

## *To the descendants of George and Masako Okabe*

My name is Christie Yamazaki, and I am a sophomore at Christian Brothers High School in Sacramento, California. I was given an assignment, in my World History class, to interview someone who had lived through World War II, and to write up both the interview, as well as a follow-up concluding essay. The teacher used someone living in a Japanese internment camp as one example. My father, Daihachi Yamazaki, is a licensed acupuncturist here in Sacramento, and since opening his practice in 1980, both Masako and George Okabe have been patients of his. When I asked my parents if they knew of anyone who had been interned during the war, they mentioned George and Masako. My mother, Heidi, gave them a call, asking if they would be willing to speak to me. They were most gracious in their willingness to be interviewed. On May 6, 2000, I went to their house with my mother, and for the next few hours, George and Masako talked of their experiences, while the tape recorder ran. The conversation ended up mostly being George telling his experiences, with Masako adding in comments here and there.

After the interview was over, the Okabes mentioned that their own children and grandchildren had not even heard the story I had just been told. It was then that I decided to print out the conversation, and provide you with the original audiotape, so that someday you may hear the interview for yourself. My grandfather died before I was born, and while he was still alive, he had recorded his life story on tape. When I had an assignment in my religion class to write a paper on an ancestor, my mother brought out his audiotape, which I listened to and wrote my paper from. Having never listened to the tape her father made, my mother learned many things about her father, simply from reading my paper. When I saw the joy it brought my mother, I felt you too would appreciate someday being able to hear George and Masako's voices and reading about them. The interview with the Okabes was a most enjoyable and informative one, and there was much laughter throughout. I left the Okabe home with a much deeper understanding for what the American people of Japanese ancestry had to endure during the war. It is a story I think you will find quite interesting. I left with the feeling that the Okabes were not bitter about their confinement, and that they had simply chosen to make the best of a situation they could not change.

The first 47 pages contain the actual interview, verbatim. The last five pages are the conclusion essay.

Christie Yamazaki

Ms. M. Jenkins

Sophomore World History II A – G Set

8 May 2000

May 6, 2000 Interview of George Okabe, with interjections by Masako Okabe

**Christie Yamazaki** - What is your name, and where were you born?

**George Okabe** - My name is George Okabe. I was born in Sacramento, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1922.

**C.Y.** – What one incident most quickly comes to your mind when you think of World War II?

**G.O.** – The camp that we were sent to during the war.

**C.Y.** – Where were you when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

**G.O.** – I was in Sacramento when they bombed Pearl Harbor. In fact I was at the basketball game when they announced over the loudspeaker that all military personnel report back to their bases.

**C.Y.** Were you playing basketball in high school?

**G.O.** - No, no, no, no. This was a Japanese league. They had a Japanese league basketball. Not a high school. It was during a Sunday, or whatever it was, I *think* it was Sunday. So it was a Japanese team.

**C.Y.** – How old were you when World War II started?

**G.O.** – I was 18.

**C.Y.** – What observations of your family and friends during this time do you remember?

**G.O.** – Well, I don't have any recollection of what friends thought during the period.

**C.Y.** – How were you notified that your family had to go to Camp?

G.O. – We were notified to go to Camp by radio and newspaper.

C.Y. – What was the reason you were given for being put into the camps?

G.O. – The reason they gave us was that they might bomb California and they didn't want us to be injured, or they believed us Japanese to be a spy for Japan.

C.Y. – What camp were you sent to?

G.O. – We were first sent to Merced Assembly Center.

C.Y. – Did all of your family members end up at the same camp?

G.O. – Everybody was together except for my dad, who was picked up by the FBI before, well about two three months before the evacuation. They considered him a dangerous alien. We stayed in Amachi, Colorado, for two year and then were sent to join my father in a camp called Crystal City, Texas which as a family, um, internment camp.

C.Y. - My father spoke to me about Pearl Harbor, why it actually was bombed; something about communication between Japan and America was too slow? It was like if Japan didn't respond to the offer America made by a certain time, they were gonna attack, and it was a *Sunday* in America, and the Embassy was closed. There was no one in the office to get the telegram that said Japan would accept their offer, or something like that. Do you know much about *why* the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor?

G.O. – Yeah, *that* part of the...

**Masako Okabe** – Your dad would probably know more about it, huh.

G.O. – Yeah, *he* probably does, cause we don't, you know, we didn't look into the history or background of anything. We just...

C.Y. – So the general public just didn't really *know* much?

M.O. – *NO!* It was a SHOCK! It was a shock.

C.Y. – So you weren't aware of any threat of...

M.O. – No

G.O. – Well, it just came over the radio that that, that they'd bombed Pearl Harbor. We didn't even believe it at first, you know.

M.O. – I think... We thought, "What are they doing?" you know. I think it was my, either my oldest brother or it, it *couldn't* have been my mom because she doesn't understand English that well.

G.O. - <<*chuckles*>>

M.O. – I think he came I said 'Hey!' "Japan", oh he didn't say 'Japan', he said something terrible I think.

G.O. - <<*chuckle*>>

M.O. – What it was I don't remember, but I don't, he said, "They bombed Pearl Harbor." I said "Where's Pearl Harbor?", and then we never saw nothing of it until they said, <<*pause*>> we were talking about it the other night, we didn't know *where* we got the news, that we would all have to go into Camp.

G.O. – Yeah we don't *exactly* know, I think just newspaper radio.

C.Y. – Now Pearl Harbor was in nineteen forty...

M.O. – One, December 7<sup>th</sup>.

C.Y. – 41

M.O. – Mmm hmm.

C.Y. – And when did the camps...

G.O. – Forty-*two* we evacuated.

M.O. – In April, wasn't it?

G.O. - Yeah, something like that.

C.Y. - So about six months later or so...

M.O. - Four months.

C.Y. - Oh, yeah.

M.O. - We already started hearing about it in the springtime.

G.O. - Yeah

M.O. - And everybody said, 'Oh, we're gonna go to some desolate place, and they're gonna...

G.O. - It was pretty desolate alright! <<*chuckles*>>

C.Y. - And you said that you were told *either* that they didn't want you to get hurt, OR they thought you could be spies, and they let you know that it was one, I mean, that you were kind of suspect?

G.O. - No, well, well, it was more like <<*pause*>> they expected us, most, some of the Japanese to be a spy for Japan. And that then we would sabotage.

C.Y. - But is that what they *told* you, or did they *more* tell you that 'we don't you to, we, it was for your safety.'

G.O. - All these things are not, didn't come out like that.

C.Y. - Oh, okay, it was just 'you're going to go'.

M.O. - Yeah, at that time, they had to get us out. Out of the West Coast, I think I was, I don't know.

G.O. - They said ALL the West Coast, from Seattle down into California.

C.Y. - The entire west coast?

G.O. - Yeah. West Coast.

M.O. - Uh huh...

C.Y. – Well then how come there were some camps still in California?

M.O. – It was a desolate place in Tule Lake.

C.Y. – Oh, okay.

G.O. – It was in the *desert*. You know, desert...

M.O. – Oh, it was *terrible*... (George laughs) We had centipedes and everything.

G.O. – Uh, um, from Merced we went to Colorado, and *that* place is desert. It's SAND and sagebrush, and rattlesnake and what else, scorpion, whatever else you have, you know. We had barbed wire fence around there, watchtower

C.Y. – Where would you have gone to if you had...

G.O. – Well, we did, we did, you know. We snuck out about four or five of us, we had a stick you know, in just in case we ran into a rattlesnake.

M.O. <<laughs>>

G.O. – We went out to the town, of Grenada.

C.Y. – Of Renada?

G.O. – Grenada.

C.Y. – Grenada, in Colorado.

G.O. – Yeah.

C.Y. – Okay

G.O. – That's the closest camp there was. I mean city there was, town, whatever. And we went to, have some um... uh, ice cream soda or something, went to the drugstore had some ice cream soda, and then, then we played pool <<pause>>

**M.O.** – This is, this is where I was, excuse me. This is where I was in Tule Lake, it was nothing but sand, and they had these in the sand, so... <<*shows Christie a strand of tiny white shells that she strung together while in Tule Lake*>>

**C.Y.** – Ohhh...

**M.O.** – This is the *one* thing that I have of Camp. That's the **ONLY** thing from Tule Lake. And we sh, we strung em.

