

West Fresno Chinatown Oral History Project

Nori Masuda (90 years old) Interview

Interviewer(s): Margo McBane, Suzanne Guerra

Location: West Fresno, California

Transcriber: Stephanie Fryslie

Interview Location: Nikkei Service Center, Fresno, California

Date: June 9, 2005

Length of Interview: 90 minutes

Length of Transcript: 59 pages, plus summary

Audio Editor: Margo McBane, Ph.D.; Suzanne Guerra

Nori Masuda was born in California on September 11, 1916, though he isn't sure exactly where. He is Nisei, a second generation Japanese-American. Mr. Masuda grew up in Fresno, the third of nine children. Masuda's parents owned a store which catered to the Japanese population, commonly called the Alley, Japantown or Chinatown. "J Town" is what Masuda and young people of his generation called it. He attended local public schools and always was involved in sports including track, football and baseball. His early life centered around the Buddhist Church, where he attended kindergarten and later Japanese school. As a youth, Mr. Masuda also belonged to the Young Men's Association, also affiliated with the Buddhist Church. He sold Japanese newspapers as a boy. As a high school student he was recruited to participate in the local Sumo wrestling league sponsored by the first generation Japanese American immigrants.

Nori Masuda described the family life as fairly normal up until they were evacuated along with the other Japanese in Fresno and sent to "camp" in Arkansas. He didn't spend much time there because he volunteered to work, and was shipped first to Detroit then to New Jersey. Not long after, he went into the Army to serve his country while the rest of his family remained in the camp.

Masuda was sent to language school in Minnesota so he could act as an interpreter for the U.S. Army. At the end of the war he had an opportunity to translate for the War Crimes Trials in Yokohama, but turned it down for fear of making a mistake and being the cause of someone's death sentence. Masuda was able to work for the military PX and stayed in Japan for several years after the war. This enabled him to reconnect with the branch of his family that remained in the old country, and to send money to his parents.

He returned to an unfamiliar Fresno in the early 50's. The prejudice against the Japanese was still evident to him, even though he had served his country and was a veteran. He purchased a house for his parents, who had been working as field laborers, and was able to help support his younger siblings. The family store, like many other Japanese American businesses, was gone forever. The one job he always wanted, as a carpenter, was out of reach because he was not allowed to join the union.

He worked locally for a time and then went to Los Angeles, to help his brother in his business, where Masuda learned furniture construction and refinishing. When his father died he returned to Fresno and worked for Montgomery Ward, until they closed, and for then a local Bank. After he retired he began making character dolls. These are detailed representations of characters from traditional folklore, Japanese mythology, or theatrical dramas that are in high demand for local cultural exhibitions.

Nori Masuda does not seem to harbor any regrets or hostilities about his internment, despite the drastic changes the war made in his life, and prefers to look at the different opportunities that have been presented to him as an American. He notes the changes that have taken place in Fresno, "...people just don't walk around anymore." He seems to think that people won't come out of their way to live in Fresno though he agreed with his mother, "Fresno is the best place."

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Date: June 9, 2005

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Margo McBane (MM): This is a project for the City of Fresno, on West Fresno Chinatown and we're interviewing Nori Masuda and the day is June 9th 2005, and we're here at the Nikkei Senior Center, and we are going to start our interview with Suzanne Guerra; I'm Margo McBane and Kathy Omachi. So we'll just do this as though you're talking OK?

Nori Masuda (NM): Yes

MM: Alright, so where were you born?

NM: I was born in Fresno.

MM: You were born in Fresno, in what year?

NM: 1916, September 11, 1916

MM: And where were exactly location wise were you born?

NM: I really don't know because, ah, those days there was a lot of mid-wives.

MM: And where did your family live?

NM: Right here in Fresno.

MM: What street?

NM: Right here by Tulare...

MM: Tulare and G or F Street?

NM: No, there was an alley there, our apartment, apartment there, in the alley

MM: Uh huh, OK

NM: Those days the alley was all muddy yet

MM: It was all muddy, it wasn't cemented?

NM: There wasn't concrete or asphalt or nothing.

MM: Uh huh.

NM: Just mud when it rained.

MM: Was that an area that many Chinese or Japanese lived? Was it...

NM: No, all around within this area, walking distance.

MM: Uh huh, were Japanese?

NM: Yes, up to A Street anyway- you know A-B-C?

MM: Right, so up...

NM: Yeah, right in China Alley.

MM: Okay.

NM: I got a picture there

MM: And when did your parents come?

NM: My parents...?

MM: ...to live California?

NM: My dad came about 1898, yeah. And then he worked somewhere in San Francisco, Ventura. Because I know my dad mention something about a big earthquake in San Francisco, about 1906.

MM: And when was he in Ventura?

NM: About 1906, yes. And then he came into Fresno about uh....

(tape stopped & started)

MM: So Nori, what prefecture did your father come from?

NM: Hiroshima

MM: He was from Hiroshima.

NM: Hiroshima.

MM: And why did he come?

NM: He came out here to work.

MM: And why did he not find work in Japan?

NM: Ah, I think it must have been pretty rough out there, just farming

MM: Was he the first son?

NM: No.

MM: What son was he?

NM: Ah, he was the second I think.

MM: Okay

NM: Cause, uh, but the older brother was here too.

MM: He had come earlier?

NM: Earlier...

MM: Okay

NM: ...then he had a business already and...

MM: Do you know what his business was?

NM: Yes, had a bookstore and all the Japanese comb, toothbrushes, and things like that. And, uh I don't know how they got it but they had it. And Japanese, you know, candies and all that.

MM: So, was it a store here?

NM: Right here on China Alley.

MM: On China Alley, where his brother...

NM: Yes, 921. The building is still there.

MM: 921 huh?

NM: Yes

MM: You'll have to show us where the building is...

NM: Yes, it's a two story building right now, we'll go out there a little later.

MM: OK, it's very exciting

NM: OK, then we'll see some of the pictures.

MM: OK, wait, wait we're going to get up to when you were born, so how did your father meet your mother and how did she come here?

NM: Oh, I don't know. I think they knew each other; anyway he went back to Japan...

MM: She wasn't a picture bride-she was a picture bride?

NM: I think he went out there and married, then brought her here.

MM: And then he brought her.

NM: Then, this was about 1908, or around there. And then 1910, he took over his older brother's business. He bought him out, yes. Then our first child was born

MM: And are you the first?

NM: No, I'm the third one. And the first on was one year old, this was about 1910 now and he (dad's brother) went back to Japan for good. My dad took over. He had a son one year old, by 1910 anyway- and the uncle just took him back. Then didn't bring him back

MM: Oh, he took the son?

NM: Yes.

MM: The one year old

NM: One year old. He was supposed to bring him back, and they waited and waited, then we were born. All together we had nine siblings.

MM: Nine siblings, how many brothers and how many sisters?

NM: Five boys and four girls.

MM: Four girls, and you're the third.

NM: I'm the third one, then I had two sisters after me, and another sister, and then a brother, sister and brother.

MM: OK, and what school did you go to?

NM: I went to Lincoln School, Lincoln.

MM: Lincoln.

NM: Lincoln, yes..

MM: Is that where most of the Japanese went?

NM: Most of them went there, yeah. And when I first went I started with the Buddhist Church here, and they had a kindergarten there. And my brother and I went to kindergarten there for a while, then after that we went to Lincoln.

MM: Was there a boarding school at the Buddhist Church?

NM: There was a boarding dormitory there

MM: Did you...

NM: But no, we had a store and we had an apartment

MM: Was your apartment above the store?

NM: No, no, we had it separate...

MM: Separate?

NM: Yeah, yeah. Later on we found other places. It was just a two bedroom and one kitchen, it was...

MM: Two bedrooms, one kitchen-was there a living room?

NM: No, no, no, no.

MM: It was just two bedrooms and a kitchen.

NM: A kitchen.

MM: Was there a dining room?

NM: No, no, no dining room.

MM: And this was for eleven people?

NM: No, no we weren't born then. Just (pause)... I can remember about the fourth one, my older brother and myself, and two sisters.

MM: And that's how you lived in that..

NM: Yes, about that time.

MM: OK

NM: And then eventually the family got bigger. We had to move out, then we had a home at the, close to the Church, but we moved from there. And that place we moved was on Mariposa Street.

MM: On Mariposa?

NM: Yes, right close to, and then I...

MM: Was that an area Japanese could buy housing?

NM: We couldn't buy a house.

MM: You had to rent

NM: My dad, you know there was a law saying that we can't buy.

MM: Can't buy

NM: So we weren't old enough yet so we had to just work and just...

MM: So you rented a house?

NM: Rented a house, yeah.

MM: OK, and then when you... [*Aside to others*] Are you guys going to come in and help do this interview?

(discussion in background)

MM: So, when, in your elementary school you were, did you belong to any clubs at school, or where they at the Buddhist Temple?

