't -- I get the picture that your parents really didn't suffer.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well they were high school kids.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. But I mean, how about their parents? Did their parents go?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Oh. Oh, absolutely. Well, their parents --

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. How did they tolerate? Or do you know?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, of course the parents lost everything. You know, it was much harder for the isseis because they lost everything. At the same time, you know, as I said, my grandfather on my father's side got busy in camp and became a block captain and helped to organize the school. And as I said his background was horticulture so he helped with the -- they had many, many parks and water features in Manzanar and he helped design some of those. And my grandmother ended up teaching sumia painting classes and so a lot of the women there ended up learning other skills. My grandmother on my mother's side was taught how to make paper pictures. So it was folding and she made all these paper pictures and she showed other women how to do that. She taught ikebana as well. So they found a way to be useful and it was that same, you know, it can't be helped.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

[ Speaking Japanese ]

>> Debbie Ikeda: It can't be helped. So you make the best of it and I think that's what they did. And --

>> Carlene Tinker: I didn't mean to downplay the, you know, the uncomfortable --

>> Debbie Ikeda: The hardship, yeah, yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Of the Isseis -- I didn't want to do that. But I wanted to impart that for different parts of the age groups, you know, the younger kids -- like I was a little kid. I mean, it was not any different there than if I had stayed in L.A.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well you were playing.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, I was playing. But if you're talking about the Isseis who were denied citizenship, that was awful. That was awful.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, the other thing is I think it broke down the family structure.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Because the kids wanted to eat with the kids. Well, my father was the oldest son and he was 18 at the time and he insisted that his younger brothers eat with the family. So my father's family ate together as a unit. And my -- the younger brothers, the uncles, they hated that. But he insisted they sit down and eat with the family [laughing].

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. And that was a key problem, you know, because the kids did in many families. They did not eat with the family.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: And that was the first sign or the first stage of breakdown of the family structure.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes. Well, and they had gangs that started to appear in the camps. And that wasn't good either. I know my husband's family, the teenagers were creating trouble and his dad was older and his dad was -- so the young man his age said, this has to stop.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Debbie Ikeda: These gangs have to stop. So the agreement was these young teenagers would get their champion and his dad's age group picked their champion. Well, it was Dale's dad who was the champion sumo wrestler. And these two would fight it out and whoever won, you know, would be in charge of the camp, kind of in the behavior. So Dale's dad -- they picked this really big kid and Dale's dad wasn't that big but he's very strong. He was a farmer, right?

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And he worked in the fields. He was very strong. He just picked that kid up, grabbed him in a sumo hold, jammed him down, that was the end of it. [Laughing]

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: That fight lasted all of two seconds, I understand.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And order was restored in camp.

[ Laughter ]

At his camp and I think his folks were in Jerome, Arkansas. So -  
-

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, that's because he grew up here.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes. They were -- they were in Clovis and actually Clovis did not have to report to the Fresno Assembly Center but all the people on one side of 99 did have to report. But and Dale's mother did have to report because she lived in Chinatown on East Street.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, yeah. Yeah, west.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And that group had to report.

>> Carlene Tinker: West of 99.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. So but Dale's dad and his mother were going to get married so to keep the family together, his family voluntarily reported to the Fresno Assembly Center and then were sent off to Jerome.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, is that right?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's how that happened.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. OK, well getting back to your immediate family. Your mother and father were high school kids. Your parents were there. When the war was over, I assumed they stayed there all the time.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, what happened was actually my father's family left earlier.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, did they?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah, and my father and his parents and sisters -- because his sisters all left as soon as they could get out. They all got married and who they married volunteered for the 442nd. So they were all able to get out and they originally went to Cincinnati and then they moved to Chicago.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: But my three aunts whose husbands were in the 442nd were all injured in the Rescue of the Lost Battalion -- the three men, my three uncles. And my three aunts at the time were living in Cincinnati together and they each had just had babies.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my.

>> Debbie Ikeda: So they had babies and they each got a telegram on the same day. One of my uncles was killed. One of my uncles was seriously wounded. And one was wounded. And so the Cincinnati papers heard about this. So they came and they wanted to do a story on these three women and they took a photo of my three aunts and they're each holding their baby. And there's a picture of their husbands in their uniforms. You know how they take soldiers' pictures. So they had them in front of them. And when this photo was taken, well it became part of the MIS Photo Ark -- or, not the MIS, the 442nd Photo Archive that went around the United States on display. Of course, here you have this picture of these three women with these three babies with the telegrams in front of them. And the pictures of their husbands. So but yeah. They left camp as soon as they could because their husbands -- well, they got married in camp mostly.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right, OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And then their husbands got drafted and so and then they moved to Chicago. My grandparents and my dad went to Chicago with them. My mother stayed in camp till the end with her parents and they went back to L.A.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. But wait a minute. Your dad's parents -- what? Did they move to Chicago with him?

>> Debbie Ikeda: They moved to Chicago.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. But your mother went -- OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah, my mother went with her parents to L.A. and then my father got drafted out of Chicago.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so before he shipped out, he drove back -- or, I don't know probably took the train. Whatever. He got back to L.A. and he and my mother got married in Los Angeles. And then after the war he got her because she went to work for a family in L.A. as kind of their housekeeper and she actually learned to cook there. She worked for a family who was tied into the Hollywood scene and I think the husband wrote screenplays or whatever and they used to have parties there. And she learned

how to -- the wife taught her how to cook. So she really -- and she learned from a really good cook so she learned how to be a gourmet cook really. And anyway, after the war my father picked up my mother in L.A. from her parents. They came to Chicago and they decided to go back to Chicago because on the GI Bill it was better to go to school in the state you got drafted from. The benefits were better.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. So they went back to Chicago and my dad got a job in a wire products factory.

>> Carlene Tinker: In a what?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Wire products factory.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. No, first bookbinding and then wire products.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And he started going to school part time in IT but he never finished because they had four children -- my brother. And he had to concentrate on working.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Because my mother at that time did not work.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Debbie Ikeda: She stayed home and watched us.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. So that's how you got to Chicago. Or that's how you got born in Chicago.

>> Debbie Ikeda: That's how I ended up being born in Chicago because technically I really feel like I should have been a native Californian. [Laughing]

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah! [Laughing]

>> Debbie Ikeda: Had it not been for the war [inaudible] I would have -- well, who knows what I'd be because they probably wouldn't have met because they met at Manzanar.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah. So anyway, OK. So let's take you from Chicago. You grew up there. What was life like for you in Chicago as a Japanese American?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well Chicago was a very -- Chicago is a multi-ethnic city. It's like L.A. and New York in a lot of ways. More like New York, I think. And but they have segregated neighborhoods in Chicago. There's an Italian neighborhood and a Greek neighborhood, an African American neighborhood, and a Japanese neighborhood, and a Chinese neighborhood. But the high school I went to was -- well, we started off in uptown which was a poor area. You had a -- but it was a lot of the Japanese lived there. The Buddhist temple was in that area. A Japanese store was in that area. And --

>> Carlene Tinker: Were you Buddhist or Christian?

>> Debbie Ikeda: No, I was Christian.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Because my grandmother --

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

>> Debbie Ikeda: On my father's side was raised Catholic but when she came here she ended up going to the Japanese Methodist Church in L.A.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: So they went to I think it was West L.A. Unity Methodist Church.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so my father was raised in the Methodist Church.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And my mother's family, they started off as Shinto. And then they went to -- oh, I know. My mother and my grandmother took the children and they took some of the local Mexican kids to the church and they were not treated well. They did not treat the Mexican kids well. So my mother and grandmother said, no, that's it. We're not going to this church anymore. This is not where I want my kids. No. If they're not going to treat people nicely then we're not going here. So then they went to -- then she started experimenting. She went to a holy rollers church that scared them all.

[ Laughter ]

And they -- anyway, they went to different churches. I don't know where they finally ended up at, probably not being that

religious because they were going to so many different churches. But my father was very religious so we ended up in Chicago going to the Japanese Congregational Church, not the Methodist Church which is interesting, probably because my uncle was very active in the Congregational Church in Chicago. So it was called Tri-C -- Christ Congregational Church. And but in Chicago, as I said, we went to an elementary school and they had a middle school in Chicago and it was a pretty diverse middle school. We had kids from Appalachia there. We had African American kids. We had Mexican kids, Japanese kids, Chinese kids, all kind of kids. So I actually went to a school, very diverse school, which I think was good.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yes.