**C.Y.** – I've seen these shells before, but I figured they were from the ocean somewhere.

**M.O.** – There must have been a lake at one time.

**G.O.** – Well, there **MUST** have been Tule Lake!

**C.Y.** – Or maybe an ocean, back in the days of the dinosaurs?

**M.O.** – Maybe, huh, but they had jillions of these.

**C.Y.** - Oh, cool.

**M.O.** <<*chuckles*>>

**C.Y.** – So *you* strung that?

**M.O.** – I guess, because look how it's done! <<*laughs*>>

**C.Y.** – Okay, so you snuck out

**G.O.** - <<*laughs*>>

**C.Y.** – and you had ice cream soda,

**G.O.** – Yeah, we went to play pool and all that. We went, you know, either on a bus, or a, or a truck, went to next town called LeMar, and they had a bowling alley there, so we bowled a few rounds, and then said we'd better get back Camp, so we got on a, the coal truck, you know the

**C.Y.** – “Coal?”

G.O. - Coal, you know. We had to, our heat was coal, in the rooms they had a coal pot belly stove, we put in coal. Cause the people went into town to pick up coal and they came to each block and dumped the coal and the people went over there and picked up what, what they could use in their rooms.

C.Y. - Okay, so you knew the coal truck was going to go back to the Camp

G.O. - Yeah, so we knew the coal truck so, so we got on the coal truck and came back to Camp. And we said, 'hey, you know what? They know you ran out of there, so you're gonna be in trouble. <<chuckling>> We were saying that to ourselves, you know. You know, but um, nothing happened.

C.Y. - Really? How did you sneak out? Was it just that the guards didn't see you?

G.O. - No, they could have seen us, we just walked along the fence with the stick, <<laughs>>, I don't know if the guards were paying attention or not, but we made it to town.

C.Y. - About how far, about how long, I guess you *walked* to town, right?

G.O. - Yeah, we walked, so it must have been about 45 minutes or an hour. Yeah, but it wasn't that bad. But that's the only experience we had in Camp that we kinda, well not sneak out, but kinda enjoyed ourself in town, you know. Ice cream soda and pool table.

M.O. - Oh, *you* guys were lucky, we didn't have anything like that!

G.O. - <<laughs>>

C.Y. - Were there ever times where they would take a group of you outside the Camp?

G.Y. - Yeah, well, we played basketball with the high school people in town of Grenada, in their gym. We used to go out and play basketball.

C.Y. - And were there guards *then*?

G.O. - Nnnn, I don't know, I don't think so.



C.Y. – Okay

G.O. – Yeah

C.Y. – Because in some of those books you loaned me, I was looking through them, and they had football,

G.O. – Yeah, we had everything...

C.Y. – Even Queens and Kings of the high school dances...

M.O. – Yeah

C.Y. – and they actually set up, what was the, so you had, did you go to school?

M.O. – By then, I was out.

G.O. – They had school, from kindergarten on up, the high schools.

M.O. – They had a language school.

G.O. – And then, uh...

C.Y. – What were the buildings like? Were they like *tents*?

G.O. – No, it's just like a Quonset hut.

C.Y. – So how did these get, were these built for the purpose of

M.O. – yeah

C.Y. – of the internment camp?

G.O. – Mmm hmm

C.Y. – So they didn't take over some military site or anything like that.

G.O. – No. Black tar, wallpaper, you know. So...

M.O. – There's some pic... there's some, maybe it was drawn in one of those Tule... those barracks looked just like that.

C.Y. – Okay.

**M.O.** – Just like the one in Walerga was like that, except there were, you know, the slats were, they had a lot of openings so the sand would come up if you had the sand storm

**G.O.** - <<*chuckles*>> You could *see* the sand storm coming, and you know, like in Colorado, you could see it was getting *dark* out there, and we knew the sand storm was coming...

**M.O.** – Oh you just couldn't believe it.

**G.O.** – So we closed the window, you know, all the dust coming in, because it's not water, I mean wind proof, you know.

**M.O.** – I've been trying to think that, don't they have this display out at Sac State anymore?

**G.O.** – huh?

**M.O.** – Don't they have this display out at Sac State?

**C.Y.** – Oh, I heard about that.

**M.O.** – I wonder if it's still there anymore. Well, I can find out.

**G.O.** – You know, WE didn't go. Hehe... who wants to see it? That's about, then we went to, like I said, my father was picked up by the FBI, so he was gone.

**C.Y.** – For about two years, it sounded like, from what you said.

**G.O.** – He was gone when we had this evacuation.

**C.Y.** – He was already gone, you were still home?

**G.O.** – We were still home. And then we had this evacuation, where everybody had to leave.

**C.Y.** – When they took him away, was there communication they allowed between you and him?

**G.O.** – No, because, we were out on the ranch, working.

**C.Y.** – In Merced, or Sacramento?

**G.O.** – No, in Woodland. Yolo. And uh, the FBI came, and my father went to the house, and then the next thing you know, he was carrying his suitcase, and he was going. So actually, we had no com., maybe my mother had talked to him or something, but...

**M.O.** – Oh, because I remember Mrs. Isuka saying they came in the middle of the night and took him. She didn't know *where* he went.

**C.Y.** – Her husband?

**M.O.** – Yeah, yeah.

**G.O.** – Yeah. They don't tell you where they take him.

**M.O.** – Uh uh. Not the FBI.

**G.O.** – So, so, actually, all the different kind of camp, you know, you had the Assembly Center, from Assembly Center went to Relocation Center, and meanwhile there's uh, uh, uh Internment Camp there run by Immigration Federal Government, you know Immigration Bureau, mmm, only reason we know is I think we might have gotten a letter, I can't remember. That said he was in Roseburg, New Mexico, or Santa Fe, New Mexico, wherever camp they take him.

**C.Y.** – So the Crystal City one was later, when you were reunited with your dad?

**G.O.** – Yeah.

**C.Y.** – How were you informed that you were going to be reunited with your father?

**G.O.** – But they, they, they let you know. They want to know if you want reunite with your family.

**C.Y.** – Would you *like* to reunite?

**G.O.** – Yeah. So, so we, if you say yes, then they got out in a train, and they took us on by train, <<pause>> I don't know which one we took.

**C.Y.** – So you were in Colorado

G.O. – Yeah, and then we went down

C.Y. – And then you met him in Texas?

G.O. – And they took us down south to Texas.

C.Y. – And where had he been before Texas?

M.O. – He probably came from New Mexico, don't you think?

G.O. – Yeah, Roseburg, New Mexico, or Santa Fe, New Mexico. Roseburg was uh, one of those, you know they kept moving him around.

M.O. – Mmm hmmm

G.O. – Actually, there is *some* communication. I wouldn't say it's a LOT, but

C.Y. – But you couldn't write letters, you couldn't call on the phone...

G.O. – I don't think we ever wrote a letter. I don't know.

C.Y. – And it was probably about a year and a half or so before you saw your dad again?

G.O. – Yeah.

M.O. – Oh, it was a good

C.Y. – Or two years?

G.O. – Yeah

M.O. – It was around, we went in forty-two, so it must have been at least forty-three, or forty-four

G.O. – Yeah

M.Y. – when they finally reunited.

G.O. – Yeah, about three years maybe

M.O. – Two or, at least a *good* two years.

C.Y. – So you went in, in April of 1942?

**M.O.** – We went, we were first picked up

**C.Y.** – And then when were each of you released?

**G.O.** – Oh, you know, now that's another story. <<*chuckles*>>

**M.O.** – This is something completely different.

**G.O.** – Okay, um, people in Crystal City had a choice of staying or repatriating to Japan.

**M.O.** – The *fathers* you mean, not you guys.

**C.Y.** – not the whole family.

**G.O.** – Well...

**M.O.** – he can't repatriate, if he's not a citizen.

**G.O.** – Well, the whole family *could* go over.

**C.Y.** – Oh, okay.

**G.O.** – See. If the father wants to go, well, usually the kids went with the father.

**C.Y.** – Okay.

**G.O.** – So we, I, went, repatriated to Japan with my father. Okay?

**C.Y.** – okay.

**G.O.** – And then, and then, uh, we, we hit the, the uh, seaport of Uraga.

**M.O.** – It's near Yokohama.

**G.O.** – Yeah, it's near Yokohama someplace. It was *terrible*. People dying left and right. They had a big two-story barrack, and they had people laying, dead people laying in the building, I guess they must have had

**C.Y.** – the war was still going on?

**M.O. and G.O. together** – No, no, no

**G.O.** – It was already over.

M.O. – Nineteen.... Forty-five, right?