NM: The club was all at church

MM: At church, uh huh

NM: Yes, we had a boys club, you know.

MM: Had a boys club.

Suzanne Guerra (SG): What was the name of the boys club?

NM: It was called the YMB-Young Men of the Buddhist Church.

MM: The Young Men of the Buddhist Church

NM: Buddhist Church, YM....

SG: Was there a club for girls too?

NM: Yeah, they called them Lumbini. Yeah there was, yeah

SG: And your sisters, did they belong to uh...

NM: Yes, we all belonged to the Church's school, from...

SG: to MM - Did you ask Nori if he attended Buddhist School or Japanese Culture School?

MM: He said he had gone to kindergarten at the Buddhist School

NM: Yeah, I went to kindergarten at the Buddhist Church. There was an American teacher already..

MM: Oh.

NM: And then, that's why, when we went to first grade, it was kind of, easily I went...

MM: Since she was teaching American kindergarten at the Buddhist Temple...

NM: An American lady...

MM: I see. So did you go to, also did you go to Japanese school?

NM: Yes. We had to go Monday through Friday, everyday, five days a week, one hour.

MM: What time was that?

NM: Between 4:30 to 5:30. After we finish our American school, we used to come, but used to argue with the family, we don't want to go. And they ball us out and say "you got to go, you got to know your language."

MM: It was a language school?

NM: Yes.

MM: Was it a religious school also?

NM: No, it was just a regular Japanese school. They were pretty good teaching us that, but we just didn't want to learn because we said "What's the use of learning, we don't, we're not going to go back to Japan" you know. And English is, and we were busy with the English school, we did homework and all that. So the Japanese class was secondary. Whether we went or not it was we had to pay our tuition.

MM: You had to pay extra. And was it also on Saturday?

NM: No, just Monday through Friday, in Fresno. But you know during, the outskirts of Fresno, Parlier, Fowler, Selma-they had Japanese school too, but they had it only on Saturday. Half a day, that's all, one day.

MM: But you had to go...

NM: In Fresno we had five days.

SG: Why did you have it five days here?

NM: Well, every afternoon, after school, just like

(discussion in background)

MM: There's one hour a day four five days. So they just did it four hours in one day.

NM: But you know we used to argue with the family, "No use going, we not going to use Japanese anyway, this is all English..."

SG: Well, how did your parents feel about that because you...

NM: They were against us. They say "you got to go" then they forced us. So I went up to about sixth grade. Then during high school, you know, I played basketball, football, track and all that. So we can't come back to, you know, after school. So we didn't go, so we played a lot of hooky, but they didn't say nothing. Yeah.

MM: So, when you were in elementary school what was, did your parents speak much English?

NM: No, they hardly spoke English, but I don't know how they did their business, you know, we had all kinds of things. Of course there was a lot of Japanese in the twenties, you know, a lot of immigrants. They come through from labor camps, they come through to Fresno to work for grapes, this and that, then they keep going. But we had a lot of Spanish people come in during the season, you know, so that helped a lot

MM: So you didn't just have Japanese clients in the store...

NM: No. Oh yeah, you couldn't, depend on it. In fact, the Alley was full of people because there was a lot of things to do there. They had gambling, and they had Japanese restaurant, like that...they had about three or four of them right in the Alley there, I could show it to you a little later where it was...

MM: What happened to the Alley?

NM: Well, the business started to go bad because nobody, and then started to develop on "F" Street, so everybody kept coming out this way. Then "F" Street was the main street then, so we...

MM: When was that?

NM: This was about 1929, you know when Depression.

MM: Depression, yeah.

NM: Yeah, we had to move out, we moved to another place, but...

MM: The store moved?

NM: Yes, we moved the store about two times, then we finally found, we had a good spot there on "F" Street. And there used to be a Lyceum Theater there. Then there's one on Tulare Street, there's Ryan Theater, two Japanese theaters, and we had another theater right in front here, across the street. It used to be a Japanese Hall they called it, but they didn't use it for movies, except for some movie company. They bring a Japanese movie in there you know....

MM: What was the name of that? It was just called Japanese Hall?

NM: Yes, Japanese Hall

MM: But the Ryan and the Lyceum you thought were Japanese theaters?

NM: No, no, that was all American-cowboy, comedy and all that. Regular movies so...

MM: What year was that?

NM: This was from 1920 on, yeah.

SG: I was going to ask you about when you and your friends, say, would go out to a movie, or kind of recreation, do you and your sisters go out to movies, or your parents, did they go to movies, or did they go to theaters?

NM: No, they hardly went, they just stayed, they did the business, because those days they opened, my mother used to open about, by nine anyway, yes. And then they...

MM: How long was the store open?

NM: Til midnight.

MM: Midnight.

NM: Midnight, yeah.

SG: And she would be there all day long?

NM: All day, yeah.

SG: Were you expected to help in the store, you and your sisters?

NM: No we were all going to school then you know. So what help we did of course...

MM: Who took care of you?

NM: Oh, my father and mother, but uh...

MM: They were working in the store

NM: No, they did business by pictures, amazing. You know our last store was at the, next to Lyceum Theater and we had all kinds of foods. And then we had ice cream, anything you can, candy..

SG: A variety store?

NM: Yeah, then the main thing was because of, thank you, the movies we had bought a popcorn machine.

MM and SG: Ohhhhhh

NM: That was a good seller, so we had a place to warm the peanuts and sunflower seeds and that was one of the best sellers.

MM: Who would watch you while they were selling all this stuff? When you were a child?

NM: Well, they watched me, yeah

MM: You had to stay in the store? You mostly played in the store?

NM: Well, we stayed at home, yeah and we watched the store like that when they had to do, and my mother used to cook. My dad used to go-you know the Depression year- my dad used to go out and do gardening work. Then we, I can remember getting a bicycle. Then we used to go help my, I used to help push the mower, you know, they had that mower.

SG: A push mower.

NM: Push mower, yeah

MM: And your dad didn't have a car.

NM: No car, bicycle, both ride the bicycle.

MM: So you had to carry the mower on the bike?

NM: No, they had it at the home there, so.

MM: So your mom ran the store and your dad did gardening.

NM: Yeah, ran the store.

SG: Where did your father do the gardening? Was he working in this neighborhood or other parts of Fresno?

NM: Well my dad was at the store too you know. But a lot of times he went out. Then after, (pause, halting) when we grew up a little older we leased the land-you know where Kearney Avenue is. We leased the land and then used to raise vegetables on there and I used to go out there and help them all, yeah

SG: How much land did you lease?

NM: Oh about four acres I guess, but we didn't use all that, my dad was just doing it too hard. We raised strawberries, you know, tomatoes.

MM: And you would sell them at the store?

NM: So I used to help, my mother ran the store like that.

MM: No, but you would sell the vegetables?

SG: Where would you sell the vegetables?

NM: No, vegetables we sold through the market, yeah.

SG: So which market did you sell them to?

NM: Ah, we used to, there used to be a Chinese market here on "C" Street. We used take it there and sometimes we took it to free market there by the City Hall, yeah. They used to be outside there on the street they used to sell them too

SG: There were fresh vegetables?

NM: Then we used to, yeah, and then we...

SG: During the Depression?

NM: Yeah, during the Depression. And then during that time we sold at the, there was a lot of Italian grocery stores on Fresno Street, like, -what the heck? (pause) I went to school with them- there was about, Italian-Cetti's? God I forgot their names now, there was a lot of Italian...

MM: It might come to you.

SG: Was that an Italian neighborhood?

NM: Italian, well you know Italian was right there, and German people was right there on Elm Street. I used to deliver newspapers too- Japanese newspapers. I call it Rafushimpo that's an LA paper.

MM: Rafushimpo?

NM: Uh huh, and then there's, they call it Shinsekai, or rather Asahishimbo.

MM: Where was that from?

NM: San Francisco.

MM: Oh.

NM: It's not there now.

NM: But I had two deliveries, two deliveries, so I got two pay there.

SG: Oh, you had two paper routes?

NM: Yeah, two routes

SG: That's a lot of work

NM: Well, I got it all memorized and...

MM: On your bike?

NM: On my bike, and I...

MM: When you were in school did you have friends that were from other, like Italians or ...

NM: Oh yeah.

MM: Were most of your friends Japanese?

NM: Mostly Japanese, cause after school we'd come back, you know.

MM: And what would you do with your friends?

NM: Oh, school friends?

MM: Uh huh.

NM: Well I'd see them the next day.

MM: No, but what would you do after school? You said mostly we came back.

NM: Yeah.

MM: And what would you do?

NM: Well we went to Japanese school, like that. Then, uh, we used to play baseball before our start.

MM: Where did you play the baseball?

NM: Right there on our ground.

MM: Temple?

NM: Temple. They got softball, and then... There's a lot of other places we played. Any empty lot there's all over we played around Fresno.

MM: And when you were in high school then that's what some of these pictures are is your high school pictures...