>> Debbie Ikeda: But there were actually a lot of Japanese kids there. And then we moved further north to the north side near Loyola University and near Evanston, Rogers Park area, which was a more affluent area. And the high school for that area -- well, the high school for uptown was Sinn High School and that's where we had all started so we asked to stay at Sinn but my younger brother. A better high school really was Sullivan High School which was on the north side and that was primarily an all Jewish high school. So he was not in high school yet so he went through middle school and high school there in Rogers Park and as I said it was a more affluent area. So we went to middle school and high school that was more multi-ethnic, more not as affluent but a good school. Good enough. And we had a lot of -- we had some AP classes and kids from the south side of Chicago who wanted to go to a better school were allowed to come to Sinn High School which is interesting because they were not allowed to go to Sullivan but they were allowed to go to Sinn. Sinn accepted transfers. I guess Sullivan didn't. I don't know. Anyway --

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: I should find out more about that. But --

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, that's interesting.

>> Debbie Ikeda: So we went to high school there. In our high school years we were active in the junior JCL and so we were involved with the Japanese American community that way. And we were also -- I was involved in what was called the Nisei Ambassadors Drum and Bugle Corps which was you would think it would be all Japanese American kids but it wasn't. It was a very -- it was the first really multi-ethnic drum and bugle corps in the country, probably, because most of the corps were white. So we were the first multi-ethnic group and we had African American

and we had everybody in there. But it was, I would say, predominantly Japanese Americans because we were sponsored by the VFW and American Legion and Japanese American Post, so the Nisei Post which is another interesting story because the niseis after they came back from World War II were not allowed to join the VFW post and American Legion post that were existing because they were Japanese. So what did they do? They formed their own. So we had a Nisei VFW post and a Nisei American Legion post. And it was the VFW posts and American Legion posts that sponsored drum and bugle corps at the time. So they sponsored our drum and bugle corps and we were the Nisei Ambassadors. And as I said we were primarily Japanese Americans but we had a very multi-ethnic group. But our parents, we would have bento boxes. [Laughter] So we would go on the buses, you know, with nigiri and the African American kids and Mexican kids grew to love teriyaki and nigiri.

[ Laughter ]

And we would -- when you competed, you took buses all over the primarily the east coast and south and Canada. Drum and bugle corps were not that big on the west coast at the time. So we would -- and the big competitions, the national ones, were on the east coast. But building up to that, you would go to these other competitions. And the first competition -- well, we went to many. Many in the Midwest -- Indianapolis, etc. But we went down south one time and that was a mistake because we had African American kids in our corps and --

>> Carlene Tinker: What year would this be in?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Oh, this would have been in the 70s.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah, '71-72.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so we went down south and I think it was Atlanta. I don't really remember, though. It was definitely a southern city. And they didn't know what to make of the Japanese kids. So we were just a novelty. So they were very nice to us. But the African American kids they were not nice to. And these African American kids were from Chicago. So they did not know how to act in the south and they were not acting the way they were suppose to act in the south like the other African Americans who were born in the south who "knew better." So they acted like us. Well, they weren't treated right. And so people wouldn't sell them stuff and we went into a restaurant, they wouldn't seat us. So all the boys got mad. So they went into one

of these stores and they shoplifted which was a really bad thing to do.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so the shop owner came onto the boys' bus and said, hey, your kid shoplifted! And our parents were saying, no way, my kids? So they opened -- you know, in buses you had these areas where you put your luggage up on top. Well, they opened it and all this candy started coming out. [Laughing]

>> Carlene Tinker: Ohhh [laughing].

>> Debbie Ikeda: So our parents were so embarrassed. Anyway, so they paid the shop owners and they told the kids never do that again. And they said, you know, you're just reinforcing what they think about you. And but we never went south again after that experience. Instead we stayed in the Midwest and the east coast and we did go to Canada.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Well, for the Japanese, like you said, kids of Japanese descent, you were kind of a novelty.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah! In the south we were a novelty. In fact, we kind of played it up and pretended we didn't speak English and they were giving us free doughnuts and free candy because they thought we were from some other country.

[ Laughter ]

>> Carlene Tinker: Well and partly too, I think, it sounds like you didn't really experience a lot of racism or discrimination in Chicago because when we first were allowed to move out of the camps to Chicago we were a novelty.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: And so, I'll tell you, my grandmother is German. And she married my grandfather who was a law student at Evanston.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Oh! OK!

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And --

>> Debbie Ikeda: So you know what I'm talking about. Evanston is right on the border of Rogers Park.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. And so when they got introduced through a mutual friend, I'm sure, you know, they didn't know one Japanese from another, right? And they got married. There were

no problems. And then they moved back to L.A. because that's where my grandpa set up his law practice. OK?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Ahh.

>> Carlene Tinker: But yeah, and then even today people don't in the Midwest really recognize us or even know our history which is to me amazing because so many of us were leaving the camps at that time and these people were growing up at that time.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes. And many went to Chicago.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah!

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah, many. And in fact, my husband's side of the family also left camp from Jerome and went to Chicago. And the whole family went to Chicago. But his mother and two brothers came back to the west coast. Well, the mother was married. So they came back to Clovis. But the two other brothers went to L.A. even though they were from Fresno. And one brother and her twin sister stayed in Chicago.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so I grew up knowing his cousins because they went to Christ Congregational Church. So I knew them better than I knew him because I grew up with them. And when I first met my husband here, I asked him, do you know anyone in Chicago? And he said, no, I don't know anyone there because he had only seen them once. They had only come out -- and he totally forgot about them. Then when he's meeting my parents in L.A., my mother asked him, do you know anyone in Chicago? And I said, no, he said he didn't know anyone. And he goes, oh, wait a minute, I do have some relatives in Chicago. And I said, well what are their names? And he said, Kotohira. I said, Kotohira? We know Kotohiras. He goes, oh there must be a lot of them in Chicago. I said, well, there's three boys -- Ken, etc., etc. And he goes -- those are my cousins. [Laughter] I said, I dated your cousin.

[ Laughter ]

Which I had! I had dated his cousin! Because his cousin Kenny went to the University of Illinois the same time I did. So it's just really funny.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah. So [laughing] -- well anyway, getting back to your residence in Chicago.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: You went to high school there.

>> Debbie Ikeda: I went to high school there.

>> Carlene Tinker: And then you went to college in Champaign-Urbana.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right? OK. And then what that kind of --

>> Debbie Ikeda: Now, there there were not that many Asians.

>> Carlene Tinker: No.

>> Debbie Ikeda: In fact, I came later to find out there were only 300 Japanese Americans on that whole campus of 25,000 students. There were 300.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And the only reason I found out is because while we were there in the -- by then it was '74-75. You had all these protests going on.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Berkeley, you know, had started their protests. And two assistant professors from there had come to Champagne and were starting to teach on our campus and they started the Asian American Alliance. They wanted to start an Asian American club at the University of Illinois because there was none. So they, you know, put up flyers and my roommates and I went to go -- well, two of us went to go find out about it. And so we ended up starting the Asian American Alliance there in 1975. And it was there the whole time I was there. And we actually marched in the Vietnam War protest and they wanted the Asian American lines up front because we kind of looked like the enemy.

[ Laughter ]

And they want us carrying the sign, "Stop Killing Our Brothers and Sisters," Right?

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh dear!