G.O. – yeah

C.Y. – So when about was this? Forty-six?

G.O. – yeah forty-six.

M.O. – early in forty-six. *You* people must have gotten there before *we* did.

G.O. – Yeah, because we left, we left...

C.Y. – so *you* ended up there too?

M.O. – Oh, my dad was, he, he didn't believe. I'm sorry, we're getting way off his story.

Because my dad said, "no, Japan did not lose the war. That's propaganda.." I said, "Dad, they *did* lose the war." "No! No!"

G.O. – you know, die hard, hard headed, you know, they can't get nothing through!

M.O. - He could not believe that they lost. He said, so when we were given the option in Tule Lake, he said, 'we're gonna go'. I said, "no, we can't go! There's no place to go!" He said, "Oh, I have a house." He didn't have a house. His sister sold it, thinking that we were dead. No, actually, there was a propaganda on both sides. Well, you know, HE thought there was propaganda, but over there, they were just as bad, because, my mother's sister said, she saw it in the news, the Americans uh pulled all these Japanese Americans, they tarred them, you know they, I don't know where they got that story, they, and they saw it on the *news*, they said, "Oh, NO... nothing like that happened!"

G.O. - <<*chuckles*>>

M.O. – And she couldn't believe that we were *alive*, you know, my great aunt. And, I said, "no, that's not *true*!"

G.O. – anyway

**M.O.** – So THEN... there was propaganda on both sides.

**G.O.** – Anyway, after we got to Japan, we stayed in that camp maybe about three four days, you know until we could find out where we gonna go, from that, that camp. You know, we were waiting for a train to take us home, you know to the father's hometown you know,

**C.Y.** – Mmm hmm

**G.O.** – And that, at that time, the train was so crowded you couldn't even get in. It was a madhouse.

**C.Y.** – From so many people from America?

**G.O.** – No, just in general. These people were just crowding in, we got suitcases, you know, we got luggage, and the place was so packed, you couldn't even, if you got in, you don't have to do anything. You could just relax, and the people will hold you up. It was that crowded. And then, we went back

**C.Y.** – now did you go to Japan by boat?

**G.O.** – uh huh. The Matsonian.

**C.Y.** – The Matsonian?

**G.O.** – Yeah, people got seasick in the dark <<chuckles>>

**C.Y.** – how long did the trip take?

**G.O.** – About a week.

**M.O.** – OH NO! Not a WEEK!

**G.O.** - <<laughs>>

**M.O.** – GOSH!

**G.O.** – Well then...

**M.O.** – It must have been at least two weeks or ten days. The boat *rocked*, and we were so sick.

**G.O.** – This was December...

**M.O.** – I thought my mom was gonna die, but she was okay.

**G.O.** – the first night was bad, but after that, I got my sea legs I guess <<chuckles>>

**C.Y.** – What were you guys thinking while you were on the boat?

**G.O.** – Oh, man. You get sea sick, have you ever been seasick? Car sick?

**M.O.** – We didn't think, we, we were, I was sick for four days.

**C.Y.** – Four days?

**M.O.** – then my, my brother came. The men and the women were separated..

**C.Y.** – On the ship?

**M.O.** – yeah. The men were in the front of the boat, and the women were in the back. So I don't know which was worse. See this was a transport ship we were on. I don't know how they <<pointing to George>> went, but you know how transport, the GI's go overseas? There're bunkbeds, about four up, four stacked up like so, and so he came back, and said, "I heard you guys haven't been up, you gotta get up. He made my mom get up, and we got up, my sister and I, we finally got up and he said, 'Go eat.'"

**C.Y.** – So you could talk to the men, it was just that you had separate places to sleep on the ship?

**G.O.** – yeah

**M.O.** – oh yeah, they came over.. Did you have GI's on the ship? <<looking at George>>. We were under the Justice Department, so we had GI's on our ship.

**G.O.** – oh yeah, we had GI's. Because on the ship, when we found out how bad it was, we, people wrote letters to the people back in American Camp, we had the GI deliver it, you know mail it for us over there, when they got back to the states. We told them to 'don't come back. Stay in America.'



M.O. – We had a chance to get off the boat. Even in Portland.

C.Y. – Were you tempted to? Or was your father so determined that...

M.O. – he, well, I guess we were told to obey our parents, so we went, but we did have a chance, because they told us you can still change your mind.

C.Y. – What were you guys thinking? Were you wishing that you could go back? Or were you just...

G.O. – Well, we figure, a lot of people thought, when this was all over, and get everything settled, it'll all come back to us.

M.O. – but we couldn't, though.

C.Y. – Did you think that too though?

G.O. – You're still a US citizen, see? And then the people in Crystal City, they said they had a chance to renounce their citizenship. Okay.

C.Y. – Their American citizenship?

M.O. – Yeah.

G.O. – their US citizenship. But there's a lady in, in headquarters in Camp over there, in Crystal City, working in the office, Caucasian lady, kept all the applications. She didn't mail it in. See... people renounced their citizenship and they sent it, well she didn't send it out. She *kept* them. So people who *thought* they'd renounced their citizenship didn't renounce their citizenship. So she was in a way looking out for the people here, you know. To make sure that you didn't get into any more trouble than you HAD to. By retaining the renunciation papers.

C.Y. – So you're saying that was 'helpful' that she did that?

G.O. – Yeah.

M.O. – Mmm hmm. Yeah, they had a better chance.

G.O. – Of coming back.

C.Y. – Oh, I see.

M.O. – Because *once* the diplomatic, the diplomatic uh, the

G.O. – the relationship got...

M.O. – it didn't start until what, 1950?

G.O. – Yeah, you could come back...

M.O. – Yeah, it was around 1950. It was around 1950, 51, maybe it was 50 then when we finally, when *I* finally could get my things start going, but if you were under age, like my brother and sisters were, they could come back, even before they, the uh, Diplomatic...

G.O. – my, my brother came back

M.O. – but I was over 18.

C.Y. – So you HAD to stay in Japan until the early 50's?

M.O. – Yeah, until the Diplomatic Relations was started, and I had to go through them,

G.O. – red tape

M.O. – all the US embassy, WHY I was over 19, WHY and all that, so you know, after that, you know, I got my passport and everything. But I couldn't come back until the Diplomatic Relations was started.

G.O. – If, if you had voted in Japanese elections, in Japan, you're OUT.

C.Y. – In other words, you could not come back to America.

G.O. – No... you couldn't come back, unless there was a valid reason why you voted, or if they, you know they worked on your paper or something.

M.O. – Oh yeah? I didn't know *that*.

C.Y. – So they looked at it that you felt you were enough of a Japanese to vote in Japan, and so

**G.O.** – if you voted in the Japan elections, you had a heck of a time coming back.

**C.Y.** – And Japan would let you vote, even if you were an American citizen?

**G.O.** - Yeah.. Anyway, there's a lot of stuff. Oh, we're getting off the subject here, but, uh...

**C.Y.** – This is so interesting though, because this is not stuff we get to learn about unless we can talk to someone like you.

**M.O.** – It's hard, because a lot of people really don't know. I don't think our kids know either, a lot of the stuff.

**G.O.** - You probably know more about it than they do right now! <<chuckles>>

**M.O.** When we had the last reunion of, of Crystal City, George got a copy for each of the kids so they know what, what it was all about.

**G.O.** - Yeah, that book, the big one, it was the 50<sup>th</sup> year after evacuation I guess, so we had a great big reunion in Monterey. And then, we had another one after that, but too many people are dying off, so they, they can't hold a reunion, because there's no body there anymore!

**M.O.**- Well, don't say that, they've just got too many things of their own going, you know? You know how busy your mom is, she's probably going in ten different ways!

