

A KIBEI'S VIEW OF LIFE
IN RELOCATION CAMPS DURING
WORLD WAR II

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Basic History 100

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NARRATIVE OF THE TERM RESEARCH PROJECT

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For my term research project, I asked my father, George Nobuo Nachara, to be my interviewee. He agreed wholeheartedly and seemed eager to give any information asked of him. In fact, he thought that he did not give enough information for a good interview. I assured him that his interview was sufficient for the project.

For the interview, I had a few basic questions in mind, but I wanted it to be an ad-lib type of interview. This worked well except for the fact that at certain periods I could not think of questions to ask or I asked the wrong type of question. My father did not notice this, though, and did not seem self-conscious of being taped. I think I was the one that was self-conscious! My father was very easy to talk with which made the interview an easy one. One point which bothered my father was that he felt his Japanese accent might not be understandable. After some assurance that it would be, he was very willing to be interviewed.

My father is, basically, a simple, conservative man who is old-fashioned in his ways. This is in my opinion because his ideals are conservative in comparison to my own. For example, while attending High School I had a curfew at 11:00 P.M. and could not date any race other than Japanese, whereas I considered 11:00 P.M. much too early and did not see any harm in dating a Caucasian. From the interview I learned other things about my father. He came to the United States on his own when he was nineteen, volunteered to work at the Manzanar Relocation Camp during the war for 20 cents an hour, and moved on to Idaho for 50 cents an hour when he did not receive his pay at Manzanar. This made me see him as a very ambitious person.

Also, through many of his experiences he told me in the interview, I have a better understanding of his old-fashioned ways. I can see his reasons for his prejudice against other races and his high respect for the Japanese and traditions, even though I do not fully agree with his views.

In the interview, my father gave a brief personal history. This was quite interesting because he mentioned many things about his life that I never knew before. ² The bulk of the interview involved my father's experiences in the concentration camps. He moved from one camp to another and described life in Manzanar, Idaho and Tule Lake, although there were other camps he worked in besides those mentioned.

His description of Manzanar evolved around the type of work he did. He also went into describing the barracks and living conditions. One point that surprised me was that the journey to Manzanar was by train on which the shades were drawn. To this day he does not know the reason for this act, except for the conversation with an MP he had on the train. The MP said that he was "just obeying orders."

Life in Idaho mainly involved work on the sugar beet farm for 50 cents an hour. He described the attitude of the Caucasian farmers toward the Japanese. He told of one incident where a farmer referred to all Japanese as "Japs" whether they were American citizens or not.

Tule Lake was very interesting. My father went into describing incidents of violence and riots in the camps, means of entertainment and how a typical day was. I was shocked to hear that he went to Tule Lake and at first I thought, "Ah ha! My father was a troublemaker!" But, I found out that he volunteered to go to Tule Lake in order to meet his fiancée. It turned out that his fiancée's family decided not to go to Tule and he found himself stuck there.

My father concluded with his own personal attitudes toward the evacuation and the concentration camps. He feels that it was all a mistake and all should be forgiven. This, I thought, was the attitude he would not take. I was expecting to hear hatred toward what the United States did to the Japanese-American citizens. Instead, he gave me the "forgive and not forget" attitude. He also feels discomfort talking about his past with Caucasians because he feels it is nothing to brag about and that they have no idea of how it really was.

The experiences which my father told me do not seem distorted or exaggerated. One part in the tape, though, he mentioned the date of Pearl Harbor was December 27 instead of December 7. Other than that, I feel that what my father told me was what he wanted to tell me, not what he thought I expected to hear.

NOTES

1
Refer to Appendix A, page 6.

2
Ibid. page 6.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Interview with George Nobuo Nachara, Barber, George's Barber Shop, Gardena, California, March 17, 1974, Between 9:00 P.M. and 11:00 P.M. at 1914 W. Compton Boulevard, Gardena, California.

APPENDIX A

Biography of Interviewee

George Nobuo Nachara was born on August 7, 1919 on Compton Boulevard, Gardena, California. His parents, Yasaku Nachara and Tsune Sumida came to the United States in hopes of making a fortune farming. When George was two years old, his parents sent him and his elder sister, Mitsuko, back to Japan where they lived with his Grandmother, Tama Sumida in Karuga, Hiroshima. His parents returned to Japan after making a fortune six years later. After his mother passed away following the birth of his younger sister, Fumi, his father remarried to Harumi_____. In Japan, George attended Kakogawa Mura Grammar School and Sootoka High School in Hiroshima, plus other private schools from which he did not receive any diplomas. Because of his father's wealth, he, along with a Doctor's son and the Mayor's son, were the only children from their village to attend high school. After graduation, George was fortunate to become employed by the Hiroshima Post Office where he worked as an officer for \$15.00 a month. This was during the Depression when jobs were hard to come by and he found himself working with many University graduates. After two years, George went to the United States on the advice of his father in order to avoid the Manchurian Draft.