[ Laughter ]

>> Debbie Ikeda: And I had never been to a protest so I wore my nice raincoat and a rainhat and I'm walking with this friend of mine who is from L.A. because we had kids from all over there. And they said, you don't go to a protest in -- you're supposed to wear like a blue worksheet and jeans. And I said, well, nobody told me the dress. And it's raining so of course I'm

going to wear my raincoat and my rainhat. [Laughter] So I kind of stuck out. But --

>> Carlene Tinker: But there were only 300 of you?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Only 300 Japanese Americans. But there were other Asian Americans. And what happened was they took a photo of us and we're in the front and we're on the front of the Daily Line which was the school paper. And someone sent that photo back to one of the kids' parents in Chinatown. There was a Chinese kid. He got in a lot of trouble because someone said this is what your son is doing with your hard-earned money. And there he is marching in this protest parade. So yeah, he got in trouble. He was an engineering student.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh my gosh.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Anyway, so I found out later on there was a woman who with her dissertation at the University of Illinois studied the Asian American movement at the University of Illinois. And she wrote her dissertation on it. And she came out to -- somehow she got our names. And she asked to meet with us. And I -- so several of us have moved to the west coast. So I said, I can pull together some of the members of the Asian American Alliance because we've kept in touch with each other over the years and you can meet with all of them. So a friend of mine who lives in Fremont, she hosted a luncheon and it was potluck and we had about 20 of us there. And this young woman came to interview all of us for her dissertation. And that's where we found out there were only 300 Japanese Americans. At the time I said, I probably knew all of them then. So [laughing] -- I didn't realize there were so few.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: But because we were in the Asian American Alliance, a lot of our friends were Asian American. And so it seemed like there were more but there weren't really that many. And I noticed it when I went to my education classes because I was the only Asian in my major class. Now, in my general ed classes there were more. But once I got to my major classes there were very few Asian Americans. In fact, none in my major classes. And I thought, gee, this is really interesting. I look around and there would be --

>> Carlene Tinker: Huh!

>> Debbie Ikeda: Is that it?

>> Carlene Tinker: That's fascinating.

>> Debbie Ikeda: That looked like me.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, even in the '70s.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: Because I was going to college in the '50s and there were quite a few of us.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Where did you go to school?

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah!

>> Debbie Ikeda: Where did you go to school?

>> Carlene Tinker: UCLA.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well see, that's the west coast.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Whereas in the Midwest, although there were a lot in Chicago, by the time you get to the university and in education -- I think had I been an engineer or computer science major, that's where all my Asian American friends were. Very few in education.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Yeah. So did you associate more with Japanese Americans?

>> Debbie Ikeda: I associated more with Asian Americans.

>> Carlene Tinker: Asian Americans.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah, because I had belonged to that club. And so --

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, I see.

>> Debbie Ikeda: So my social activities -- we had our intramural team. We were terrible.

[ Laughter ]

But you know it was interesting because the Chinese kids, they had -- there were a lot of foreign, international students, Chinese students. And so they formed their own club. And so the Chinese American kids went to both.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh.

>> Debbie Ikeda: They went to the Chinese National Club and they came to the Asian American Club so they kind of crossed the barrier between both clubs. But for Japanese Americans, we

mostly hung around with Asian Americans versus the foreign nationals. So it was really interesting.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, so then you got your undergraduate degree there.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK. Then what did you do? What field were you in at that time? Or what were you interested in and what did you pursue?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, I was in my -- I was on a scholarship there. So I could take as many units as I wanted. So I was taking a lot of units every semester and I worked at the bookstore there which was a great job because except for rush, it was really slow. So I was able to study when I sat at the cash register because hardly anybody came in. And so I studied -- back there you'd get your elementary credential, ed credential, or your teaching credential in four years. You didn't do this fifth year thing. And so I got my teaching credential and I taught for two years.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: In Chicago Public Schools which was a condition of my scholarship. But in my fourth year I had all the classes I needed to graduate except for one so I petitioned because while I was doing my teacher training in one of the elementary schools I met a woman who was doing her internship in counseling. And she was out there doing her hours in counseling and I asked her what she was doing. And she told me about her field and I thought, gee, that's really interesting. I think that's what I really want to do. So I petitioned the program there and they let me take graduate programs in the counseling ed program. So they let me start my masters degree early. And I was able to take them under my scholarship. So I completed almost a year's worth of my graduate program which was a two-year program while I was still an undergrad. And then I came back and I got a job teaching kindergarten for half the day and being a reading specialist for half the day. Not that I had a -- I mean, I had a couple of extra classes in reading but it's not -- I don't know about Chicago public schools because they really don't check your background very well, I don't think because they made me a reading specialist. Thankfully I had some extra background in reading. And they also made me a music teacher. And they didn't even ask if I had any music background. [Laughter] Which I fortunately had. So and then the following year I was the eighth grade science teacher at another school. Again, they don't ask

you if you have any special training. But at the time I made home visits which I found out later on I wasn't supposed to do because it was a bad neighborhood. But families were very nice to me. But I'd visit these homes and I'd see three generations of family living in one home and they were all on the FDC. And I would think, gosh, do these things have a chance? You know? Are they going to be able to break out of this cycle because here's three generations. But anyway, families were very nice. And I just wondered about the kids. But after I did my two years I went back because I wanted to finish my masters degree in counseling psych. So I went back and I finished my degree. And after I finished that I decided I wanted -- I thought, you know, really to have a chance, the best chance was community colleges for these kids. If they came to community college I felt they had a good chance of transferring and anyone can afford a community college, I felt, given financial aid. So I went -- there's six Chicago community colleges, public colleges. It's a six-college system in Chicago. So I visited all six systems -- and this is before internet. So I went to the mailrooms of all these six schools. And I had my resumes. I had a stack of resumes in envelopes and I'd put them in what looked to me like administrative mailboxes [laughter] at all six schools. And I got a call that evening from Loop City College. A guy had received a grant, I think it was either an NSF or one of these grants, to start what was called the Individual Needs Program and he needed to hire a counselor. So he asked me if I would come in and interview. I said, yes, I'd love to. He goes, when can you come in? I said, tomorrow? He said yes. So I went in the next day and one guy interviewed me and he goes, can you start tomorrow? I said, yeah, I can start tomorrow so I did. And I started off teaching psychology and being a counselor for this individual needs program. And we had about 125 kids. And it was a block program where we identified all the classes the students were going to take for two years depending on their major. And he picked the teachers he knew would work really well with these kids. And he -- and so we set up 25 sheets for each block of kids and these 25 kids were going to take the same classes with each other. And so they formed these cohorts and they stayed together for two years. And the whole point was to transfer these students to the University of Illinois Chicago campus because we had agreements in place with the Chicago campus that if we could get these kids through with a, you know, B average they would accept them. And we got them through, working together in cohorts and really I think we had identified the best teachers at that school, to tell you the truth. And they really worked hard with these kids and we also hired tutors. And my tutors were all doctoral students from the University of

Chicago who couldn't find jobs and these were full time tutoring jobs and they took them. Because they were doctoral students at the time and I had a biology student and an English student and I mean all the different areas -- business. And they were very good teachers and they knew their content. And I had one guy who was going on to medical school. I mean, really topnotch tutors and they really worked with these kids and they got them through and these kids went on. So I stayed. I was a counselor there for two years and then they made me the director of the program for a year and then they made me an assistant dean of academic support services for the next two years. And at the time I started looking to move back to the west coast because Chicago is cold. And so -- and I knew California had a lot of community colleges and I wanted to stay in the community college system. And I had a lot of relatives in California and I'd been here. So I went. So I applied to a couple places, Bakersfield College and Fresno City College. Looked in the Chronicle of Higher Ed. And I got an interview at Fresno City College and I told my parents who had been here through Fresno maybe in the 1930s and they both said, Fresno? They don't have paved streets in Fresno. [Laughter] And I said, oh my gosh, you're kidding! They said, oh no, it's just farms and they don't have paved roads and you're not going to like it. And so it's too late. I already accepted the interview. So I flew out and as we're flying into Fresno I'm looking out the window and there's paved roads. I can see paved roads for miles. And I am at the Holiday Inn which at the time that's what it was -- kitty-corner to the airport. And I call back to Chicago. I said, you know, they have paved streets everywhere.

[ Laughter ]

And we started laughing and said, oh yeah, it's 50 years later. Of course they have paved streets. And I go to interview at Fresno City College which is on the old Fresno State campus and it's a beautiful campus. It sits on a hundred acres. They have all these old buildings, a lot of greenery. And I was used to Chicago colleges which -- community colleges -- which mine was the downtown branch and it was a highrise of 13 stories all in one building. And that was it. And the other campuses were football-sized buildings, all one big building with four or five stories because it's too cold to go outside.