**G.O.** -So everyone this year, it's a picnic, they say it's the last hurrah, because if the younger people don't want to do it, then there's no more picnic, because we're too old! You know we're all in our 80s and 70s already. So if they don't do it, this is the last one, so everybody comes. But then it's too hard to get there... it's hard to get to L.A. Uh oh, I really got off track, and I know you had set questions you had prepared to ask me. Maybe we should start answering your specific questions, instead of me rambling on: <<chuckles>>

**C.Y.** - Ok. How did you feel when you found out that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor? Were you angry, or did you not care?

**G.O.-** We didn't think nothing of it, you know. We didn't believe it, so... you know, it come over the radio, and we went to the basketball game,

**M.O.-** I didn't think it'd affect our lives so much. As it did.

**G.O. -** And then when the thing that said all military personnel had to report back to base, and that's about it.

**M.O. -** Do you remember when we were all given curfew though? Do you remember what time soon after?

**G.O. -** Curfew? Oh, yeah, we had a curfew.

**M.O. -** We had a so many mile curfew, because...

**C.Y. -** Only the Japanese?

**G.O. -** Yeah, you couldn't go,

**M.O. -** So many miles.

**G.O. -** So many miles. I don't know, I can, I don't remember how many miles we had.

**C.Y. -** And also a time of day, did you have to be home by a certain time of day?

**M.O. -** Oh yeah. We lived out in the country, but we, we couldn't go, we couldn't come into town unless we got a special permit from the Sheriff's department. Or whatever he was, and they confiscated all our old guns that we had on the farm. We had a...

**G.O. -** We didn't have anything.

**M.O. -** My father had a beautiful old gun, and I said, "Go throw it in the river!", and he said, "No, no, you don't do things," so he took it in, and he probably sold the thing, you know I laugh about it now.

**G.O. -** Yeah, you know, a lot of things that they took into the Sheriff's office, they probably were confiscated or sold, or they kept it themselves.

C.Y. - Yeah, I'm sure

G.O. - Like this farm we had, um, they put everything, trunk and everything, they put in the garage or barn or whatever you want to call it, and they're supposed to be, uh one guy's supposed to be, well one guy's supposed to take care of the farm. Well when they got back, there was nothing in there. They either sold it or took it, they took it when they left!

C.Y. - I read somewhere that during the time of World War II and before, Japanese citizens were not allowed to own land in America. Is that correct?

M.O. - That's right.

C.Y. - So the farms that you lived on, who owned them? The government, or private people?

G.O. - A lot of them were rented. Nissei, American born people, could buy land. So your parents had to buy the land and put it in their son's name. First generation Japanese couldn't own land.

M.O. Until much, much later. After the war sometime, they passed a law that they could own land. When they became naturalized.

G.O. - Walnut Grove, all that land is owned by Caucasians. The house *built* on that land is Japanese, but they had to pay rent on the *land*.

M. O. - Dwyer, wasn't his name Dwyer, dad? <<asking George>>

G.O. - I don't know, Ryer, Dwyer, something like that. So the *house* on top of the land is Japanese owned, but the land itself is not their land. They couldn't own it.

C.Y. - What happened if the owner came along and said, "I want my land"?

M.O. - I think that's what the thing was all, the summit, I think they came to some, uh, agreement. They finally, they just recently they finally made it...

G.O. - You could buy, buy the land if you wanted to.

M.O. – But it took *all* these years.

C.Y. – So the people living in those homes, all this time, fifty years or more...

G.O. – Even before the war, they lived in the house, but the land is not theirs.

C.Y. – For most of the Japanese, when they were released from the camps, their homes were still there to go back to, it's just that their belongings were gone?

G.O. – Yeah, well, <<pause>> *most* of their places were not owned by...

M.O. – It *varies*.

G.O. – You see, very few people owned land.

C.Y. – But say the home that you lived in before you went into Camp, say the land was owned by someone else, and your family owned the home, you went to Camp, you came back out, was your home still available for you to move into?

M.O. – All depends on whoever looked after it for you.

G.O. – And all depends if there's somebody living in there or not.

M.O. – We had a principal at Rio Vista High School, he had retired by then. He, he volunteered to look after all these from what I understand, 'cause I didn't go to school toward my senior year, but he, his name was Mr. Thomas, and he looked after *many* of those Japanese-owned *homes*, to see that they are *there* when they came back.

C.Y. – Was he successful?

M.O. – I think so.

G.O. – You don't kind that kind of people.

M.O. – You do find them but you don't hear about it.

G.O. – You look after somebody else's, any alien's home, you know? You don't *find* those kind of people, even *nowadays* you don't find people like that.

C.Y. – So when you got out of camp, where did you go? Did everyone expect to go back to their homes?

G.O. – I think most of them did, but I can't tell you, because we never got home! We went to Japan!

C.Y. – Oh, that's right.

M.O. – My *brother* wanted us to come back to the states. Because he was in the 442<sup>nd</sup> and coming home from, from Europe. And he told us that many years later on, the uh, the *military*, I don't know what branch of the military, questioned him why we went back to Japan. He never told us that, until *many* years later on that, it was uh, for awhile that's why there were strained relations, but when my mom came back, that's the first thing she did, she went back to see him. She went to Oakland to see him, to tell him what had happened.

C.Y. – So you had one brother that stayed here, and he was in the military, and the rest of you had gone to Japan after your release?

M.O. - Yeah, he was in the 442<sup>nd</sup>, that whole Nissei outfit.

C.Y. – That seems so strange, that the American government could have Japanese Americans serving in their military, on *their* side, while at the same time, they imprisoned their families!

M.O. – Oh yeah.

G.O. – If you read the stories in some of the books we loaned you, even when they came to visit their folks at Crystal City, they couldn't get *in* to see them.

M.O. – Yeah, I remember a M.P. brought my brother to the house.

G.O. – They had, they had to stay outside the fence. They must have had a, uh boarding house or someplace where they could stay, but they couldn't come into Camp. Even this is, he's in American uniform, all that he still couldn't come into Camp to talk to his folks, parents.

C.Y. – So you saw your brother only one time?

M.O. – He came to see us one time in Camp. He came to see Mom and Dad.

C.Y. – So he also was not allowed to come inside the camp?

M.O. – I remember an M.P. coming to the house, to bring him in, in front of main gate.

C.Y. – Now you say ‘house’, so...

M.O. – The barrack.

C.Y. - Did each family have their own barrack? Or did you share...

M.O. – All depends on how many there were in the family.

G.O. – How big of a family you had. See, on the *end* there’s a, maybe, married couples. Two people. And then in the center, maybe a bigger family, maybe four, five, and then there’s another same thing four, five, the *heavy* ones are in the middle, and at the end, there’re two or three, you know. Or three bachelor or something, you know.

C.Y. – Mmmm

G.O. – What was the size of the family, determined what size *room* you had.

C.Y. – What would you say was the most number of people that had to stay in one room?

G.O. – Oh, I don’t know, six, seven? Well, if it’s two big, you got a, one big room and you probably got the end room, too.

C.Y. – So did these barracks have canvas walls? Wood walls?

G.O. – I think it was a wooden wall, with tarpaper outside.

C.Y. – Did you have cooking facilities at all inside, or did everyone just go to like the cafeteria, the hall,...

M.O. – To a Mess Hall. See, *this* is what the barracks looked like <<*showing me a book with photos from Tule Lake Camp*>>. See, it’s tarpaper.



C.Y. – Oh, okay. It looks like the places we stay in Girl Scout camps!

M.O. - <<laughs>>

C.Y. – How about the camp that you were at, were you guys separated from the rest of your family, or were you all together?

G.O. – No, no, we were all together, and then after we went to Crystal City, we were together again with my dad.

C.Y. – Now when you were living in Yolo County, and you were told you had to go report, did you go on your own, or did they come and pick you up?

G.O. – No, you had to go on your own. And then you went to the railroad station.

C.Y. – What if you didn't go?

G.O. – Well, they'll come pick you up.

M.O. – I don't know. I don't know.

C.Y. – Military police?

G.O. – Maybe. Well, if you say you can't *make* it, they have to come take you there.

M.O. – The notice came out from the *War* Department, so they'll come and get you, I think.

G.O. – They'd HAVE to come and get you. They had to get *rid* of you!