NM: High school, yeah

MM: High School.

NM: Then, you know, you go out for sports

MM: So you were on track?

NM: I went out for track, I went out for football and ...

MM: Uh huh, oh here you had basketball, football and track?

NM: Track, yeah

MM: ...and wrestling?

NM: No, oh I did Sumo, Japanese Sumo.

MM: But that wasn't at school?

NM: No, not at school.

MM: Was that at...

NM: This is afterward.

MM: This was a sport at the Temple?

NM: At the local, because first generation, they like Sumo, so they want more, uh, younger...

MM: Did they have a ring?

NM: Yes.

MM: You had a ring?

NM: We had a ring.

MM: Where was that located?

NM: That was located right there next to the same block as the Buddhist Church.

[SG brings out redevelopment map]

NM: I could show you exactly where it was, at the ring, I got some picture.

MM: Do you have some pictures?

NM: of Sumo.

MM: Ok wait, is this a bigger one? (referring to map of neighborhood) Here, we're going to have you right here, this is kind of hard to see. This is locally, this is, oh here.

NM: Here.

MM: This is yours and this is ours.

NM: Ok.

MM: But we can't take this with us, so we write these in, so

NM: See here's the block, this is Kern Street.

MM: Uh huh.

NM: Kern and "E" Street .

MM: I see.

NM: "E" Street here. This is our church, and there was three Japanese churches right on each corner.

MM: Okay

NM: One

MM: Japanese church? Oh there's a First Congregational, a Fresno Buddhist

NM: Yes.

MM: What was third one?

NM: Methodist..

MM: There was a Fresno Methodist.

NM: There were three of them. See there on this corner, our church was right here, and Congregation Christian Church was right here.

MM: I see, and then over next to the Buddhist Church was a tennis court and the softball diamond

NM: Yeah, right here is the diamond, and right here, there was about three homes here, resident homes.

MM: Resident homes.

NM: And then, (pause) Right on this corner, here was a Sumo place.

MM: Was a Sumo place, so that would be on Inyo Street and, let me see what street is that? That's like the Alley between "D" and "E" Street.

NM: "E" Street.

MM: Yeah, that's the alley way, between "D" and

NM: No, it's this corner here.

MM: Oh it was there? It was on "D" and Inyo, okay.

NM: Yeah.

MM: It was where the softball diamond is.

NM: It was right here.

MM: Okay, okay, so most of the Japanese were in...

NM: Were in this area.

MM: In this area, but more lived, more down here with the business district up here?

NM: Well the home, where they stayed

MM: Yeah, here was the home

NM: Was all over.

MM: All over here. But this area would be the Chinese area, around Tulare and Mariposa?

NM: Well there was quite a bit too

MM: There was.

NM: Yeah.

MM: Ok, I see, I see .

NM: They were scattered.

MM: Okay. How would you get to Lincoln School?

NM: Walked.

MM: You walked or biked?

NM: No.

MM: Did you bicycle?

NM: No bicycle, all walking.

MM: Okay, okay. How did your parents talk to the school people? The teachers, did they ever, when you had problems, did they ever talk to the school?

NM: Well, we didn't have problems, we never went out of line.

SG: Your report cards or anything like that? Or did they ever have to talk to the teacher about the school?

NM: Well sometimes we get a bad grade they'd come after us, yeah. You got to study hard.

MM: How did the teacher talk to you parents if your parents...

NM: Well they can't speak English, so we can't ask them to help us, yeah. So of course my brother, we talk among ourselves too sometimes. Actually, I talked to my classmates a lot of times, yeah.

SG: Did you help each other out that way?

NM: Oh yeah, yeah.

SG: I was wondering too. I noticed that there was a hospital nearby so, were there doctors- Japanese doctors here?

NM: Yes, yes. I have a picture of Okenobi Hospital and it's located on Mono and "E" Street

MM: Mono and "E" is the hospital? Okay.

NM: Yes

SG: So you couldn't go to the general hospital?

NM: No

SG: That would be here (referring to map) at the hospital

NM: Wait a minute, Mono-wait a minute now, Mono...

MM: and "E," is it here?

NM: This corner here

MM: Oh okay, did it in pencil-good thing. This is the hospital?

SG: Yeah, 708 "E" Street.

MM: And then down here you were saying is the Sumo...

NM: Sumo, yes right there (referring to map)

MM: Okay.

NM: That's all half block. Yeah, they had judo place there too.

MM: Oh they had judo?

NM: Yeah.

SG: Who was teaching you about the wrestling or the Sumo

NM: There was older people .

MM: Nisei?

NM: They're, uh, teaching us.

MM: Uh huh.

NM: So they flip us over, we learn how to flip and how to tumble, yeah. But you know, it's good to learn anything, cause falling, we roll. I got hit on a bicycle twice, from the car, from the back. And I just jump and then I just flipped over and I roll, so I didn't get hurt.

MM: That's good.

NM: A couple of times, yeah.

Tape stops and starts

MM: *(indistinct-reference to map)*

NM: This is our store.

MM: This is your store and who is this, your sister?

NM: Yes.

MM: And what was her name?

NM: Dorothy

MM: And your mothers name?

NM: Tatsu.

MM: Tatsu?

NM: Masuda.

MM: Masuda, and what's your fathers name?

NM: Matashiro, that's a long name

MM: Matashiro

NM: Oh yeah, that's good.

MM: Okay, Suzanne here's the first one. *(referring to photos)* It's his store.

SG: Okay

MM: And ...

NM: Sold all Japanese deal, candy and all that, Japanese goods here.

MM: So it's all Japanese goods. Where would your parents shop for clothing? Would they order it or would they go down to Fresno, downtown Fresno, to get clothing? Or could they get it here in Fresno?

NM: Oh, clothing?

MM: Uh huh, for you and your family to wear

NM: For us, ah well. When we were a little small it was just local. They had Japanese dry goods store. But once we got to know a little something about clothing we went downtown.

MM: Downtown. Where, but your parents didn't speak English, so did you shop with them?

NM: No, we went alone.

MM: Oh okay, and where did they get their clothing?

NM: Oh they got it through-they made their own.

MM: Oh, they made it.

NM: Yeah.

MM: They sewed it, I see.

NM: The mother did. But dad, he had to buy his. He ordered, they had a tailor then.

MM: I see, a tailor here in Chinatown?

NM: Yes, they had two tailors.

MM: And what were the tailors? Do you remember who they were?

NM: Yeah

MM: What were their names?

NM: Momosai, and Gotiyang

MM: And where were their tailor stores?

NM: One of them did it at home on "E" Street, where he lived. He measured, then he cut it up and then he sewed it at his home. And we had one, Gotiyang, right across the street here.

MM: Okay, on "F" Street

NM: On "F" Street, yeah

MM: I see, okay so lets look at these. These look like your sports...

NM: This is Japanese (pause)... you know the first generation they love Sumo.

MM: Sumo, so that's, this is...

NM: So they want us to come out, the young men. And a lot of people don't want to go out, they don't want to be naked, and in loin cloth and wrap. But they come to my, our store, and they keep on asking my dad, and my dad tell me. And I say okay, okay-but I went, you know.

MM: Were these mostly-what junior high school did you go to?

NM: Junior high school?

MM: Uh huh.

NM: Edison.

MM: Edison.

NM: Edison Junior High School.

MM: And then what high school?

NM: Edison, and then I graduated from Fresno High School

MM: Okay, and is this when you were at Fresno High School? When you were doing the Sumo...?

NM: No, that's before, when I was freshman and sophomore.

MM: At college?

NM: No.

MM: Freshmen in high school?

NM: Uh huh.

MM: So you were at Fresno High School but you did this (Sumo wrestling) after school?

NM: Yeah, we practiced at night, at nighttime, and then when they have a tournament, see, it's like Fresno, Parlier, Selma. They all have it see.

MM: So you would, those would be the teams that you'd wrestle with?

NM: Yeah, there's a tournament

MM: Was it only in the Valley, or was it also Los Angeles?

NM: There, Los Angeles had it, San Francisco had it, San Jose had it, so...

MM: Did they wrestle with Valley teams, the San Jose team?

NM: No.

MM: The Valley was only the Valley

NM: No, the Valley. Okay, they get the best team, and then they go to LA, or San Francisco, Sacramento.

MM: Oh, so they get the best of the wrestlers of the Valley?

NM: Yeah.

MM: ...and go to San Fran, Ohhhhhh, okay. So, and which one are you here in this picture? Are you in this picture?

NM: I got one of them.

MM: But these aren't you?

NM: No.

MM: Okay.

NM: These are somebody else's boy.

MM: Okay, so...

NM: These are older.

MM: This is from the 1920's?

NM: 20's

SG: These are from the 20's?

NM: Yeah.

MM: And you did this only for two years? Your freshman and sophomore year in high school?

NM: About three years I wrestle.

MM: Okay.