>> Carlene Tinker: Ohhh.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And that's the campus and that's what I was used to. So out here I see this beautiful campus. I thought, this is gorgeous. And so I interviewed and this was nothing like the interview I had in Chicago. I'm sitting in front of, I don't

know, 12 to 14 people and they have all these questions and I interviewed with them and then I went to visit my relatives in L.A. and I flew back to Chicago. And the vice president of student services -- I made it into the final three. He interviewed me over the phone. And he hired me, sight unseen. He was African American. He was the first African American administrator hired at Fresno City College. And he was hired the year before I was. And he in turn hired myself and another dean of students. I was the dean for counseling, guidance, career planning, and this other dean was for support services like EOPS and international students and things like that, student activities. And he was African American. So but I had not yet met the president because the president really makes the final decision normally. But the president didn't even interview me. But they called me up and they asked me if I'll meet the president at O'hare Airport. He's on his way to vacation in Florida. And at that time you could still go to the gates. This was before all the security and 9/11. So I went to the gate to meet the president and I don't see anyone that looks like a president coming out of the gangway. And this guy comes -- and I'm in a suit and high heels. This guy comes up to me. He goes, you must be Ms. Shakami. I said, yes, you're Dr. Macaulay? Because he had a Hawaiian shirt on and Bermuda shorts.

[ Laughter ]

And he didn't look like a president. And so I walked him to his gate and he talked with me. And yeah, I was hired. And I started in August of '81. And --

>> Carlene Tinker: And so you were a migrant but [laughing] --

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes. And my secretary was a Nisei by the name of Iya Kimora. Her husband taught biology over at Fresno City College. And my relatives knew a woman here, Sumi Suda, who I had shipped all my stuff to. Sumi Suda was a good friend of Iya Kimora's because they both went to the Buddhist church. And so I was looking for an apartment. So I had found an apartment and Sumi Suda was telling my secretary, she can't live there, that's a bad neighborhood. So it was on Ashland and I don't know West or something. And it was an apartment right next to the railroads or Railtrack. And my secretary said, you have to move. I said, what do you mean? She goes, you're in a bad neighborhood and Sumi Suda said you have to move because that's a bad neighborhood and your parents wouldn't like it. And I said, Iya, compared to Chicago this is a lovely neighborhood. [Laughter] Really. Trust me. I feel very safe here. Really. Believe me. I'm not moving again. [Laughter] But she was my mother's age, really.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And she was very kind and she was very helpful. And she said, you should join the JACL. So I did. I joined the Fresno chapter of the JACL. I think the first year I was here.

>> Carlene Tinker: Eighty-one, '82 maybe?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. And the next year they made me president of the Fresno chapter. [Laughter] That's what happens to the new people, right?

>> Carlene Tinker: [Laughing] Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so I was the chapter president when they had their 60th anniversary.

>> Carlene Tinker: Which one?

>> Debbie Ikeda: 60th.

>> Carlene Tinker: 60th?

>> Debbie Ikeda: I think. It was either 60th or 65th. I think. One of those.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah! That's right. It started in the '30s. Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Right. So I was in moderator. Actually it started in 1923.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh. Was it that long ago?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah, it started as the American Loyalty League.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: The first JACL chapter in the United States -- the Fresno chapter claims to be, as the American Loyalty League.

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

>> Debbie Ikeda: And Dr. Tomya Tabei was the first president.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Anyway. So I was the moderator for that event. And I guess my husband saw me at that event. And Rick Berman who is also an attorney was active in the Fresno JACL because his wife was Japanese American. She was a sansei and so he thought it would be good for him to be involved in the JACL for his children because they were half Japanese. And then you'd go to

the picnics and stuff like that. Anyways, so Dale apparently asked Rick, is Debbie dating anyone? Rick says, no I don't see her dating anyone. When she comes to bed, she usually comes by herself. So Rick introduced us. He invited us to a Rick Layman fundraiser together as a way of introducing us. And -- And of course this was, I guess, a few years later because I was starting to look around to move to San Francisco or L.A. because I really wanted to be back in a more urban area than Fresno was. But so I met my husband and we started dating. And he's from here. And he chose to be here. He went to Stanford. He went to UC Davis Law School. He had worked in the Bay Area. He had worked in Sacramento. And he came home. And he got a job working for the city's attorney's office and then he started working at the Blumberg Kokorin firm. He went into private practice, so he was in private practice when I met him. And he eventually became partner at that firm. Anyway, when you're an attorney in private practice it's hard to move because you establish a book of clients.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And by then we had had our first child and my husband's family still had their family farm in Clovis. His dad and his uncle farmed it together, their 40-45 acres there on International and in between Willow and Miniwawa which is actually right down the street from Clovis Community College.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, that's right, yeah!

>> Debbie Ikeda: And Clovis North High School. And there's a big church there at Clovis Hills and their property is right next to it.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, is that right?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah! So the nice thing about raising a family in this area is their farm is right next to a llama farm. So we would go out to the farm, take the children, and their grandfather would give them rides on the tractor and they would go visit the llamas and the people next door would let them, you know, feed the llamas. And they're mean, though. And so it was really nice, a nice place to raise kids -- better than, I think, L.A. or San Francisco because here you have urban and country. You know? You had both. And you were up in the mountains in an hour. You could take them skiing. And so they were able to learn how to ski. And Yosemite is right here. And actually that is one of the reasons I wanted to come to Fresno, because Yosemite. I had come out here. I had gone to Yosemite. I was amazed at how spectacular that national park was. And I thought, gosh, I'm

only an hour away from Yosemite National Park. How wonderful is that? And Sequoia National Park. Really wonderful place if you like the outdoors. So I really felt fortunate and really -- and our kids went to Fort Washington Elementary School and Janet Young happened to be their principal. And at the time, Janet Young knew every -- I took the kids to school and Janet Young would say, hi Tiffany, hi Megan. And I immediately said, did you guys get in trouble? How come she knows your name? Well it turns out she knew every kid's name at that school. She made it a habit to learn every child's name at that school.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow. How impressive.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah! Very impressive. I mean, she knew their names, she knew their faces. And I got to know Janet over the years because she eventually ended up becoming superintendent at Clovis Unified. But the kids, I think, got a really good education at Fort Washington and then at Clovis West. And they went on to do, I think, fine. One went to UC Irvine. The other went to Santa Cruz. And they're well off into their careers now. So you know.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, now, when you were raising your children, you were continuing to work, right?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Because you've had several positions in administration. Not only were you at Fresno City. You then transferred to the new -- what was it? The international campus --

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well here's the interesting thing. I actually stayed at Fresno City College for 24 years.

>> Carlene Tinker: Was it that long?

>> Debbie Ikeda: As the Dean of Counseling and Guidance. Opportunities came up at other campuses in the district. There was an opportunity to apply for the vice president of student services at Reedley College but at the time my children were very young and I did not want to be that far away from them, should they need me.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Debbie Ikeda: But I was thinking, I don't know what I was thinking because my husband was right in town. He certainly could have taken care of any emergency but I wasn't thinking that way. And I really should have because I think had I done that, I would have moved up much earlier.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yes.

>> Debbie Ikeda: But I declined that job. I declined to even apply. And I was advised to apply. And I think I would have gotten it, had I applied, but I did not. But as the dean of students for counseling and guidance, I was given a lot of opportunities to do other things. They also made me the dean of workforce development at the same time. So just as that was getting really big, I got involved in that. And the whole assessment thing was big in the community colleges and I got --

>> Carlene Tinker: The what was?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Assessment and placement --

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And all of that. And --

>> Carlene Tinker: You want to explain that a little bit?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Oh, sure. Well, California community colleges, there's a law. A lawsuit came from MALDF, the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, against the California Community Colleges about the placement tests being biased. So you had to go through this whole process to make sure your test wasn't biased. So I was involved in that statewide development of that process. And I got to be involved then in a lot of statewide committees because I had been in that position for so long and I got to know a lot of people. So I helped to develop that process for developing the test and then working with the high schools on developing cut scores and so that was an interesting process. But as I said, I got to try out a lot of different things. And I think at the dean's level, that's really where you're making a lot of the hiring decisions, honestly. And when I came into my dean's job, I was very young. I was 29. I was probably the youngest administrator they had ever hired. And as a result of that, all my, all the people who worked for me -- the counselors who worked for me were quite a bit older. And most of them were male and white. There were two other women. One was Latina and the other was white. And one of the women was an older caucasian woman and she was actually -- she applied for the same job I applied for. She did not get it. She had been a longterm counselor and so I think there -- but she was so gracious. Her name was Mary-Alice Easton and she was so kind. And she helped me break into that job and really she was very helpful. She became my righthand person. Well, she was a good friend of my secretary's and I think that helped, to tell you the truth because my secretary was very helpful as well. As you know, secretaries do all the work anyway.