C.Y. – How did you feel when you had to go into Camp? Were you confused, you didn't care, how did you feel that all of a sudden you had to just go someplace unknown?

G.O. – I mean, as far as I was concerned, when they told us we had to go, that's, that's the law. You know. We didn't question it. The people that *did* question it, well they got put in jail and all that, but most of them they just went. You know, they don't like to start trouble.

C.Y. – Did you have friends, or anyone you knew, that ended up in the same camp? How was it determined which camp you went to?

**G.O.** – By city. When we went to Merced Assembly Center, okay, people from Yolo, Woodland, were sent there, but there's also people from uh, other places there. So there might be two three different city people in one camp.

**C.Y.** – But pretty much, if you had a good friend who lived down the road from you, you would end up at the same camp? Or at least most likely?

**G.O.** – *Most* likely. All depends on what street you living on. <<*chuckles*>> You know, sometimes they separated at the street. So all depend on which side of the street you were on. You might get separated if you were on the wrong end of the street.

**C.Y.** – How long were you in the camps?

**M.O.** – From, from April of forty-two till, you were there <<*looking at George*>> until 1945 in Crystal City, right? Till you went to Japan in December of forty-five.

**C.Y.** – Did people leave at different times, or were you all released at the same time?

**M.O.** – Oh yeah, at the end of the war, they were allowed to go out. I guess.

**G.O.** – Yeah, some people left earlier than other people. If you had places to *go*, you go.

**C.Y.** – But only *after* the war was over, right?

**G.O.** – No you could, you could, but you had to have a, have a place to work. And you couldn't go back to California. You had to have a place of employment. That's why, you've heard of that Sea, sea, ...

**M.O.** – Seabreeze in New Jersey?

**G.O.** – Yeah. They took in a lot of Japanese for farmers.

**M.O.** – They started a frozen food farm... Seabreeze. Sea-something. I heard a *lot* of Japanese people, and I heard a lot of people went to Idaho to pick, dig potatoes.

**G.O.** – As long as you had a job, they let you go.

M.O. – Yeah, I remember my brother asked, begged us to go out.

G.O. – As long as you were not in California.

M.O. – He begged us, why don't you go out?

C.Y. – And why didn't you? Why did your father not...

M.O. – He said he's not gonna do anything that, for America, he said, stubborn old man. Can't you see him? <<George laughs>> Stubborn old picture there, where is my father up there?

<<Points to wall of family photos, chuckling>> I'm talking about you, Pop! Oh, god, he was stubborn!

C.Y. – I guess it was hard for him to feel against his own country.

M.O. – I don't know, I don't know, sometimes.

C.Y. – What do you remember most about the camps?

M.O. – Fun times.

G.O. – Oh, fun times.

C.Y. – Really? How so?

G.O. – Because they *feed* you, and they clothe you, you got a roof over your head, you got nothing to worry about!

C.Y. – Were you bored?

G.O. – Well then, then you find something to do.

C.Y. – So is it safe to say that it really was *not* a very *negative* experience for you?

G.O. – No, it's not negative but, it sure spoiled you. You forgot how to work! You know, you played so much you forgot how to work.

M.O. – Didn't *you* work, Dad?

G.O. – I worked. But then outside of that, you had nothing to do!

M.O. – Yeah.

G.O. – At night, we had dances and movies. We had entertainment. We worked, say, 8 hours in the daytime,

C.Y. – Doing what?

G.O. – Working in the Mess Hall.

M.O. – What was your salary? <<Looking at George>> \$16.00?

G.O. – No, no, it was, yeah. Sixteen, fourteen.

M.O. – No, you *couldn't* have been sixteen.

C.Y. – A MONTH?

M.O. - Yeah, a month. We were in the middle. We're not....

G.O. – Twelve, sixteen and,

M.O. – I thought sixteen was the highest.

G.O. – Professional got sixteen or something like that. The doctors.

C.Y. – Doctors got \$16.00 a month?

M.O. – Mmm hmm. I think we were twelve.

G.O. – Then you, you had twelve and I think ten. Ten, twelve and sixteen.

C.Y. – What could you spend the money on in Camp.

M.O. – Montgomery Ward catalogue! Montgomery Ward and Sear's catalog we ordered from.

That was our *favorite* thing to do. As soon as we got paycheck, we ordered. Shoes...

<<laughs>>

G.O. – They gave you clothing fund.

M.O. – Yeah, dad, how much *was* that? \$3.00 a month?

**G.O.** – I don't know how much it was. They gave you a clothing fund, so you go to store and buy whatever you need.

**M.O.** – And then we got *shoe* coupons. So we could buy shoes every so often. We had to have the coupon.

**C.Y.** – From the catalog?

**M.O.** – No, from the canteen.

**G.O.** – The government gave us clothing coupon, or shoe coupon. You had to have those to buy shoes and ...

**M.O.** – To order, to the catalog. <<*chuckles*>>

**C.Y.** – What were your reactions to the things that went on in Camp?

**G.O.** – Well, there was no reaction. You went into Camp, they give you a room, and then they give you a meal, if you wanna work, you work, if you don't wanna work, you don't work!

**C.Y.** – Oh, you didn't HAVE to work?

**M.O.** – No. But if you wanted money, you had to work. But my mom insisted that I work or go to classes.

**C.Y.** – Now where did you work?

**M.O.** – Mess Hall.

**G.O.** – That was the biggest, well *everybody's* got to eat, so they had a Mess Hall where most of the people worked.

**C.Y.** – What about laundry facilities?

**G.O.** – They had laundry facilities. You had to wash by hand.

**C.Y.** – How about medical care? Was it okay?

**G.O.** – They had a hospital. As far as whether it was a good one or not, I don't know. For us, we never been to a hospital before, so we don't know. But, when I was in Merced Assembly Center, I had appendicitis. So they took me out to Merced General Hospital, where I had an operation, and then came back into Camp.

**C.Y.** – How about dental care?

**G.O.** – Mmm hmm. Yeah, they had den..., they had everything.

**C.Y.** – Were the doctors and dentists other Japanese Americans?

**M.O.** – Yeah, they were all picked up, they were all from within the, from the community..

**C.Y.** – Were there Caucasians then, that ran the camps?

**M.O.** – No.

**C.Y.** – Everyone was Japanese American?

**M.O.** – Oh, the administration part, yes. Way in the front, way in the front. Front of the camp.

**C.Y.** – How would you compare your life before and after the war?

**G.O.** – I can't tell you that, because I was in Japan.

**C.Y.** – How long were you in Japan?

**G.O.** – About three year. Until we got able to come back. <<chuckles>>

**M.O.** – I think you came back in 50.

**G.O.** – 49 or 50.

**M.O.** – You couldn't have come back until the Diplomatic Relations... I didn't come back till 51.

**C.Y.** – What was life like for you in Japan?

**G.O.** – *That* was the bad part. There was no food! Everything was rationed. The Japanese government had rationed food to the Japanese people, and here we come barging in.

M.O. – More people to feed.

G.O. – You know, even your family is only getting so much, and then we *barge* into the family and they had to stretch their food. That's why I never care for sweet potato anymore, because all we had was sweet potato mixed into the rice to stretch it.

M.O. – In Camp, we ate a lot of bologna, so I never much liked it after that.

C.Y. – What other kinds of food did you eat in Camp?

M.O. – Oh, lamb stew. My mom could smell it.

G.O. – And was it cod? <<*George makes a face*>>

M.O. – See, she hated lamb stew, and I said, “well, what are you gonna eat, Mom?” She said, “well, I'm not gonna eat that, I think I'll just go get some rice and eat the rice at home.” She used to do that a lot, because she didn't want to eat the lamb stew.

G.O. – You know, you, there's no place to go eat. If you don't like it, you starve. In Camp, there's no place to go.

M.O. – Oh, we had little co-op stores.... But they didn't have food.

G.O. – You know, back in Japan, if you didn't like it, you could go someplace and *buy* something. We were in that small camp in Japan for about three days, the food was, oh the food was terrible.

C.Y. – In Japan, you went into another CAMP?

G.O. – No, this is where we got processed after we landed in Japan. But the food was *terrible!*

M.O. – You call that food? <<*everyone laughs*>> Ah! You know what miso soup looks like? They had those, you know the daikon, that white part, not the green top part of the leaf, that real hard stalky part, we saw those floating in, and there was no miso, it was just the *color* of miso, and the rice.