NM: Yeah, because my school did most of it. You know, basketball, like that

MM: Did more American sports?

NM: Yeah.

MM: And this, are you in this picture?

NM: I was in here.

MM: Okay.

NM: Right here.

MM: Oh my goodness, what a handsome man you are. Wow, where did you get these pictures from the 20's? Where did you get these?

NM: Kamiyama Studio.

MM: Oh from the Studio.

NM: Yeah. He died and his brother's here, and he said that anybody that wants the picture pick it up. So I picked it up.

MM: Where you the only person to pick up pictures?

NM: No, no a lot of guys picked it up before I did. I wish I would know earlier, I would have taken the whole thing.

MM: Oh my goodness, yeah, we've see the...Is that the-what studio was that? Kawahashi, which studio was the photographer from?

MH: Kamiyama

MM: Kamiyama, I haven't see that one

NM: Kamiyama and there's another studio named George Studio.

MM: George Studio, and these, and when were these people doing, they were doing photography in 20's and 30's?

NM: Yes.

MM: I see.

NM: 20's. Yeah they started in 20's already.

MM: Okay, so lets walk through some of these other pictures. These are – what's this one?

NM: These are the old timers. That's wayyyyyy earlier, these are in the 20's see. But these are the main men that they loved wrestling.

MM: These are the men that loved wrestling.

NM: Yeah.

MM: Sumo wrestling.

NM: Yeah, they are all from Japan see.

MM: Oh, and these were, but this wasn't from here? These men are...?

NM: Yeah, they are local people. This man used to own a Japanese restaurant

MM: He did, and who is this one?

NM: Nagaoka-he used to be a policemen. He used to guard a lot of movies...

MM: Where there Japanese police? It was private police?

NM: Private, yeah.

MM: Okay, at the movie theater?

NM: At the movie theater.

MM: Were there dance halls here for Japanese?

NM: No, no dance halls.

MM: No dance halls.

NM: They were against it. But they had a hard time convincing our family that we got to learn dancing-everybody dances. And when you go to school we have our Junior-Senior prom, like that, we tell them. So we practice dancing with a group.

MM: With your group, at the Buddhist Temple?

NM: No, well sometimes were at the Temple there, we got a room, sometimes at somebody's home.

MM: I see.

NM: We play phonograph player, and then we learn how to dance.

MM: And who was this man? (referring to photo)

NM: A lot of them I don't know.

MM: Oh you don't.

NM: I don't know, yeah.

MM: You seem to know a lot.

NM: But I know these two.

MM: Those two. How about, you don't know these two?

NM: No I don't know.

MM: Now, what were some of the celebrations of the community, the Japanese community? You have the Obon...

NM: Yeah, Obon.

MM: And what, can you describe what is the Obon festival?

NM: Yeah, Obon in memory of people that passed away. And they'll be back and then going to join us dancing and all that, and...

MM: What time of the year is that?

NM: It's in the summer, usually in July, I think it's going to be July 9th. And this year they say let's make it bigger and better, so that they're working on it though. You should come and see it.

MM: And why do they have the lights go down the river?

NM: Oh, that's in memory of your family, somebody that passed away. They'll come back again, you know, like that, so they have that....

MM: And what are some other celebrations?

NM: That's in August. But ah, see then Garden does that.

MM: Oh, I see, that's different, that's not part of the Obon?

NM: No, it's sort of same meaning, yeah, but it's in memory of the people that passed away, yeah. But, that floating boat, they do that at the, by the Shinzen Garden group. They gave it to the American people, and they're doing, now they're doing a good job.

MM: Yeah I heard about it. Now what were some other, did you have other winter festivals down here?

NM: Not in winter.

MM: Spring or fall?

NM: Well, they have, oh, the churches.

MM: Is there New Years?

NM: New Years is always. Before it always used to be a big thing, but you know the first generation, second generation, they were all...

MM: Here's another older one, these are the Issei who were the promoters of the, ah, wrestling, Sumo wrestling. Okay, and then these are from the 20's, he's actually not in these. These were from a professional photography studio.

[Pause and change tape]

MM: Okay, and so you said at New Years, there was a Japanese New Year, is there a Japanese New Year?

NM: Well, ah, New Year, we were all celebrating at home. We had a little, special dinner.

MM: Oh, a special dinner

NM: Before, they used to make it for about three or four days. People come in and visiting, but they don't do that any more.

MM: What kind of dishes would be at this special dinner?

NM: Well they got all kinds of vegetables, like you know the fish, Kamaboko, that's a fish cake. And then they got Japanese potato, and...

MM: and these would be special dishes for New Years?

NM: Yeah, and then they used to have a lobster on top, one lobster. They'd take all the meat out and they make all kinds of salad with that. And then of course there's chicken teriyaki all cut up. All full of them, you know, with the other things too. So when people come they usually eat and they drink Saki or something you know .

MM: This went on for three or four days?

NM: Yes, but not today, a lot of people is quitting.

MM: Is that the third, Sansei?

NM: Cause nobody goes and visits anymore. And nobody want to cook, so... (chuckles).

MM: You're going to visit and there's no food? (laughter)

NM: Yeah, but, before every home used to make something and they had it all ready.

MM: Sounds like they need you to restart that. So what are these pictures of? This was...

NM: Oh these were all the programs they used to have.

MM: Well, this was what I was trying to find out. So they had Japanese theater, did they have a ...

NM: Right across, there was a Japanese hall.

MM: What kind, like a Kabuki, or was it a...

NM: No, it's dancing or they had some kind of play too.

MM: Is this was Japanese, this was at the Japanese hall?

NM: Hall.

MM: The Japanese Hall, I see. And this was the whole community that sponsored this, or was this...?

NM: The whole community.

MM: The whole community.

NM: It's a Japanese Association, they have another...

MM: They have a Japanese Association for the whole, is that for all the Japanese?

NM: All Japanese.

MM: When did that get started?

NM: Oh, way back in the 20's.

MM: The Japanese Association?

NM: Oh yeah, yeah.

MM: Was that all Japanese Americans?

NM: These are all old, 1925, see you can tell they're old. But I can still, I know him, Kofu (pause)? I think this is Nagao, and this is Ariya. He used to be a barber here.

MM: A barber? Ariya?

NM: Yes and this is the tailor, Momosai

MM: Momosai the tailor. Okay, and is he the one who had the shop or did it ...

NM: No he's the one that had at home.

MM: At home. Okay, so these were actors in the theater, the local people,

NM: Well?

MM: Or you don't remember

NM: No, they act alright, but they're all amateurs.

MM: (chuckles) community theater?

NM: Okay, these are a group of ladies. They had a dance, they had a big stage.

MM: They had a huge stage!

NM: Huge, and they had all kinds of scenery too, just like a theater. I don't know how they ever did it.

MM: What ever happened to it?

NM: Well...

MM: Was it torn down?

NM: Well the, there wasn't too much to do with that thing , so, they rented it out to after...

MM: Is this after the war?

NM: Yes.

MM: Uh huh, I see, I see, up to the war it was used.

NM: Yes.

MM: I see and what is this?

NM: This is a (pause)

MM: This is a temple?

NM: Our Lady's...

MM: This is a Buddhist church?

NM: Yeah, they just took it at the church, at the church there. I think they learn to sew, "My Lady's Sewing Class."

MM: Oh, was it American sponsored?

NM: No, it was sponsored by this lady-she's the teacher

MM: What was her name? Do you remember?

NM: God. I don't remember.

MM: She's a Japanese woman though?

NM: Yeah.

MM: I see, Was that sponsored by the temple?

NM: No, no, she just opened her business right across the street.

MM: Oh, she was a seamstress?

NM: Yes, a seamstress.

MM: Across the street.

NM: In fact, we had about three or four. She was teaching dressmaking.

MM: You had three or four teachers of dressmaking. Yes, I see.

NM: Because some second generation they knew how to do it too so.

MM: I see, so but this one really doesn't have a date on it. So I guess, it looks like it must be in the twenties or thirties, it doesn't – what does that sign say?

NM: It says "My Lady's" that's the name of the school

MM: Oh, it was called "My Lady's"

NM: Yeah.

MM: Okay, alright. Suzanne we have more here. *(handing over photo)*

SG: Okay

MM: And then what is this?

NM: That's the hospital – Okanagi

MM: This is the Okanagi Hospital?

NM: Yeah

MM: Uh huh, Okay

NM: *(aside)* Kathy would you get that newspaper for me? Okanagi is the name.

MM: And here's the hospital *(handing over photo to SG)*.

NM: Yeah, that hospital *(pause)*.

MM: Oh, they're trying to save it. That was where the doctor worked?

NM: This is the Bank of Italy (*referring to photo*)

MM: Right.

NM: This Okanagi built that.

MM: Oh I see .

NM: Yeah, and then he borrowed money again. After he got this built, he had a bank. And then Bank of Italy bought it, they run it.

MM: I want her to scan that.

NM: Then...