In America he worked for his uncle on the farm in Long Beach, California. When Pearl Harbor broke out he volunteered to work at Manzanar for 20 cents an hour, a wage he never received. Because of this, he transferred to Idaho where he worked on a sugar beet farm for 50 cents an hour.

From Idaho he transferred to Tule Lake where he was to meet his fiancée. When he reached Tule, he found out that his fiancée's family decided not to go to Tule and he found himself stuck. He stayed in Tule until the war was over.

In 1945, at the end of the war, George went to Chicago where he met his fiancée and they married. He worked for the International Harvester Company. There he fixed radiators. Two years later, he received a letter saying that his stepmother was ill and could he return to Japan to see her. At that time, all immigration and emigration to and from Japan was not allowed. George decided to volunteer for the United States Army for three years from which he was guaranteed to be shipped to Japan.

Three months later during training, he received word that his stepmother passed away. He still had to finish his three years even though he had no reason to go to Japan anymore.

After basic training, he went to the Monterey Army Language School and because of his knowledge of the Japanese language, he taught for one year. He was then shipped to Japan where he served at the Intelligence School G2 Section, 24th Infantry Division as interrogator, interpreter and translator.

When the Korean War broke out, his three years was extended one more year. He was sent to Korea and fought for the United States. In 1951, he was discharged as a Staff Sergeant with a Bronze Medal along with many others.

He lived in Los Angeles after the war where he worked for the Brotherhood Market as a butcher and fisherman. On the G. I. Bill he attended barber school. After one year, he finished and went on to hair styling school and worked in a barber shop there. Later, he worked in Sawtelle as a barber for 2 1/2 years.

He then moved to Gardena and opened his own business on Western Avenue for three years. He now owns and runs his own barber shop with his wife on Compton Boulevard in Gardena. He has been there with his family for the past fifteen years.

APPENDIX B

Outline of the Taped Interview

00:00 minutes: Brief personal history.

Interesting points:

03:00 minutes: Returns to Japan for financial reasons.

04:00 minutes: Returns to America to avoid Manchurian Draft.

05:15 minutes: Prices of farm produce during Depression.

07:45 minutes: Did not go on to collage because of Uncle's advice.

09:15 minutes: Where he was when Pearl Harbor broke out; his feeling when when he first heard about it.

10:35 minutes: Informed of evacuation.

11:10 minutes: Volunteers to evacuate to Manzanar.

12:00 minutes: Conversation with the MP on train to Manzanar. Told to pull shades.

13:15 minutes: "Did the MP tell you why you had to pull the shades?"

13:45 minutes: Scenery of Manzanar.

14:35 minutes: Lunch box given to them on the train.

15:20 minutes: Arrival at Manzanar; assignment of rooms.

16:15 minutes: American Caucasian attitude toward them at the camp. Description of barracks and living conditions.

18:15 minutes: Type of work done at the camp.

20:00 minutes: Wondering about paycheck.

20:50 minutes: How he got along without pay; volunteers to Idaho to work on sugar beet farm for 50 cents an hour.

22:20 minutes: How long he stayed in Manzanar.

- 22:25 minutes: Inquires about pay at Manzanar.
- 22:55 minutes: Life at Idaho.
- 24:45 minutes: Treatment by the farmers.
- 26:35 minutes: Where family was located.
- 27:05 minutes: How long he stayed in Idaho; other places he worked at.
- 27:55 minutes: Why he went to Tule Lake; mix-ups with fiancée.
- 29:40 minutes: Violence in Tule Lake.
- 35:00 minutes: Life at Tule; describes the bathrooms.
- 37:25 minutes: Type of work done at Tule.
- 38:10 minutes: Means of entertainment.
- 41:55 minutes: Attitude toward Caucasians.
- 42:55 minutes: Benefits of the camps for the Japanese.
- 44:00 minutes: Curfew.
- 44:35 minutes: Manzanar incident- boy shot for violating rule.
- 46:20 minutes: Lack of communication is reason for not knowing rules.
- 47:15 minutes: Tule Lake- riots and violence.
- 47:35 minutes: "Banzai" Group.
- 49:00 minutes: Violence never published in the American papers.
- 49:45 minutes: Personal attitude toward the evacuation and concentration camps.
- 53:00 minutes: How he feels about it today.
- 54:20 minutes: "Do you feel uneasy about discussing your experiences?"
- 56:10 minutes: Conclusion- "Forgive them."

APPENDIX C

Photographs

The photographs on the following pages are those from the collection of George Nachara. He did not have any pictures of Manzanar available nor of Tule Lake. Those included are from Idaho, Jerome Relocation Camp and Poston Relocation Camp. Also included are Christmas cards he made in camp.

Please note: George Nachara would like to have these photographs returned. You may duplicate any photographs you wish. His address is:

George Nachara
1914 W. Compton Blvd.
Gardena, California 90249