**G.O.** – If you forgot what it was like in that Uraga Camp, you're no good! <<laughs>> If you forget that experience, you're no good!

**M.O.** – I can understand why, because they didn't have the food, and we didn't know. And then, um, it was so cold, you know, so we all slept in a circle to keep us warm, for a couple of nights, till we were able to go home.

**G.O.** – They gave you a blanket, and it never held heat. It was just dead weight on you, no heat, doesn't hold the heat or anything. That's how bad that place was.

**C.Y.** – So you were only there for a few days and then the idea was that you would go with family?

**M.O.** – We would go back to our family's place. In our case, the men folk had to stay, but we took the train to our home.

**C.Y.** – They had to stay longer in the processing camp?

**M.O.** – They stayed to get our baggage, our belongings together to be shipped home.

**G.O.** – The young people stayed up at night, guarding the baggage, cause they were getting robbed. So...

**C.Y.** – By the Japanese?

**M.O.** – Yeah.

**G.O.** – The people came from warmer climates in America, and they came to the cold climate to Japan, in the summer clothing, they froze to death! Some of them.

**C.Y.** – Oh, so you mean the other Japanese Americans would steal, because they also had nothing.



**M.O.** – Yeah, but Japanese soldiers too... they were coming back from war, they had nothing on their backs, they were *really* in bad shape. I bet my cousin, my second cousin came back, and he told me that he was glad that we lost the war.

**C.Y.** – Had he been living in Japan or America?

**M.O.** – In Japan. I said, “why? You’re supposed to be a ‘die-hard’ Japanese, true to the Emperor.” “Oh”, he said, “Don’t say that!” When it really comes down to it, if you don’t have no food, you can’t fight and they didn’t have the food. They were eating mulberry leaves.

**G.O.** – Well anyway, it was terrible. After we got back to the folks’ home, we stayed there for maybe about a month, then we went out to work for the Airforce, for the military government, United States military government.

**M.O.** – Yeah, they were in Occupation over there.

**G.O.** – We got paid as a foreign national. We didn’t get paid in dollars, we got paid in yen. Foreign national was a little bit higher wages.

**M.O.** – You know what the yen was then? 360 to 1!

**C.Y.** – Now it’s only about 100 to 1, right?

**G.O.** – Yeah. Anyway, when we first got there, well some friends got in, and then they called their friends to come and work. So a lot of people from the same camp were working there, because every friend calling, hey come over here and work, come over here and work, you know, so we went and worked, and then, oh a couple of years maybe worked. Then my brother came back to the states, to finish high school, so that’s when the first people were able to come back. They were in the first group that left Japan for America. They finished high school, they went to university, they served in the military, all that, and then when we needed money, they sent us money to get back on the ship to come back.

C.Y. – So how long were each of you in Japan then?

M.O. – I came back in October of 1951.

G.O. – About four, five years. I think.

C.Y. – And so all that time, you were working for the American military?

G.O. – Yeah, most of the time.

M.O. – I went down to Kyushu to work. My girlfriend said come on down and there's a job.

G.O. – I'll tell you a good one. From Tokyo to home, to my folks' place, one, one day, you know, we get a vacation time. So we had the Mess Hall make us some lunch, and from the G.I. we get tobacco, bottle of whiskey, stuff like that. We had to pack it, and it get heavy, you know. So we packed it, we go down to Tokyo, we had a friend that took us down to Tokyo Station, then we wait for the train to come in. This one trip, this fellow and I, we got into the bathroom. They cleaned, they washed the place out, so it's clean. So we locked the door, and we went all the way to Nagoya in the bathroom!

M.O. – I was wondering how you guys got through the ticket line?

G.O. – No, we had a ticket. We didn't get on for free. It was because it was so crowded, we sat in the bathroom! There was a lot of room. Nobody came in because it was locked.

M.O. – It was bad. They would just break the windows in the train to get in. Yeah, it was that bad.

G.O. – This one trip that my friend and I took, we got in that bathroom and locked the door, then when we got to Nagoya, we got out the window! <<laughs>> Opened the door and got out the window!

M.O. – Even now, there's too many people in Japan!

C.Y. – Were you mistreated in the American camps or in Japan.

G.O. – No, not really in either place.

C.Y. – How did the Japanese citizens in Japan treat you? Did they accept you? Did they view you as Americans?

G.O. – Actually,

C.Y. – Did you speak fluent Japanese?

M.O. – No

G.O. – We spoke in broken Japanese. But my uncle had a little shop, where the little kids were coming in and making things, like brooms, from palm trees, not palm trees, but something like that, and they used to make tawashi <<*dark brown scrub brushes*>>, anyway, we got by, and then after we got through, when we left home to work for the military installation, we, we didn't have too much to do with the Japanese people, except for the people working there. Then, you know, since we speak English, we were supervising them, cause they didn't understand too much English from the American Airforce bunch of people. So we were sort of supervising the Japanese on what they had to do. So, we didn't have it that bad, you know. We were on the up side, compared to them, the other side. So we were able to come back, then after we left Japan, we came back to California, well people had already settled down, and had jobs, and stuff like that, so we just went to the friends' place and they had a job for us, so we went to the farm and worked on the farm, so actually, we didn't have that much trouble getting in with the people.

C.Y. – But financially you had to start all over?

G.O. – Yeah, yeah. We were starting from scratch, financially.

C.Y. – How did so many Japanese Americans get into universities after they came back? They had no money?

**G.O.** – I went to night school, I went to JC City College, I went to night school for three years or about, to get my AA. At that time I was working for the State, so at night, we were married, I'd take the bus, we didn't have no car, couldn't afford it <<laughs>>, took the bus, went to City College, took the bus home after class.

**C.Y.** – How did you two meet?

**M.O.** – I don't know how we met, dad?

**G.O.** – Yeah, I think a family friend introduced us. She was in San Francisco, I was in Sacramento. I used to go see her once in awhile, and take the bus. Because we had no car, I took the bus.

**M.O.** – We were so poor.

**G.O.** – When I came back, the people were already settled, so they had a job for me, or first year, I went to the farm, to the country, worked on a peach ranch.

**C.Y.** – Was that the same kind of ranch you worked on before the war?

**G.O.** – No. Before the war, my father had a Chinese restaurant. Before the war though, he sold it and we moved to the farm. Anyway, that's where we first, moved into the farm, then, THEN the war started.

**C.Y.** – So he left the restaurant, to go to a farm.

*<<We all got off the subject for a few minutes, then returned to the topic>>*

**G.O.** – People, Italian, German, and Peruvian descendants had to stay in the camps too. As long as they thought you were enemy alien, they picked you up.

**C.Y.** – But they didn't stay in the same camps as you, did they?

**G.O.** – Yeah, but only in Crystal City. Not in the other camps. Just my camp in Crystal City. If you're a schoolteacher, or a minister, they picked you up. Most of the Japanese people were schoolteachers or ministers.

**C.Y.** – How did they determine if you were Chinese or Japanese?

**G.O.** - They had you pin-pointed. They know.

**C.Y.** – What do you think the attitude in Japan was towards the war, or about the war?

**M.O.** – I think they were really happy that it ended. They were really suffering. Mentally, physically, and the food was running out. Because they regarded MacArthur as a savior you know. When he left, they couldn't understand why they kicked him out. Who was it, Truman that called him home? It was one of those Presidents, who called him home. They really loved the guy. Hey, I don't know too much about politics, but.

**C.Y.** – How long after the war ended, before things started to improve in Japan? Before food started being available? Was it bad for quite awhile?

**M.O.** – Gee. Yes, they used to make those toys out of the beer cans and stuff, and used to be so tinny, and then gradually things got better.

**C.Y.** – My mom told me that when she was little, and she's 45 now, that anything made in Japan, everyone knew it was going to break! And made in USA was the best. Now it's the opposite.

**M.O.** – Yeah! I don't know how long it took though.

**C.Y.** – Were there any products created because of the war? Like my grandmother told me there was no plastic before the war, but there was afterwards. Or maybe, what good things came out of the war, if not products. What big changes?