MM: (*background conversation with SG regarding photo*).

SG: Nori was saying that even though it was Bank of Italy, it had been owned by Okanagi.

MM: Yeah, the Japanese. He bought, the Bank of Italy bought it from him. I see.

NM: Then he opened up a that hospital.

MM: He opened up his own hospital?

NM: Own hospital. And I happened to be there, I stayed there about a month or so.

MM: Why?

NM: I don't know, I was sick.

MM: Was this when you were a child?

NM: I was a kid yeah.

MM: And you don't know why?

NM: I don't know why I'm hopping around. They had me.

MM: They probably didn't know why either.

NM: I don't know why they had me in there.

MM: So this looks like the Japanese Hall. Is that the Hall?

NM: No, no.

MM: What is that?

NM: This is somewhere, a restaurant in, on Broadway.

MM: On Broadway? Oh, so this is...

NM: Broadway used to have a lot. No this is just other Chinatown.

MM: The other Chinatown?

NM: Yeah.

MM: OK, so you don't really know, this is the professional photographers?

NM: I don't know who took it.

MM: So we don't know?

NM: Yeah, yeah, let it go.

MM: This looks like...

NM: This is at Fresno High School .

MM: No-is this from WWI?

NM: No, this is from high school, what do you call it...?

MM: Like the military, like ROTC?

NM: ROTC!

MM: Oh my goodness .

NM: And this is Dr. Taira

MM: Dr. Taira

NM: He was our surgeon, he was our doctor. He passed away about ...

MM: So he went to Fresno High School?

NM: He went to Fresno High School.

MM: He was the doctor for the Japanese

NM: Yes, well, afterwards he went to Cal, and he got to be a doctor. He was main doctor for all Japanese.

MM: Oh really?

NM: When Okanagi was...

MM: For how long? In the 20's and 30's-or the 30's and 40's?

NM: ... 30's, 40's. During evacuation he had a lot to do. He was doing all kind of vaccinations, for the people.

MM: How do you spell his last name?

NM: Taira, T-A-I-R-A

MM: T-A-I-R-A

NM: Taira.

MM: Taira, an interesting name.

NM: And this fellow is a Japanese too. His name is Masumoto or something, I'm not sure now,

MM: Uh huh.

NM: He was a ROTC, he was a captain or something. Anyway, he was a higher rank than him.

MM: Oh, my goodness.

NM: He became a famous. He went back to Japan after high school, and he knew his English, and he was a, sort of a advisor or interpreter for the Emperor Hirohito,

MM: Oh my goodness, on English and American activities?

NM: Yeah, and then I got a letter from him one time. He thanked me for helping him out for doing something. I don't know what I did. These are all something...(referring to photos)

MM: These are all something..

NM: Yeah, performing .

MM: ... at the Japanese Hall ?

NM: Yeah, they all had these, all these were...

(background noise by people walking through room)

MM: Did you go to performances here?

NM: Yes.

MM: You did.

NM: A lot of these I went.

MM: Uh huh.

NM: Yeah, anytime they had any performance, my dad used to push me to go. You know why? They talk in Japanese and they want us to learn Japanese

MM: Oh, so he wanted you to retain the culture, they wanted you to keep the language.

NM: Yeah, yeah.

MM: Have you been back to Japan?

NM: Every year I've been going for 25 years.

MM: But when you first went back, one of the interesting problems is that this Japanese is old Japanese, so when you went back did you have a hard time communicating?

NM: No, I was sent as a GI.

MM: Ohhhhh, okay.

NM: You know, after the war, we were in camp, concentration camp, and then I was working in New Jersey and I got my call, so I had to go to New Jersey, when did I go? Trenton or someplace, and I had to raise my hand, I do.

MM: Was this the, this wasn't the "Yes, Yes, No, No?"

NM: No, no

MM: This was after the war

NM: Yeah, no this was still the war.

MM: Oh you went to New Jersey, you didn't go to camp

NM: No, I went to camp, and then..

(SIDE TWO)

NM: ...the order

MM: No, but I mean you volunteered to go out and work

NM: Oh yes, I volunteered to work, you know they need people to work outside anyway so

MM: But the camps weren't in New Jersey?

NM: No, I went to Detroit first, and then...

MM: So they sent you way far...

NM: Yeah – I was in Arkansas.

MM: I see.

NM: And then I got hurt, so I came back to camp cause I couldn't work, and then...

MM: How old were you by that time?

NM: Oh, I was pretty old already, I was about 25 when went into...

MM: Camp,

NM: Camp, yeah, so I know just about everything, yeah. Then I know Fresno, because I used to deliver newspaper, so I remember everything.

MM: What camp did the Fresno Japanese go to?

NM: First they went to Assembly Center here in Fresno, and we stayed there six months, from May 12th

MM: Where was the Assembly Center located?

NM: Right by the Fairgrounds. And then we couldn't use that grandstand though, just the barracks were built.

MM: Was it the horse barns you were taken to?

NM: Yeah-no the horse barn was all gone anyway

MM: Uh huh.

NM: And they got barracks all there, and then from you know from Ventura to Butler to-I don't know, another half a mile there some kind of a street that was, I forgot, I just don't remember. Anyway, from Chance Field to Maple and we start camp there and we used to have a baseball team there. We organized a baseball team because we didn't want to be doing nothing

MM: Right

NM: So a bunch of us youngsters, we cleared a field. It took too long to do it, so there's one fella there, he's just Mr. Baseball, he loves it. He says we gonna get some equipment, and then, so he had an idea he went to the office and told them, "Hey, if you let us go out to the farm in Kerman, we'll go get that baseball field in no time. And they gave us a permit to go outside to get that tractor, whatever, to level the field. Then we made that baseball diamond right away.

MM: Oh my goodness.

NM: So it was lucky.

MM: Did you live with your family at the-

NM: Yeah, at the camp we were, we had one room. Seven of us and my older brother was already in the Army like that.

MM: And then where did you go for internment? To the detention center? What detention center?

NM: I went to Jerome, Arkansas

MM: Oh you went to Jerome, Arkansas. Okay, that's where you started doing your work outside the camp.

NM: Yeah, went to Detroit, then I came back, and then I went out again, New Jersey. Then I got my orders to go into the Army, so I went. Then I took my basic in Camp Robinson, Arkansas. Then when they were going to ship me to Europe they stopped me. They said all the Japanese, second generation of course, report to the headquarters. We all called, and there was about 100 of us second generation Americans, you know, and we knew what's happening, we had to go Japanese school and learn Japanese, and be interpreters.

MM: But you already, your parents had forced you to learn Japanese.

NM: That's why it was good. (chuckles)

MM: You were going "thanks."(chuckles)

NM: Yeah, I should have learned. This one I really don't know (*referring to photo*)

MM: You don't know what it is?

NM: No.

MM: Okay, let me pull some more.

NM: This is, I got to find somebody in here, or somebody that I know.

MM: Speaking of baseball?

NM: Oh baseball, you can get the football too, over there.

MM: Football, basketball, here we go. So are you in this?

NM: No. These are all older groups

MM: Oh okay, it's an older group, okay.

NM: This one, they played in that Fireman's Ballpark

MM: Okay.

NM: This is at the Fairgrounds.

MM: Okay, oh my goodness.

NM: But, no more Fairground, and that Fresno Firemen's Baseball, that's the park they played.

MM: Oh my goodness, you've got all these signatures on here.

NM: You know Babe Ruth came and we knew Babe Ruth, when we were kids you know. This was taken earlier, in the 20's.

MM: Yeah, yeah and then who's this?

NM: This is a football team, okay. They formed it in the valley, they wanted to make a strong team to play San Jose, San Francisco or Los Angeles.

MM: So the best of the Valley.

NM: Yeah and then...

MM: Are you in this?

NM: No no, I'm too small to play with these guys.(laughs)

MM: Ah ha, these guys are big guys

NM: Oh yeah.

MM: And this looks like football too?

NM: Yeah that's football too

MM: Okay. We will let Suzanne scan those-there's more baseball.

NM: This is baseball.

MM: Now you must be in this one, are you in this one?

NM: No.

MM: You're not!

NM: No, I didn't bring my baseball.

MM: You didn't bring them!

NM: No.

MM: Fresno, 1925

NM: This is 19, one of the best teams we had

MM: Wow.

NM: Yeah, of course right now they have a lot of good teams.

MM: Oh, this is a blowup of one of the other ones.

NM: Oh yes.

MM: This is just, we'll leave this here because this one's actually a better picture. Okay, she's going to take a picture of this, this is great. And what's this? What's this a picture of?

NM: I don't know.

MM: That's not Japanese Hall?

NM: Yeah.

MM: Is it Japanese Hall?

NM: Ah no, this is Memorial Hall.

MM: This is Memorial Hall, okay.

NM: You know, by Fresno Street, right by the City Hall, yeah.

MM: Okay, okay and then what is this?