[ Laughter ]

So but as a result of that, at the time, I chaired the hiring committees for counselors. And all the counselors were involved in hiring our other counselors. But one of the things I wanted to do was to diversify the staff and have counselors more reflect the students we were serving. I wanted Spanish-speaking counselors because we had a lot of Spanish-speaking students. And one of the counselors that I hired, she was half African American and half Mexican American. And she spoke Spanish and she'd been a social worker. So she was not the typical masters degree in counseling. Her masters degree was in social work. But she had worked for the Department of Social Services. She knew all the services that were out there. And the kind of students we were getting at the community college needed to utilize those community services. And most of my counselors did not know what those services were. Well she did. So I really worked with our counselors to get them to see the value of bringing in people who had different skills than they had to diversify our skillset to help our students. So they agreed so we hired this woman. And she really did a good job in training the rest of us on all the community services that were available to our students so we could then refer our students out for these additional services.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Then that is such an important job of all schools, principally at the community college because a lot of times the kids who go to a community college don't have the opportunity to go beyond that and maybe that's the terminal place, the stopping place. And if they don't get that help, obviously they're not prepared to go out into the world.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Exactly. And so the interesting thing was she was a student at Fresno City College and one of her counselors was still working there. He was an African American counselor. And she told me she had pulled him aside one day and she said, you told me to go into child development because I wasn't going to make it. And I want you to know I don't ever want you telling that to another woman again because you need to let women do whatever it is that they want to do and encourage them to do it. And that was very healthy for him to hear because I don't think he ever did that again.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah. I think given the person's background and what they've grown up in, you know, it's amazing that they don't understand. They don't understand. You know? And what they're conveying to their students as the -- I was a high school counselor and I tried to tap into the skills and academic abilities at the same time. So I often would try to get the kids

-- if they were not really academic but maybe, you know, focus on their studies but also look at vocational things as well.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Exactly.

>> Carlene Tinker: So I would have them go in to school in the morning at Bullard High. Then they would go over to Cart.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes. Which I think is great.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh yeah. And they blossomed.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: They blossomed.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes. Absolutely. Because you're tying that core connection and they see the need.

>> Carlene Tinker: So you went from City College to --

>> Debbie Ikeda: OK. So I was for 24 years. And then finally we had a president. His name was Ned Doffney, African American man. And the Reedley College president left. And so our vice president of instruction, Tony Cantu, they asked him to go down to Reedley and be the interim president down there at Reedley. Well then there's an opening for an interim vice president as Fresno City College of Instruction. Well, Ned Doffney said, you know, you need to apply for this job. I said, but Ned, I'm on the student service side of the house. He goes, no, you need to apply. Well, he's going to make the decision. He's the president. So I applied. And much to the angst of the deans of instruction, I got the job. So now here's a student service person in charge of all of instruction. And actually I think it worked out better than they had hoped for because as a dean of students, I [inaudible] of course I knew all their programs because counselors have to know all the programs, not just their own area. Whereas deans of instruction really know their own area very well but not so much the other areas. Well, I knew all their areas because we had to. So I was very familiar with all their programs. And not only that but the vice president of student services, Robert Fox, and I -- he hired me. And we had worked together for 24 years as a team. And I trusted him and he trusted me. So when it came time to divvy up the budget, I could tell him, you know, I really need this for instruction and this is why and he trusted me. And we were able to work together as a team and get rid of the silos that had been in effect the whole time I was there. You had instruction and you had student services and they should be working together but they were always vying for the same pot of dollars. Well, now we're

working together as a team because I had worked with him as a team. And so I was seeing all these opportunities for instruction workers and student services so there was much more collaboration going on because I could see how student services could help instruction. And I was saying, you know, I think student services can help you with this. And we brought them in on some of the projects and I think it worked out really well. So that year went very well and the deans of instruction were happy with me, I think, because at the end they gave me this nice gift and party, etc., etc. But then Tony came back to Fresno City as the vice president of instruction. I went back to being the dean of students but then the vice president of instructions and student services opened at the North Centers.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, OK. That's how you --

>> Debbie Ikeda: That's how I went out to -- and the North Centers was, they're the North Centers of Reedley College and they included Clovis, Madera, and Oakhurst. And we functioned really almost as a third college even though we were centers. And but we had our own president but he was called the vice chancellor.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: But he was at the same level of the president.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And I was at the same level as all the other vice presidents except there was one of me. I was a vice president of instructions and student services. All the other campuses had two, one vice president of --. And I liked that because as a vice president of both I had the deans of instruction and the deans of students meeting with me weekly and we worked together as a team, similar to what I had with the vice president of student services when I was the interim vice president of instruction. It was one team instead of two. So we met weekly and there was a lot of collaboration going on. And I think it worked really well. We didn't have the silos develop that you had at the other campuses that just naturally develop. Well there was always the plan for Clovis to break off and become the third college in the district. And so after about, I don't know, six years or so, the vice chancellor retired and I applied to be the president for the North Centers. And I was given that title. And then when Clovis had to break, we had to break off from Madera and Oakhurst because we were becoming a third college and the accreditation commission said you can't have centers over centers. You have to break off. So Madera and

Oakhurst then fell directly under Reedley and we were a standalone campus. And so for the next two to four years we went through the process to become accredited as Clovis Community College and I took us through that process. Well, with of course a team. Our team, which was comprised of a great faculty, staff, and administrative team, all had one goal. And that was to make Clovis Community College a college. And we worked together as a team to do that and we all had that same focus. And we did whatever we needed to do to get Clovis accredited as Clovis Community College.

>> Carlene Tinker: And that happened when? About three years ago?

>> Debbie Ikeda: That happened in 2015.

>> Carlene Tinker: OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: We became Clovis Community College.

>> Carlene Tinker: Four years ago.

>> Debbie Ikeda: So I stayed on for one more year to make sure I had all the processes in place because when you start a new college you have to put things in place with the state chancellor's office to make sure you're getting your funding properly and to make sure all the data was getting reported properly because the district then had to break us off. The advantage we had was we had been doing this separation for years because we always knew we were going to break off. So our funding stream was always separate. So and our student services was the difficulty because our funding for student services went through Reedley College and then we got a portion. And the way the state funds you is based on the number of students you're serving in these different programs. Well we in some cases we did not -- well, we didn't have an OP&S program. So we had no EOPNS students so we started from scratch. But the others -- we had our own DSPS program and disabled student services program, etc. And so I was able to make sure we got our adequate funding for those programs. For EOPNS we started from scratch. But I hired a really good person, Kelly Tibay, to build that program up and within six months we went from zero students to a hundred students. So our base was a hundred and I just heard yesterday it's up to 400 students. So from 2016 to now, 2019, we went from 100 to 400 students. So that's a great job. She's --

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, that sounds really wonderful. Yeah. So when did you actually retire?

>> Debbie Ikeda: I retired in August of 2016.

>> Carlene Tinker: Sixteen! Oh.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And I ran for the board in November of 2016.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's the board of trustees?

>> Debbie Ikeda: The board of trustees of the state [inaudible] community college district. So that's the district I work for. And I ran to get rid of the trustee who represented my college area because when I was taking the college through the accreditation process his behavior with the accreditation team almost sunk us.

>> Carlene Tinker: Ooh.