**G.O.** – Pokemon! <<everyone laughs>>

**M.O.** – Kimonos kinda went out of style, you know. They don't hardly wear kimonos anymore. It's a rare occasion to see women wearing them... especially the obi part. Also, Honda and Toyotas, I guess.

**C.Y.** – They were developed after the war?

**M.O.** – Oh yeah. They didn't have them I don't think, before the war. They had Datsan, that became Datsun. Datsan was there when we were. They had these little three-wheelers, they use to put along.

**G.O.** – We never paid any attention to these things. Everyday use stuff, you don't remember what came out when. Even these chinaware, you know, dishes? We didn't think anything of it, until we came back and then said, "oh, I should have bought that, I should have bought this." You just don't think anything about it.

**M.O.** – The only thing that really came to my mind is Honda cars, but I don't know for sure. I never saw a Toyota then.

**C.Y.** – From the camps, were you able to send mail, or otherwise communicate with other people in either Japan or America?

**M.O.** – We had to go through the International Red Cross to get mail to Japan. It might take awhile, but it will get there. I know, because my great aunt said she had received my mom's letter. We had mail in camp though. We had a post office. That's how we ordered from Montgomery Ward and Sears. "Here comes the mail!" And we used to run to the block office!

**G.O.** – We wrote to people after they got relocated to other camps.

**M.O.** - <<looking at George>> Did you people get shoyu (*soy sauce*) from Japan, through the International Red Cross?

**G.O.** – No we didn't get nothing.

C.Y. – Was it sent by your family?

M.O. – No, I don't know where they got it.

G.O. – That was in Tule Lake... we were the 'bad' guys!

M.O. - <<laughing>> Oh, you're jealous now because *we* got shoyu!

C.Y. - How much about the war were you allowed to know? Did you know everything?

M.O. – Oh yeah, we read everything. We had newspapers.

C.Y. – So the only difference was that...

M.O. – We were confined, in this area, with the barbed wire fence and the guards.

C.Y. – Now if while you were in there, there was a national election, could you have voted?

G.O. – No, I don't think we voted.

C.Y. – How were you treated before you were put into the camps, as a Japanese American?

M.O. – You know, I never gave it another thought, but our schools *were* segregated. In Sacramento County, before the camps. Before the war, always. Courtland, Walnut Grove, Isleton. Those three country schools were segregated. I don't know about Clarksburg, maybe not, because Clarksburg only had that one building, they probably were all in one building.

C.Y. <<to George>> Was it the same for you?

G.O. – No, I was in town. I was in Sacramento, and it wasn't segregated. <<chuckles>>

C.Y. – What did high school did you go to?

G.O. – Sacramento High School. Same location. 1940. Fifty years. *SIXTY* years.

C.Y. – So you graduated from there before the camps.

M.O. – That's why we were so late in having kids, you know. We got a late start. We were in our thirties when we had our kids.

C.Y. – After returning to America from Japan, how were you treated?

**M.O.** – Oh, no different. We just blended into the mainstream I think. It took us awhile, yeah. It took us a while. For *me* it was hard, because, I don't know if for you <<*looking at George*>> it was any different, for me it was *hard* because I was away so long. I didn't know, you know, what the reaction from other people was, but no.

**G.O.** – I think it was harder for women folks than men folks.

**C.Y.** – Why?

**G.O.** – Well, the kind of jobs were different too. You know, men could go out and do anything. The woman had to more choose what they could do.

**M.O.** – You had to kind of be *trained* for office work or something like that.

**G.O.** – Even after the war, women had no equality. Some jobs could not be had by women.

**M.O.** – Even today, *today* I should say!

<<*Everyone laughs*>>

**C.Y.** – Throughout the entire war, if you had to pick one major feeling or concern, what would that be? Like that you personally were feeling?

<<*pause by both George and Masako*>>

**C.Y.** – If you could summarize it into one word, or a few words, descriptive words, like maybe sad, oh gosh, uh...including how you felt in camp..

**G.O.** – You know, actually, there isn't that much... everything is furnished for you.

**M.O.** – She's not talking about that, George. Well, we got uprooted. That's what I didn't like.

**G.O.** – Yeah, they sent you to a strange place, but then, after you got there,...

**M.O.** – It took you awhile, maybe it didn't take you, but it got, I think it affected women more, because it affected my mom more than my dad. My mom had a *hard* time. She was crying, and burning her stuff, and all these things.



C.Y. – Burning her stuff, here? Before?

M.O. – Before. You know, that Buddhist thing that she had *<using her hands to show a Go Han San temple box>>*, she just didn't want to take that inside part, she was crying, she, she, "I think you're not supposed to start a fire", I said, she said, "No!". And the smoke went straight up, and then,

C.Y. – This is when she learned that she had to go to Camp?

M.O. – Mmm hmm. And she burned the Tenoheka's picture, she said "I don't want to have anybody trample on it," so she burned all those pictures of the Emperor. She had pictures of the Emperor and the Empress, yeah. For her it was hard, I think. She didn't know what to expect. We were younger, we didn't know. I guess it's different.

G.O. – We just go to school, come home and then you play. *<<laughs>>*

M.O. – Well, I don't how to really explain that.

C.Y. – Well, you said you didn't like the feeling of being uprooted.

M.O. – Oh, it was anxiety there, yes. I, I didn't know what to expect.

G.O. – Yeah, when they sent you camp, you don't know what to expect, but you figured out where you were going, and who you were gonna meet, and how the things were gonna be like.

M.O. – I don't know about you people *<<looking at George>>* but when we went to Marysville, there's an airfield there? And then G.I.'s came and yanked all the shades down. I said, "What's going on? We like to see outside!" They said, "No, ma'am... you can't see anything outside." It was defense, or military or something. We couldn't even see anything!

G.O. – They pulled the shades down for us too. When we came through Sacramento, they had the shades down, so we couldn't see outside. That was, they said, "For your protection." You know, I guess in case the outside people were throwing rocks at you!

**M.O.** – I think it was more a war hysteria on one side, and I don't think we were even bothered by some of it, but I guess, I don't know.

**C.Y.** – Maybe too, because you were raised by Japanese parents, you were probably taught to respect your elders, and you didn't question anything, right? I wonder in today's society, if this could happen.

**M.O.** – I don't know how they are gonna round up people nowadays. It'd be *hard*.

**G.O.** – They'd no better... they'd scatter all over the place now!

**C.Y.** – When you came back to America, did you return to your previous home?

<<*George laughs*>>

**M.O.** – No you didn't!

**G.O.** – Oh! No. We didn't, because we went to Japan instead.

**C.Y.** – Would you say the majority did not?

**M.O.** – The majority did not. We went around to see if our house was still there, the one we rented... it was gone.

**C.Y.** – It was gone?

**M.O.** – Uh huh. It was right on the river. The river is here, the highway's here, and the house is right here. <<*motioning with her hands where the river, road and house were*>>

**C.Y.** – How did that affect you, to see your house gone?

**M.O.** – I said, "Oh, our *house* is gone!" And that's what I said!

**G.O.** – That's it! <<*laughs*>> What're you gonna do? Build it again? <<*laughs*>>

**M.O.** – It was a nice house. Two story house. Porch all the way around.

**G.O.** – Well, if nobody lives in it, or the farmer needs the land, you know they tear it down.

C.Y. – Yeah. Were you given anything, like money, by the government to get back on your feet or start over?

G.O. – NO! The only thing that they gave us was that \$20,000...

M.O. – Remember President Reagan?

C.Y. – But he was much later. What about when you were first released? Did you leave only with what you had earned in Camp?

G.O. - Yeah.

C.Y. – What about your boat fare to Japan? Did the government pay for that?

G.O. – Yeah, they paid for the fare.

C.Y. – Then later you got restitution from President Reagan?

M.O. – I think it was President Bush that gave us the paper.

C.Y. – Oh, I had a tutor in 4<sup>th</sup> grade that had been in a camp, and I saw her letter from President Bush. It was a short letter, huh!

M.O. – I might be able to find it, if you need to see it.

C.Y. – Okay, thank you. How did you guys get jobs in Japan? Did they give you any trouble? Was it hard to find someone who would hire you?

G.O. – I worked for the military.

M.O. – I worked for the 24<sup>th</sup> Division, and I also got, my girlfriend said, “come on down, there’s some jobs,” so I went south.