NM: This was a Japanese Association, donation to the City of Fresno, a lantern, stone lantern.

MM: I see.

NM: And put up at Roeding Park.

MM: At Roeding Park, oh, I see.

NM: And they did have it, but during the war somebody toppled it over and...

MM: What is that stand for, it says Japanese YMA League

NM: Let me see.

MM: YMA - Young Men's Association

NM: That's right, (*other people talking in background*) that doesn't concern any Buddhists or Christian Church.

MM: So, it's multi(?)

NM: Yeah, but they found that, they got this now at Shinzen Garden.

MM: Oh they do.

NM: They found it and

MM: Oh my goodness, look at these track pictures.

NM: This is right in our lot there.

MM: Which one is it? Which lot? You mean the Buddhist lot?

NM: Yes.

MM: Oh, this is at the Buddhist Temple, okay.

NM: See the Buddhist Temple here, okay.

MM: Oh my goodness.

NM: Okay, see we got the whole block here. See right here was Christian Church, right here was a home, so we couldn't use that much, but right here...

MM: Oh this the, I see, I see

NM: That's how they, look how many people.

MM: Oh my goodness, you don't know the year on this do you? Where you in this?

NM: No, no.

MM: No.

NM: I'm small.

MM: Too small, that's a good runner, small is good, Kathy can you hand her, tell Suzanne that this is at the Buddhist church.. Okay here, she has some more pictures here for you

Kathy Omachi (KO): Of celebrations

MM: Of celebrations

NM: No this is the Raisin Day Parade.

MM: Oh, and the Japanese participated?

NM: Yes.

MM: You were in the Raisin Day Parade.

NM: No no.

MM: You just watched.

MN: I just watched, but the Japanese Association would put up a float sometime.

MM: Oh they did?

NM: They did.

MM: When did that start? Do you know?

NM: We had one, a big one from Buddhist Church.

MM: Oh here, we'll have to come over and look at this, there are.

NM: These are old, old.

MM: These are old. Oh my goodness

NM: See, this is on Tulare Street. See, that's why I wanted to blow this up a little later

MM: Right, these are great.

NM: See, these are pulled by horses yet

MM: Let me see if I can find the other one here.

NM: I got one.

(Tape stopped and started)

MM: Okay, so what's this a picture of?

NM: This is Kern Street right here.

MM: Okay.

NM: You know where the bank is?

MM: Uh huh.

NM: Right there (*refers to map*).

MM: Okay, so this is where the bank would be?

NM: No, this corner and this.

MM: This corner.

NM: Well, I just saw it. Where did I put it? Here it is, Toshioki.

MM: Okay.

NM: That's that drug store.

MM: Okay, so where we are here, is this "F" Street or is this "F" Street or is this?

NM: This is "F" Street.

MM: This is "F" Street going down here.

NM: Going down, going down.

MM: This is Kern Street.

NM: Kern Street, yes.

MM: I see. Okay, okay, there we go, oh there it is, alright, great. Okay and this is, you don't know what date. Oh here it is, a date on there.

NM: Golly there's no date.

MM: Yeah, do you know what it says in Japanese?

NM: (*reads the Japanese text*)

MM: Okay

NM: No date, I would say about 1920.

MM: It looks like it's the 20's, or late teens and then I wanted to ask you about, we already looked, this is 1931, I think._

NM: That's the same one.

MM: Yeah, the same one. Okay, and this is the audience.

NM: And that's the audience, yeah

MM: And who's this? These are just kids?

NM: Ah, just

MM: Are you in here?

NM: Yes.

MM: Which one? That's you?

NM: Yeah, I must have been about ten huh?

MM: And look at, you're already playing baseball.

NM: Yeah, huh.

MM: That's got to be 1925. Around ten, yeah? And what's this?

NM: This is, I think it was a Japanese Association party.

MM: Oh, okay, so it's a young men's association, it's a male organization.

NM: Yes, male, or they come from all kinds of states in Japan.

MM: Lots of prefectures.

NM: Yeah, prefectures.

MM: Okay.

NM: Okay, then they all here, they call it Association.

MM: I see, and then this is...

NM: Oh that's a, just a, this is just a club.

MM: Somebody started to trying to label these.

NM: Well I did. I'm trying to get the names and all that, that's why

MM: Oh, you're a good historian. And this looks like the Young Men's Association.

NM: Yes.

MM: That's it. Okay, okay, is this from the Christian Church? Or is that the Buddhist...

NM: This is the Buddhist Church.

MM: Buddhist Church, and this we already have.

NM: Yeah, you don't want to duplicate it.

MM: So, let me hand these over to Suzanne, and then let's look at these

NM: See, Kamikawa was a, one of the big stores. When they first came, oh, half a block was Kamikawa.

MM: And what street is this, Kern?

NM: Kern Street, yeah.

MM: I see, I see, so this is on Kern Street?

NM: Yes this is the same corner.

MM: I see, Kern and "F."

NM: Kern - No, and "G" Street.

MM: Oh, Kern and "G", Okay right up by the packinghouse.

NM: Uh huh.

MM: Okay, and then where was this?

NM: That's "G" Street.

MM: That's "G" Street.

NM: Yes.

MM: Okay, and that's kind of between (*both say*) Kern and Tulare

NM: That's, somebody gave me this picture, you know .

MM: Wow, and which one, this is the...

NM: No, this is the other corner, this is on Kern Street .

MM: Okay.

NM: Right opposite that-Kamikawa.

MM: Okay opposite Kamikawa.

NM: On this side, you know where Central Fish is now?

MM: Right, right.

NM: Right there, yeah. There's a pool hall there and all that.

MM: Okay, so it was really quite a mixture of businesses, some Japanese, some Chinese.

NM: Yes, Chinese and Japanese.

MM: And Italian? or not?

NM: No Italian, but Dick Avakian, Armenian, he's the only one that I could think of.

MM: He's the only Armenian though?

NM: Yeah.

MM: And then you have your Basque Hotel

NM: Yeah, Basque Hotel was there.

MM: Basque was there. So did many of the Japanese, when you were growing up, were there mostly-that were living in the hotels-were there Japanese living above the stores and hotels?

NM: Ahh, no there was a lot of residence halls.

MM: And who would live above the stores?

NM: Some owners, on their own stores.

MM: I see. What street is this?

NM: This is right across the street here.

MM: The West Side Garage?

MM: Yeah, you know where Kenyon's and *(both speaking at once)* Kern Street where

NM: Kenyon's, Komoto, Dick's.

MM: That's whose store this was?

NM: Yeah, you notice that gas pump there?

MM: Yeah.

NM: Right on the sidewalk.

MM: Right on there, well that was easy; you come and fill up right there.

NM: Oh this was another Japanese, what do you call-a boarding house?

MM: Oh, so there were Japanese boarding houses for single men.

NM: Yes.

MM: Uh huh.

NM: And then hotels too.

MM: And where was the Japanese boarding house.

NM: This one was on "F" Street, by Inyo and "F" on that corner.

MM: On that corner.

NM: Chihuahua used to have a building there.

MM: Okay.

NM: That building was...

MM: And then you said there was a Japanese Hotel. There was a Japanese hotel, where was that?

NM: They're all over.

MM: Japantown? All over Chinatown?

NM: See, right here.

MM: Oh, these are all

NM: Red,

MM: Red is the hotels, but are these Japanese?

NM: Yes, I could tell you – this is Fujisawa over here

MM: Okay – let me write this down, hold on, Fujisawa?

NM: I forgot this.

MM: And you forgot that one. And what's this one where the Central Fish Company was?

NM: Tashima.

MM: Tashima.

NM: You know...

MM: Okay, and then this one over by, across from Dick's,

NM: Let me (*pause*) Fujisawa, Kamiya. I forgot this one was Tashima

MM: Oh that's Tashima, not this one?

NM: Oh no, you got it right. Wait a minute now, Tashima, yeah

MM: Okay.

NM: Nishimora

MM: Okay, Nishimora was across from Dick's

NM: Then right here was Kobayashi.

MM: Kubiyashi was a block down. Okay and this is on "F" Street between Kern and Tulare

NM: And this one

MM: What is this

NM: Kimura

MM: Kimura, these are all hotels.

NM: Jinkawa.

MM: And this is on Tulare Street between...

NM: Yes, Tulare, between "F" and "E."

MM: "F" and "E", Okay and what's it called again?

NM: Jinkawa-J-I-N

MM: Jinkawa. Okay, and the next one?

NM: Sekiya-S-E-K-I-Y-A

MM: The same block

NM: Sekiya

MM: Sekiya.

NM: Then this was Shintaku

MM: And then this one

NM: Hasigawa

MM: Oh that's the Hasigawa.

NM: Oh, you know Hasigawa huh? And then Murayama

MM: How do you spell that?

NM: M-U-R-A-Y-A-M-A, and this one is Tanigawa

MM: Tanigawa. Okay and we're going through these photo's here. What was this?