>> Debbie Ikeda: He -- the team, they make several visits through this process and during one of the visits they had told the board of trustees they made a recommendation you need to delegate authority to the chancellor and stop micromanaging. And they had made this the year before so now they're coming for the final team visit to accredit us as a college. And they meet with the trustee in groups. You can't meet with more than three at a time otherwise you're violating the Brown Act. So they're meeting with two other trustees and they ask one of the trustees -- him, the guy representing my college area -- so, trustee Patterson, what have you done to improve in this area of delegating authority to the chancellor and not micromanaging? He has a stack of paper about, you know, a foot high. And he tells him, well I didn't have to do anything because your recommendation was wrong. And he's telling this to the people who made the recommendation to the team who's going to recommend us to be accredited. And I'm -- and he spends a half an hour telling them why they made a mistake. And then the other guy was even worse. I won't tell you what he said but he was terrible. And so the team leader -- because they were the last two in the [inaudible] district office -- comes out to meet with me for the exit interview and I'm waiting in the chancellor's office. And the chancellor comes in and says, I just saw one of the trustees and apparently he told them some bad words and left the interview because they don't know what they're doing, he told them. And I said, oh my gosh, we're not going to get accredited. But the team chair came in to meet with us and said, we understand you do not control your elected boards -- because they're elected by the people -- so we're not holding you accountable for their behavior. But you still have three board members who do not understand their role. And we are going to make a recommendation but that's not going to hurt the college but the college is fine. You did everything you needed to do. And I'm like -- whew! [Laughter] And the exit interview was

probably one of the best I've ever heard. At the exit interview, of course the whole college is there. And the team is sitting up in the front in the team chair. And the whole team stood up and gave our college a standing ovation.

>> Carlene Tinker: Wow.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Which I've never seen in an exit interview. But I could tell we were going to get accredited at that point.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, that's wonderful. Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And at the June meeting, we were accredited. June 15th. So we knew. So that fall we knew we could immediately start. And we changed our name from Clovis Community College to [inaudible] Community College.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: A lot of people still know us as Willow International because there's an interesting story on that. As you know, the campus is located at the corner of Willow and International.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And when we were going to name that campus, the mayor at the time was Mayor Allanachi. He said, if you call that anything with the name -- it's on the Fresno side of Willow. So he said, if you call it anything with Clovis in it, I am going to come out against your bond measure. Well, our local bond was going to build our facilities. Right? So they said, well we can't call it Clovis anything. So they called it Willow International. So it said that -- with the understanding that down the road we would change the name once it became a college. So I had this whole committee of community members and staff, etc. to come up with a name. And we came up with five names and they took these five names to the board of trustees. At the time I was not on the board. And the five names they came up with -- one was North Valley Community College or something. One was Clovis Community College. Well, the Madera and the Reed and the Fresno board of trustees members were saying, well we think you should call it North Valley Community College because they also hated Clovis. I don't know why people hate Clovis but they did. And so the Clovis member trustee said, I'll tell you what. Madera is further north than Clovis so we'll save that name for Madera. Well, we were meeting in Madera at that time and the Madera community was there and they all stood up and said, no! Because they want Madera to be named Madera Community College.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah!

>> Debbie Ikeda: They don't want North Valley Community College. And the trustee was [inaudible] was saying, well, see? Nobody wants that name, not even people here. So some of the other trustees who were on there when -- Reedley was at one time called Kings River Community College. And he said, we made the mistake of calling Reedley Kings River Community College -- or changing the name of Reedley to Kings River Community College. We are not going to make that mistake again. And so they voted and they named it Clovis Community College. And in fact, Reedley's name was changed back to Reedley but for about 25 years it was Kings River Community College.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. I remember that.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: I'll be darned.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Because they wanted it to represent people who went there and they were from all along the Kings River. But the county of Reedley hated it -- the city of Reedley -- and they had a big, old billboard right on the corner of Manning and Reed where the college is. And this guy paid for this sign for 25 years. "Home of Reedley College Forever" is what that sign said. [Laughter] And you know, that's not inexpensive to pay for those huge billboards.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah!

>> Debbie Ikeda: So the college made a deal with him that he would help to pay for all the stationary changes if they moved the name back to Reedley College. [Laughter] Anyway, they moved the name back and it will never change again.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh! Well, if we can kind of shift gears a little bit --

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes!

>> Carlene Tinker: your background in administration counseling is amazing. I know you've been recognized several times for that but I want to kind of digress a little bit about JACL.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: You've been very important in that organization and I'd like to hear a little bit about that. Of course, that's how you met your husband.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Right.

>> Carlene Tinker: And that's a very important part of that as well.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Right. Well, so the Fresno Japanese American Citizens League is -- well, JACL is the oldest civil rights organization for Asian Americans in the nation. And so in Fresno, Fresno actually is the oldest chapter in the nation. It started off as the American Loyalty League in 1923. Tomya Tabe, Dr. Tomya Tabe, was the first president. And when I was made president I started going to these JACL meetings for Central California District Council at the time we had ten chapters. And they were all very active because the niseis were very active in JACL. And at that time we were working on getting the redress bill passed, right? This was in the '80s and that was the big push for JACL to get the congress to pass the redress bill to recognize that what was done to the Japanese Americans was wrong and should never have happened. So there were hearings held throughout the country and JACL was very involved in setting up those hearings. And these were Commission on Wartime Relocation Hearings. And they were held throughout the country and one of the hearings was held in Chicago and they got former internees to testify what internment did to the Japanese American community. And in Fresno we were very active in helping to get that bill passed because the first republican cosponsor of that bill was a congressman named Chip Pashayan and he was from Fresno. And the reason we were able to get him to sign was because his family farm abutted Tom Shimasaki's family farm which is down in the Toler area. And his father was very good friends with the Shimasaki family. And they agreed to take over while the family was in camp. And they would go over to this Japanese family for New Years and they were really good friends. And farmers help each other out. They always did. That is the nature of farming. You helped your neighbors out. And so that was true of the Japanese American farmers, most of them here in this area. So when they had to leave, a lot of the -- many of the local farmers agreed to take over their farmers. And so Chip Bashan remembered that. And he -- so when we were trying to get the redress bill passed, we -- he was a republican. We had many JACL republican members and they went to speak to him and they reminded him. So he was the first republican cosponsor on that bill and he was from the Fresno area. So the Fresno chapter has been very active in JACL. And I was one of their presidents along the way and I kind of remain active with the Central California District Council in a lot of different ways. For example, one of the things we did was Fresno is one of the few cities -- it's the only city that had two assembly centers, one at Pine Dale and one at the Fresno Fairgrounds. And so my husband was very involved in helping to get the funding and to

design it and to lead the community to build the Fresno Assembly Center Memorial Project and the Pine Dale Memorial Project. And when we first started the Fresno Assembly Center Project it was really just a fountain and a plaque and then that was it. Well, the Fresno Fair director went to Dale and said, you know, do you think you could update this? So we put a committee together again and it was sponsored by the Central California District Council because we're a 501c(3) to take donations. And we built that up. And Manyo Kunya with the Nisei Farmers League had been to the Livingston Memorial and he saw the names of everyone who was interred there on bronze plates and he wanted to do the same thing at the Fresno Assembly Center. And he said, how much would it take? And so we got some figures and Dale told him. And he said he'll raise the money from his group and he did with the Solana Nisei Farmers. So he raised the money. And Helen Sharakowa and Nancy -- I forget her last name. Nancy. They were responsible for getting the names. And so they went to the Fresno county assessors office or recorders office to try to get the names of everyone who was interned. And of course they charge for that. Well, Janette Ishi at the time was the second in command with Fresno County. And she happened to be in the office when they walked in. And she heard what they were going to do and she goes, oh we can do that for free. So she arranged for them to get the names. And so we have some, you know, more than 5,000 names on there. And we think we've got everyone but we're not really sure because the records weren't that great. But we got everybody we knew and if anyone knows of anybody else they should let us know because we'll add them on but all the names are there in bronze and you'll see people going there and it's just like at the Vietnam Wall in Washington. People take paper and take a pencil and, you know, shade their family's name on it so they can take it back and show their family. But all the family names are on there. And you'll see storyboards up there of pictures of the Fresno Assembly Center that were taken of what it was like back in those times. And you know, you can picture it. They were in barracks in the center of the race track and it was hot, as was Pinedale. And Pinedale Assembly Center, the same thing. We were -- and people held from Pinedale were from Seattle and Washington. Nobody from Fresno was held there. So the Hirabiashi family -- Gordon Hirabiashi's family was there. And his brother --

>> Carlene Tinker: You mean in Pinedale?