NM: That's a delivery for Kamikawa.

MM: He was a general merchandise store?

NM: Yes.

MM: And where was that located?

NM: That was located on Kern and "G" Street.

MM: Kern and "G?"

NM: "G" Street and Kern.

MM: Over here.

NM: Right here.

MM: Oh, Kamikawa.

NM: Yes, Kamikawa.

MM: And that's general merchandise?

NM: Uh huh.

MM: And then, which one do we have here?

NM: That's a jewelry store.

MM: And where was that at?

NM: On "F" Street.

MM: Tamaya?

NM: Tamaya, (pause)...let me see? Kern right about here.

MM: Okay, these is ah. What does green stand for- restaurant?

NM: Ah yeah, that's restaurant

MM: Kamiyama, Kami

NM: K-A-M-A-Y-A

MM: Kamaya

NM: Kamaya, yeah

MM: Kamaya, and that's jewelry.

NM: Jewelry store.

MM: And then the Mikado Laundry, where was that?

NM: Mikado Laundry was right here by Tulare Street.

MM: On Tulare, Okay over here.

NM: Wait a minute now.

MM: Here's Tulare.

NM: Tulare.

MM: It's right here.

NM: Tulare, "E" Street, right here.

MM: Okay, that's the Mikado Laundry.

NM: Mikado Laundry.

MM: Okay, alright, we got some more here? Oh these are more contemporary (*looking at recent photos*) are these from you? You took these?

NM: These are taken by some bank employee.

MM: A bank employee.

NM: Yeah.

MM: I'm just looking at, these are more contemporary.

NM: Yeah, yeah.

MM: I'll see if Suzanne want to scan these.

NM: But these, I just brought this because I thought it was interesting for you to see.

MM: Well this is, we're actually trying to do your story.

NM: Oh, okay.

MM: This other group is doing the buildings, but it's nice to hear about these.

NM: This is a..

MM: Tenchodo?

NM: ...Toshuki Drug Store.

MM: Oh where's that at?

NM: "F" and Kern, right here .

MM: Okay.

NM: This corner

MM: So that's Tenchodo Drug Store

NM: Drug store, yeah.

MM: So Nori what happened after high school, did you go, what did you do after high school?

NM: After high school?

MM: You graduated in what year?

NM: '36.

MM: Okay and then what did you do?

NM: I started working at the Rose Bottling Works?

MM: At the where?

NM: Rose Bottling, bottling.

MM: Where?

NM: They make soda water.

MM: Oh, okay bottling works.

NM: Bottling.

MM: Bottling, okay.

NM: And then we used to sell beer. We get all kinds of, you know Fresno Lager, they make it there, we go there, we sell some of there. Acme, we get the Acme from another Acme Company

MM: What was your job at Rose Bottling Company?

NM: Ah, everything. drive trucks, drive and deliver, then we go out and sell it. About three times a week we go to Reedley, Fowler, Selma, Kingsburg, Reedley, Dinuba, and all that, in the county here

MM: You would sell it all.

NM: And then once a week we used to go to Delano. Once a week, with two trucks and we used to come empty all. And then-boy it was work-and then when we'd come back here, working at the soda, we'd make soda water, we have to make it, stack it up.

MM: What time would you go to work in the morning?

NM: 8 o'clock in the morning.

MM: And then how late would you work at night?

NM: At 5.

MM: At 5, I see.

NM: A lot of times it goes over but we don't ...

MM: You didn't get paid extra.

NM: No.

MM: How much were you getting paid?

NM: About 90 cents an hour-no \$90 a month at that time, yeah.

MM: That's during the Depression in '37.

NM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, uh huh.

MM: And then you stayed there a couple years.

NM: Five years.

MM: Five years, until internment.

NM: Yeah that's right. We couldn't go out more than five miles. You can't go out anymore.

MM: Oh, after.

NM: After.

MM: So then what happened? Can you describe kind of the process of what happened in internment for you. You couldn't drive anymore after...

NM: Well you know, when the war started, they started saying Japanese people wouldn't be able to drive more than five miles, and there would be a curfew.

MM: What was the curfew time?

NM: 8pm to 6am. You couldn't get out. If you were out there you got shot and it was my fault. So we never went out, we had to be real careful.

MM: Very, very careful. And how long did that go on?

NM: Well, that's ah, until we went into camp.

MM: Until relocation?

NM: Yeah.

MM: Okay, okay.

NM: So we went and made our way to camp.

MM: And then how long did you stay in camp?

NM: Until I went out, I was in there about, '44. About Feb '44 I went to New Jersey..

MM: So you were from '42 to '44 you were there?

NM: Yes.

MM: Okay, two years and then you contracted out for work.

NM: Yeah, uh huh.

MM: Okay and then how long did you continue to work like that for?

NM: Until they call me in the army.

MM: Was that about a year and a half? Or a year?

NM: Oh let's see, I think I must have worked about a year, yeah.

MM: Okay.

NM: Yeah, about a year.

MM: And how long were you in the army?

NM: Two years, yeah.

MM: So then you worked in

NM: And then they sent me over, well they sent me to Japan. They held me back and then they sent me to school again, Japanese school in Minnesota.

MM: And this time you studied? (chuckles)

NM: Yeah, that's right. (laughs) I had to study hard too, you know, but you can't learn Japanese that fast.

MM: No, my son is trying to learn Japanese.

NM: Boy that's hard, and then you know, and then when I was in Japan, Okay, I was going to get my discharge I said I'm going to work for good wages or something like that and I was going to go into that trial deal and I went to apply for it. One of my friends, at a restaurant here, he said "Nori go ask my buddy, he'll give you a job." So I went to see him in Yokohama, see I was in Tokyo, Yokohama was close by, anyway, I went there, then when I saw what they were doing, there's a lot of technical work in court. Oh God, I said I don't want to do this kind of work, because, you know if I make a mistake it's life and death over there, so I said, "no I don't want that job."

MM: But you understood Japanese, because your parents only spoke Japanese, so you understood it

NM: Yeah, anyway.

MM: It was not about being able to speak it.

NM: I could speak it yeah, but not that good, you know.

MM: Okay, I see.

NM: I learned quite a bit when I was there working for another job. And I was working at the army PX, which was the best job I had.

MM: Why was it the best?

NM: I could get anything I want.

MM: Oh I see, access to everything. And then when you left the army, you didn't like translation that was scary-being technical.

NM: Well yeah, if it's a job and it's going to cost their life. I didn't want to have that all over my head, so I said I don't think I'll take this job.

MM: So what did you end up doing?

NM: So I went back and got another job, I asked for. And somebody told me the mail, and I got a post office job and then I work about a half a yea. And then I got another job working at the PX which was a better job,

MM: A better job.

NM: In Tokyo, the post office was in Yokohama

MM: And this was after the war.

NM: After the war, yeah.

MM: What did you do after you left the army? Is this after the army?

NM: Yes.

MM: So you were working in Japan?

NM: Yes, I got my discharge there in Japan, and then I got that job.

MM: And how long did you stay at the PX job?

NM: About six years.

MM: So into the fifties.

NM: Ah, fifty-four I came back.

MM: I see, and where did you come back to?

NM: Nothing.

MM: Where did you come back to?

NM: Oh, oh-come back to Fresno. Oh this is my place.

MM: This is where you come back? This is home. And did you resettle in Chinatown?

NM: No, see my dad and my brother they. You know, I told them I get a house you know, so we bought a home right close to Edison and (pause)

MM: Close to Edison, okay.

NM: Then I stayed there about 19 years.

MM: Was this a Japanese neighborhood, the Edison area?

NM: No they were all mixture-Chinese and all kinds in neighborhood.

MM: And what happened to the stores during the war?

NM: We had to sell everything out.

MM: So you did.

NM: Yeah. We didn't sell a lot of things we just had to give it away

MM: Oh I see, so people took everything?

NM: Yeah. And then of course we had our washing machine or something like that, the government said we'll keep it for you like that, and they held it for us and then when we came back

MM: Did you parents try to reopen a store.

NM: No, no, that was too hard.

MM: So what did they do?

NM: So they start working out in the fields,

MM: They did? They worked as farmers?

NM: Farm, you know, they made cuttings and all that. And then some German fella used to gather about five ladies and took them out to the field and then he paid them by the hour. I don't know how much but he cut the cuttings this much, and then so both my father and mother both.

MM: How old were they at that time?

NM: God, let's see they came back in '46.

MM: Your father must have been in his 60s.

NM: Oh yeah, yeah I guess so.

MM: And what was the age difference between your father and mother?

NM: About 10.

MM: 10 years? So she was in her 50's

NM: Yeah.

MM: I see, and there were no more children at home? Or did they, were there children...

NM: Ah, when we moved here? Oh I had my brother and my younger sister.

MM: Were still living with them. I see, I see.

NM: And then they got married, so they went out, and I was out in the...

MM: So when you came back you bought the house for them?