>> Debbie Ikeda: In Pinedale. James Hirabiashi's family was held there.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so was Norman [inaudible]'s family held there because they where from -- Sacramento was held there. But people at the Fresno Fairgrounds were from Fresno for the most part.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right, right.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so we were very involved in building both those memorials and the interesting thing about the Pinedale one was when we were doing the dedication we were able to find some people from Fresno who were actually held there because they were originally from Seattle. So they helped with the groundbreaking and Dale's uncle from Sacramento was actually in that assembly center. So he came down for that. And Norman Etta came out for that groundbreaking. And --

>> Carlene Tinker: I was -- I think.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Were you there? It was pouring rain.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh god, yes. [Laughing] I was in the back of the tent.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. And so yeah, anyway, we were involved. So I helped them a lot of with those. But he was really [inaudible] --

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Well, I think the JACL has done wonderful things. You wouldn't happen to have been there when the committee -- I know May Takahashi was in DC for the redress. Were you there?

>> Debbie Ikeda: I was not there. No. I was working. I couldn't go. I mean, no. And I -- no. But I know May went. And Peggy Liggett might have gone.

>> Carlene Tinker: Ah, yeah.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: I know of a couple other people.

>> Debbie Ikeda: But May was very involved in that redress movement and helping to raise money for it.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. And then also she was very instrumental in building the monument and --

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes! Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Which is very moving.

>> Debbie Ikeda: It is very moving.

>> Carlene Tinker: Very moving. Yes.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah.

>> Carlene Tinker: She happened to be the pharmacist who provided the formula for my children when they were born [laughing].

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, May was very involved in the Clovis JACL because she was from Clovis. And she started the Central California Asian Pacific Women's Group.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And we still are around today. And I'm a member of that. I was on the board recently. I just got off. But we raise scholarships for Asian American women to go to college. And we still do that. Every year we give anywhere from ten to 11 to 14 scholarships, thousand-dollar scholarships, \$2,000 scholarships to graduate students, to Asian American women.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Well, you know, Debbie, we're kind of closing in. I don't know if you're tired of talking but I'm looking at your resume. I can't even begin to kind of group all of these things. You've done so many things, not just as a Japanese American for Japanese Americans through JACL but also for all students which I think to me that's even more important, I think. You know, you've had a mission to provide education for kids who are not so fortunate.

>> Debbie Ikeda: I think community colleges will be the key to move people. Education, I believe, is the key to move people. It's mobility upwards. And community colleges -- now we're free. For anyone who cannot afford to come, you will get a board of governors waiver. If you fill out the financial aid form which is free to fill out and you have need, you can come to us for free. You can come to us for two years for free. Every one of those units will transfer to a four-year school. And then you can use your financial aid at the four-year school and take out a loan to finish up there. There is absolutely no reason not to be able to get at least the first two years done.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's right.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And so I think for higher education, I think the community colleges have the greatest mission and that is we take anybody who can come to us and wants to come to us and has the motivation to do what it is they want to do and we'll help you do it.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's right.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And take you as far as you want to go. In fact, we had a woman who was selling burritos on the border, right, barely spoke English, got to Fresno and went to the adult school and would drive by Fresno City College every day saying, if only I can learn enough English to go there. Well, she ended up coming here and she was in our Pointe program. OK!

>> Carlene Tinker: OK, let's continue. As we were talking about the role of community colleges --

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: And you and I both agree how important they are for --

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes, I was telling you the story about this woman. So she ended up in our Pointe program. This is how I know her story. And she was a brilliant, brilliant woman. She did very well, straight A's. She transferred to Berkeley. She had a full scholarship there. And she was giving a commencement address there at Berkeley and someone from Harvard heard her story because she was telling her story. And they said, if you want to do graduate work at Harvard, we will give you a scholarship. Now, what kind of -- where do you get a story like that? This is a woman who barely finished high school -- I don't even know if she finished high school because you can go to community college without a high school degree. And she just -- but she was brilliant. And because of that, you know, at the community college she was able to flourish. So community colleges have a wonderful mission. And we're the only segment of higher education that will take anybody and allow you to go as far as your motivation and abilities will take you. So I think we have a wonderful mission. So even if I were to do it over again I would choose to work at a community college.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah. OK. Our project. Oh, first of all, I want to point out that you and your husband have -- well, you've talked about Dale's work on the assembly center and you and your role as the president of JACL and the first time you came here. Both of you have contributed a great deal to the Japanese American community. And for that, you have been recognized several times. Would you like to tell us some of things that you have been honored with? I think weren't both of you recognized for these things?

>> Debbie Ikeda: We were. Well, he's from Clovis so we were given the Clovis Hall of Fame Award. So we were in that. And Dale's had numerous awards. He's a superior court judge. He recently retired. But he was given an award from the Fresno

Fairgrounds for his work there. He graduated from Stanford and he was given the Asian American Alumnus Award from Stanford. And it's interesting because I'm getting the Asian American Alumni Award from the University of Illinois of April in this year so I'll be going back for that.

>> Carlene Tinker: I'll be darned.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And locally, I guess Marjorie Mason's Top Ten Professional Women and Women's Equality Day Award. And -- you know, a lot of people do a lot of things.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right. Yeah, so not only just for Japanese Americans but you have done so much and been recognized for your contributions to the community.

>> Debbie Ikeda: I think both Dale and I believe in giving back to the community so we have volunteered to serve in a lot of different ways. I've served on Saint Angus board of directors for nine years. I finally termed out after December of this last year. And I served my last year I was the president of the board for Saint Agnus. And I enjoyed doing that because I could see how our students and the cooperation between our community colleges and the hospital work because many of our students do their internship hours at Saint Agnus. And so I'd see many of our nursing students from Fresno City College with their Fresno City College nursing uniforms on working there at Saint Angus. So Saint Angus does a really good job in training our health care workers. And then I served on the Clovis Chamber of Commerce board and I was their president and won their board of directors of the year award while I was the director there. But the Clovis Chamber of Commerce does a lot to promote economic development in that area. And again, it's a good partnership between Clovis Community College and the business community because we have the small development business program for the state at our college and it's our job to promote small business. So by being on the chamber board I'm able to reach out to a number of the small businesses and give -- I was able to give the director of that program information. And Lori Bennett now, who is the president of Clovis Community College, I was able to get her onto the Clovis Chamber of Commerce.

>> Carlene Tinker: Who was that?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Lori Bennett is the new president of Clovis Community College so she now sits on the Clovis chamber board as I termed out of that so we maintain that connection which I think is really good for the college to do. So you want to stay connected. And even though I'm not working, I stay connected to

the community by continuing to volunteer. In fact, I'll be on the San Joaquin Town Hall Board of directors starting in May and they bring guest speakers to the area. And one of the things that we do is to invite high school students to hear this speakers, wonderful speakers, for free. High school students and Fresno State students, not so much community college. So my goal is to get the community colleges bringing their students. I don't think they knew about it because I don't think we were ever invited. I was never told about it when I was president so I know we're not told. So I'm going to make sure our community college students are invited.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, absolutely. Oh and those town hall lectures are just really amazing.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah! I think we bring some wonderful speakers.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh yeah, I've enjoyed every one of them I've attended this year. Well, I've been stressing a lot about your community involvement and I want to kind of get back to the focus of the project which is how do you feel as a Japanese American living in the San Joaquin Valley? How has it been? Has it been positive? Has it been negative? Or just how have you felt?