NM: Yeah.

MM: You all lived together?

NM: Yeah, we lived together and ...

MM: And how did you feel like you were being treated by people from Fresno?

NM: Oh, good.

MM: It was okay, after the war it wasn't...

NM: After the war it was okay, yeah. But there used to be a, a way, they had a (*unintelligible*) again, you know, so we moved and I bought a place in, by Hoover High School. So I live out there now.

MM: What did you do for work? When you came back?

NM: When I came back, I worked in Pinedale as a wholesaler, furniture maker. I had a job there.

MM: I see, so you were making furniture?

NM: Yeah.

MM: I see.

NM: And upholstery, and then I wanted to learn upholstery, so they gave me a job, and I worked there. Then I went to LA about after a year, then I worked for the May Company.

MM: I thought Fresno was your home?

NM: Yeah, it was, but my brother kept calling me. He was a photographer, he needed help, so I did to help him. Then I worked out there, then I worked, learned how to make repair furniture. Oh God, we repaired a lot of things then.

MM: Was there good money in that?

NM: Well, it was a good job. I liked it because I liked to fix something. Yeah, then I learned quite a bit there.

MM: That was in LA?

NM: Yes, but one year later my dad, you know, got bad, and he passed away. So I came back then. I was, started working for Montgomery Ward, and I did all the refinishing jobs there.

MM: I see.

NM: And I got a good job at Montgomery Ward, I stayed there ten years.

MM: Ten years, wow, and then was it time...

NM: They closed up.

MM: OH.

NM: Montgomery Ward had to close up, they said, so I took a year off and I went to Japan again. And I learned how to make dolls, see, and I learned it again. And then I taught some in Fresno, all over here, but I don't do that any more, too tedious.

MM: Too tedious to make dolls.

NM: Got to sew and everything, but I'm going to have an exhibit .

MM: Oh I want to see it, at the-where?

NM: At the...

MM: The Obon?

NM: Obon,

MM: Are you going to have an exhibit there?

NM: Yeah.

MM: Oh good.

NM: They asked me to-they love my dolls,

MM: That would be very good, that would be very good.

NM: I was at Hanford this year, about a month ago, they had an exhibit for a lot of things there and they had wanted to show my dolls.

MM: Great, great .So I'm just trying to think, I wanted to ask you how has this area changed from before the war to after the war.

NM: Oh completely, you know here in Fresno the Japanese town is gone.

MM: Was this really Japanese-“Japan Town?” Because it was very mixed-did you call it Chinatown or Japantown?

NM: We, I always called it J-Town anyway, yeah. But it, a lot of people use “Chinatown” because there is Chinese and...

MM: It's mixed, so how is it different?

NM: Well.

MM: Before the war and after.

NM: Well, there was hardly any Japanese back here, big stores, Kamikawa's gone, Aki's gone now

MM: And they were kind of the main stores.

NM: Main stores .

MM: ...of the town.

NM: Toshuki Drug Store. We had about three drug stores too, yeah. Of course there's one.

MM: Why didn't they reopen?

NM: No business.

MM: Nobody would come.

NM: Nobody.

MM: Uh huh.

NM: When you came back there was prejudice still there. That's why I didn't come back right away .

MM: What was still here?

NM: Prejudice.

MM: Prejudice. I see, that's what I was wondering, what it was like?

NM: Because, ah, you can't get here a new job.

MM: So that's why you kind of stayed in Japan?

NM: Yes, I took a civil service job in Japan.

MM: Because you knew...

NM: At least I can save money there, because my cost for living was free and my eating too. Later on they charged us twenty-five cents a meal, but God that was still good for us, and then the hotel was free for us.

MM: That's how you were able to save money..

NM: So I saved money there, I used to send home about \$200 every paycheck anyway.

MM: Did you every marry?

NM: I never got married. I had a chance once, I saw too many people out there, they get married and they're separating, and this and that, and it just didn't work out. I know a lot of them brought (brides), came back with them.

MM: You didn't want to marry a Japanese woman?

NM: No, because I worked in the PX and I know how the girls are. They're all young, so I said not to.

MM: That's it.

NM: When I came back all my friends where all married so that's what happened now.

MM: Did you here-when came back and moved with your family-did you come back here to do any shopping here in Japan Town, or was there just nothing here?

NM: Well I worked at Ward's.

MM: But I mean did you ever come back to visit here downtown, at Chinatown, because Dick's was here. Did you go by?

NM: I was always in Chinatown

MM: Even after the war?

NM: Even after the war, yeah.

MM: Even after all the businesses stopped you still came back.

NM: Came back, oh yeah.

MM: What brought you back?

NM: I like it, the weather.

MM: No, in Chinatown, what brought you back? Did you continue to shop here after the war?

NM: Oh yeah, yeah .

MM: There was still enough businesses?

NM: Then I got a job at the bank.

MM: Ah.

NM: You see, I worked at Wards for a while then they closed up and then they hired me over at the bank .

MM: At the bank here?

NM: Yeah.

MM: I see. Did you feel like the different groups got along well, the Armenians, the Japanese, the Chinese?

NM: Well.

MM: Or were they very separate?

NM: No, when I came back it was okay.

MM: ...but before the war?

NM: Before the war there was some feeling that you're not wanted or something.

MM: Between who?

NM: To any business. Because you know I wanted to be a carpenter and then there's no carpenter job. I mean we can't get it, they're union, they're union and you can't get in there. That's why I start working at the bottling plant.

MM: So you felt like there was a lot of things you couldn't do .

NM: Yeah, you can't.

MM: I see, well thank you so much, you have been so helpful, .

(Tape stops then starts)

MM: Okay, you still like it here?

NM: Yeah, I love it here. My mother liked it too, she said there was not, she hears about, out East they got cold weather, snow and all that, hurricanes. My mother says "Fresno is the best place." I agree with her.

MM: You like the weather.

NM: Yeah.

MM: Not too hot, it's not too hot for you?

NM: It's hot but I can take it.. In Japan it's humid.

MM: So at the Obon festival coming up, you're going to have your doll display.

NM: Display, yeah.

MM: Is that your way of participating?

NM: Yes.

MM: And do you still go to the Buddhist Church?

NM: Yes I go there, I'm a member, a life member there. I'm a life member with the veterans group.

MM: With what?

NM: Veterans.

MM: With the veterans, the Buddhist Temple.

NM: Buddhist Temple, then I'm a VFW life member.

MM: Are you a member of the Japanese American Citizens League?

NM: Yeah, JAACL, life member, yeah

MM: And

NM: I don't do too much though over there.

MM: What happened to the Young Japanese Men's Association, the JMA, Japanese Men's Association, that happened before the war? What happened to them? Did they just disband? Did they dissolve?

NM: You know when we moved out a lot of them didn't come back.

MM: I see.

NM: Yeah.

MM: Then just didn't come back.

NM: They went to, they moved to LA, a lot of them moved to LA and they just stayed there, they never came back.

MM: Okay I was asking you about the impact of Highway 99 on Chinatown, what was it?

NM: Well.

MM: Or the neighborhood.

NM: Well, the neighborhood, nobody came back, since the war, everybody scattered. I didn't come back right away.

MM: Who moved into the neighborhood?

NM: Oh, all kind of people. Well they're making a go of it, got a job and all that, so that's great.

MM: But what impact did (Hwy) 99 have?

NM: I can't say too much on that because I didn't come back right away, you know..

MM: 99 was in the 50's, it cut up.

NM: Cut up Chinatown.

MM: Yeah.

NM: It cut up. So when I came back I noticed a lot of Japanese were scattered already. So maybe it's a good thing because you know, they went, they're all over the place now .

MM: Because their houses were torn down for 99.

NM: Yeah and then things are bad on the West Side anyway.

MM: Why did things get bad?

NM: Well there was not business here and then Japanese business, little by little, when they quit that's it. No new people came in.

MM: They didn't have any replacements. So what did you think of redevelopment, what they've been doing here?

NM: Well they're working as much as they can. You know when I came back we had fish store, wide open yet. But once they closed they can't make it like that. You got to have it all enclosed, yeah. You know, it's got to be in a glass case, you can't touch it. Before you could touch it an all that, and people used to like to buy that that way.

MM: Shopping's changed

NM: Shopping's changed yeah.

MM: So that the stores...

NM: But that actually most of the people didn't come back to Fresno. A lot of them just...

MM: So what do you think about what the city has been doing, the way they've been handling the redevelopment here. Do you think...

NM: Well if they can get new people in, but nobody wants to come in.

MM: Why?

NM: They don't want to take a chance. I think, because you know if you're going to open up a business you're going to have a lot of money. You got to. And then there's no people walking around any more.

MM: No many of the clientele.

NM: I don't think they'll ever come back to like before.

MM: Cause it was really populated.

NM: Yeah, then there's no people around here. There's too many shopping centers anyway.

MM: Okay.

(end of tape)