>> Debbie Ikeda: I think this area has been very welcoming. I haven't seen very much racism in this area. I think it's a very diverse community. Fresno is very diverse. In fact, I think there's 73 different languages last time I heard. It could be more now spoken in this area. And so we're a very diverse community and I think we're very open and welcoming and there's a lot of cooperation between the different communities in working with one another to bring inclusiveness. And that's something, you know, I think we want to continue to work at. For example, we'll go to the Islamic Cultural Center activities. And in fact, Central California District Council and the JACL gave the Islamic Cultural Center an award for being a wonderful civil rights organization and the Islamic Cultural Center in turn gave us the Spirit of Abraham Award. Right after 9/11 JACL was the first organization to come out and speak out against racist acts against the Muslim community and to in fact send Japanese Americans to various Islamic temples to make sure they weren't harmed in any way. I mean, this happened in Chicago. My uncle was telling me about it there and here because and the first public statement was made by -- the director of the National Japanese American Citizens League came out with a public statement saying this should not happen. And it just so happened Norman Etta was secretary of transportation at the time this happened. And President George Bush was president and Norman was

able to remind them what happened to the Japanese Americans and the president was saying, well we're not going to make that mistake again because there had been talk about rounding up Muslim Americans. But thankfully that did not happen. But what I'm starting to see, unfortunately, from our president, our executive offices, is racism coming out publicly. And it's because he's making these statements people are starting to feel it's OK to make racist statements and it's really just an unfortunate time. So you have a number of civil rights groups speaking up against that and trying to ensure things like that don't happen. And in California we're lucky. There seems to be a push against that type of outright racism but that is not necessarily the truth around the United States.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Unfortunately. Now, getting back to your own perception, this is always interesting to me because I think about it personally. How do you identify yourself? Let's say do you identify yourself as an educator first? Or does Japanese American come first? Or how does the role of ethnicity come in your perception?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well I know I'm a Japanese American educator. That's how I consider myself. Even there are people who are starting to call me a politician because I'm a trustee and I was elected. But I would never consider myself a politician. I am always an educator first. And so but we look different. And I am proud of the fact that I am a Japanese American and I think the values that my ancestors brought to this country and their hard work and their value of family are something that I continue to carry on and I hopefully spread it to my own children. I think immigrants bring their cultures with them and they just strengthen the United States. They don't hurt the United States. And immigrants bring hard work and those values to us. You know, anyone who's willing to walk a thousand miles to get here, they're committed to coming here and they're committed to working hard to be successful and you will find most immigrants work hard to be successful.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, well your --

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. And actually I feel very fortunate because I know that I am standing on the shoulders of those who came before me. Were it not for my grandparents and my parents, you know, my husband and I would not be where we are today.

>> Carlene Tinker: That's right. That's right. But your parents and their parents did experience racism and discrimination.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Oh, absolutely.

>> Carlene Tinker: But fortunately we've been able to go beyond that and -- Yeah, you know, as a child in an internment camp sometimes -- I don't feel this way often but sometimes -- I think am I a second class citizen? You know? So I'm wondering if Dale's parents, your parents, you know, they were in camps. How did they feel? You know? You're fortunate that you were not in one.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes, yes. No. I never experienced that.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yes. OK. Let's see. What else do I want to ask you? I always like to ask my interviewees how would they like to be remembered. What is your -- what would you like your legacy to be?

>> Debbie Ikeda: As a person who contributed back to the community in a way that helped other people rise up through the social mobility ranks, really, and make a good life for themselves.

>> Carlene Tinker: And I think you have done that. I think you really have. I really appreciate all that you've done, that you and Dale have done. I look at your resume, I think, my gosh, where did this lady have time to breathe? I mean, it's incredible. How many people have the time for it, have the energy first to do all of this?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well, you know, I had a very supportive family and that helps.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah, yeah. And your kids have been. Very successful and I understand one of them is getting married soon.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes! In may.

>> Carlene Tinker: In May? Yeah, my goodness.

>> Debbie Ikeda: She's marrying a young man of Greek origin who's an attorney, very involved with the Greek orthodox church.

>> Carlene Tinker: Now is this the one who's an attorney, your daughter?

>> Debbie Ikeda: No, this is the pharmacist.

>> Carlene Tinker: The pharmacist, OK.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. He's local. So they're going to stay local which is nice. His family is here. Her family is here. So it's nice.

>> Carlene Tinker: How did they meet?

>> Debbie Ikeda: It's funny. They both went to UC Irvine.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yes.

>> Debbie Ikeda: The same year, same age. And but they did not meet until they came back to Fresno.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh for heaven's sake.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. And they have mutual friends. Well, she went to the United Japanese Christian Church and a guy by the name of Chris Yang went there. His dad is Wally Yang. He's a doctor, a physician at Kaiser. And they live, like, next door to Alexi who is Megan's fiance. And his father is a physician at Kaiser. So the families know each other. And the boys are the same age. They grew up together. So Chris introduced Megan to Alexi.

>> Carlene Tinker: [Laughing] Isn't that funny how --

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah!

>> Carlene Tinker: How that all turns out. Yeah. Well, I had asked you earlier about, you know, the perception of the country when we got out of camp was for us to become just like everybody else. It was this melting pot. And I just talked to somebody else recently who grew up in Fowler and he thought, oh, we were a salad bowl. And I said, well what is that? And I guess it's a new concept.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah. Everybody maintains their own ethnicity and brings those values to the salad and the taste is better when you have all these different flavors. I believe that to be true, too. I think we all maintain our culture to the extent that we can. You know, unfortunately, with us the stress on our parents was to speak English.

>> Carlene Tinker: Right.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Speak English, speak English. Because of the war. And I think the parents thought they would face more discrimination if they spoke Japanese. So they understand Japanese but they don't speak it.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yes.

>> Debbie Ikeda: And as a result we neither understand nor speak it because of course they spoke English to us. So my husband is a little better than I am. He took Japanese in college.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, did he?

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yes. And so he's a little better than I am. I actually went to Japanese school, though, when I was young. But I only went on Saturday's for half a day and we never spoke it at home. I never practiced it. So you know, there was really no chance of learning it. I at least know the alphabet in Japanese and I can pronounce Japanese names which I feel fortunate about because I'm telling you we had this congressional gold medal ceremony where we were honoring 50 World War II vets who couldn't make it to Washington.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh, I remember that.

>> Debbie Ikeda: We brought the gold medals back. Well, we ordered them for them and the spouses to those who had passed to present them with their own gold medals because we thought they should have that honor. And we had this guy who is half Japanese and half white but he's a newscaster to be our emcee. And it was his job to introduce these. Oh my god! He murdered the names! He did not know how to pronounce Japanese names.

>> Carlene Tinker: Oh!

>> Debbie Ikeda: And it just never occurred to us he would not know. But of course he doesn't know. He's never had formal training so he sounded like a Caucasian person pronouncing Japanese names [laughing]. It was, we were starting to laugh and people were starting to laugh because the names were just -- in fact, some of the guys didn't recognize their names.

[ Laughter ]

>> Carlene Tinker: Well, I was in the same. I grew up in a biracial family and the only time I got exposed to Japanese language was my mother never spoke it. She could. But my dad was raised by a caucasian mother and Japanese father and so they never spoke Japanese at home. So I didn't learn it there. And when I saw my mom's dad, I mean, we could not communicate. You know. And I regret that. I do absolutely regret that. Well, anyway, do you have anything that you'd like to say that I have not asked about?

>> Debbie Ikeda: No, I think you've asked everything.

[ Laughter ]

>> Carlene Tinker: I hope you had enough water there, too.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Oh yes. Yes, yes.

>> Carlene Tinker: Well anyway, Debbie, I just really appreciate your participation, your graciousness in agreeing to be an

interviewee. Your story as I said will be uploaded into our new collection for others and particularly for your family to enjoy -- a permanent record. And certainly as a valuable community member it is a very important contribution.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Well thank you, Carlene, for doing this work. Yeah, I'm just sorry we didn't get more of the isseis before they left. I think Ishino maybe even got some of the isseis.

>> Carlene Tinker: Pardon me?

>> Debbie Ikeda: I think Ishino Hasagawa even got some of the isseis.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Yeah. Well --

>> Debbie Ikeda: So at some point when I have time I want to hear some of those.

>> Carlene Tinker: Yeah. Well, if you can help me with that, I'd be -- yeah. I actually got one from Hanford -- not just from Fresno. She's 99 now. She'll be 100 this year. And I got her and -- oh no, she's a Nisei. I'm sorry.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Yeah, I don't think there's any isseis left. Yeah, because the nisseis are in their early 80s.

>> Carlene Tinker: No, they're gone. Yeah, yeah. And so -- anyway, thank you very much.

>> Debbie Ikeda: Alright, you're welcome.