C.Y. – So you worked for the *American* military.

G.O. – I think most of the people that went back worked for America. They worked as either interpreters, or they did office work. Mostly interpreters.

M.O. – They treated us nicely, but I don’t really remember what I did.

C.Y. – How did being interned affect the rest of your life?

M.O. – Oh..... How did internment? You *HOPE* it never happens again!

G.O. – I don't know...

M.O. – To *anyone*!

G.O. – You just hope that it doesn't happen again. You know, it's terrible. You know, what we had to do, it wasn't that bad, but the whole thing itself is terrible.

M.O. – Because we *lost* everything we had, you know, our folks, family, whatever we had. You know, we lost it all.

G.O. – And then when we went back to Japan, we had three trunks full of stuff, clothing and stuff, that was our world belongings. I got to Japan, our stuff came to us half *gone*. We don't know if the United States Government took it before they left America, or the Japanese Government picked it up before they delivered it to us!

M.O. – No, I don't think that's what it is... I'm really going back to when we got evacuated. All the stuff we left, and what we had amassed, you know, the farming equipment, we just left it, you know. We couldn't do anything. They *knew* we were going to go, so we'll have to leave it anyway!

C.Y. – Right.

M.O. – Like they say, people sold a lot of stuff cheap, because, what can you do?

C.Y. – Were there things that you specifically made sure you took to Camp with you? Things that were sentimental?

G.O. – Well, you couldn't take a radio.

M.O. – I think we were only allowed one or two suitcases.

G.O. – No, no camera.

C.Y. – Did they go through your things and take anything away? Did they inspect your suitcases?

G.O. – I can't remember if we had a list, or what, but...

C.Y. – Did they inspect you as you *entered* Camp?

G.O. – No... I don't remember them checking anything.

M.O. – No, I don't remember that either.

G.O. – But, who is going to lie? When they say don't bring, just don't bring that! You know.

C.Y. – You didn't question authority, but now we question everything!

G.O. – Now that we went through it, I think, "I should have done this, I should have done that!"

M.O. – I think nowadays people are more aware of the, uh, what is it, their constitutional rights.

At that time, we didn't look into it that far...

C.Y. – How do you feel about the American Government for having imposed this measure upon you? Did you ever hold it against the American Government, or did you blame anyone for the camp experience, or was it something like you said, you just *did* it? Did you ever question it?

M.O. – No, I don't think we ever questioned it. *I* didn't.

G.O. – I don't think, well, there's people that questioned it.

M.O. – Oh, yeah.

G.O. – That's why they went to jail! <<*chuckles*>>

M.O. – It went through the Supreme Court, too, I think. There were two outstanding cases. He refused to go to camp.

C.Y. – But *two* out of the more than 100,000 people! Did he end up in jail for not going?

G.O. – Oh, yeah.

**M.O.** – My brother's good friend, he, he was drafted into the US Army, and he said, they were supposed to be shipping out, and he said, "I'm not going. My folks are interned in camp, why should I serve the United States Government?" He was sent to Fort Leavenworth for the rest of the war. You know what happens when you do that... you cannot vote, or you cannot own land.

**C.Y.** – Permanently?

**M.O.** - <<*pause*>> I don't know about that, but I know that's what happened. So I guess they're big farmers right now.

**G.O.** – You've got the last question! <<*laughs, while looking at the questions that were typed up ahead of time*>>

**C.Y.** – Would you prefer to put all this behind you, or does it help to talk about it, remember...

**M.O.** – I think it's better to talk about it, don't you think, Dad?

**G.O.** – Yeah, you know, we don't talk about it, but if you know, like a case like this, we talk about it.

**C.Y.** – It's probably not something you bring up all the time.

**G.O.** – She's not going to report us to the FBI or anything! <<*everyone laughs*>> We didn't have all that much trouble in camp, we just took it as it came, we worked and played.

**C.Y.** – What do you think about your father though, in the FBI camp? Were they mistreated there?

**G.O.** – No, I think all they did was come, ask you your name, and they showed you a paper, and then they took you.

**C.Y.** – How did you feel when your father was taken away?

**G.O.** – Hmmm.. not much... we were *working* when they came and you could see them take him.

C.Y. – But how did that make you feel? I mean, if I saw the FBI take my dad away, I'd be really scared!

G.O. – I mean, the FBI picked up my dad... I couldn't do anything!

M.O. – Your MOM was probably upset, huh. It was probably harder on your mom. Because my mom had a hard time, because my dad had a stroke on Father's Day of 1941. And he could barely walk when we went into Camp. And my father is *not* a person to mince words. And we had to stand in line to get food. Stand in line to go *everywhere!*

G.O. – EVERYWHERE you went, you had to stand in line.

M.O. – So he got special permission to go from the back to eat. He could go in from the back and sit down and eat. It was *real...*

G.O. – You had to be real patient, because you always had to wait in line for everything you did.

M.O. – There was a line for everything, doctor, everything. It was really hard on my mom. It was really hard for her.

G.O. – You gotta find out what line you're IN before you stand there *too* long! <<*everyone laughs*>>

M.O. – And the food wasn't all that great. We wanted to eat and get out, eat and get out. Especially in Walerga, I can't believe it, oh man, we had, that's how, why I eat so fast now, I learned how to eat fast.

C.Y. – So to this day, you still eat fast? Any other experiences during that time that have affected your daily life now, like eating fast?

M.O. – I *try* to be more tolerant of other people, and say that it could have been worse. I think going to Japan was an experience too, even though I hated to go. You know, you make, you

make great friends, like I made, we made great friends with this family in Japan, and we still write.

**C.Y.** – Okay, well, that concludes my questions. Thank you very much for taking all this time to tell me of your experiences. I really appreciate it.

**G.O. and M.O.** – Oh, you're welcome.



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Sophomore World History II A – G Set

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### Interview Essay

On Saturday, May 6, 2000, I interviewed Mr. George Okabe in his home on WestlynnWay, in Sacramento. He was placed in a Japanese internment camp during World War II, as was his wife, Masako. While she contributed to the interview, the main focus of the interview was Mr. Okabe.

George was born in Sacramento, California on March 23, 1922. He graduated from Sacramento High School, and then worked on the Woodland farm his parents rented. When the war broke out, all people of Japanese ancestry, whether they were United States or Japanese citizens, were ordered by the War Department to report to camp. George could not recall just how it was that the government notified the Japanese to report camp, but said it was most likely that they heard it over the radio, read it in the newspaper, or saw a sign posted somewhere. All Japanese along the entire West Coast, from Canada to southern California, were evacuated, unless they were serving in the U.S military. The reasons the government gave for 'evacuating' the Japanese were both that it was for their safety, and also that some of them might be spies for Japan.

Before George's family was interned, his father had been taken away by the FBI, without warning. George was working in the field of their farm when he saw the FBI approach his father. They escorted him into his home where he remained for only a few minutes, and then they drove away with him. George was unable to talk to his father before he left, and he isn't

sure how much conversation went on between his father and mother, but feels it wasn't much. His father was considered to be a dangerous alien, simply because he had traveled to Japan with George years earlier. While in Japan they had gone to see a kendo demonstration that was headed by a man associated with the Japanese Mafia. The United States military felt that George's father might be a spy, so he was placed into a camp, far removed from his family. Several months later, George, his mother, and his siblings were all sent to a camp in Colorado. For a couple of years, they did not see or hear from George's father, but were later given a chance to join him at a different camp, called Crystal City, Texas. This camp had been set up for families, so the Okabes were finally reunited.

Life in the camps, at least for the young people, was not all that bad. George was around the age of 18 when he entered Camp. He had a job in the Mess Hall, so that he could earn some money, little as it was. It was not mandatory in the camps to work or go to school. However, if one wanted money to spend in the canteen or shop in the Montgomery Ward or Sears' catalogs, one had to work. Salaries in the camps ranged from about \$10.00 a month on the low side, to \$16.00 a month for professionals such as doctors. George seemed to think he earned about 10 cents an hour! When he wasn't working, he was free to do as he pleased. His memories are that it was a fun time, since he had no responsibilities. Everything was taken care of for the internees. The government provided their food, clothing, shelter, and basic health care. One comment George made later in the interview was that one negative aspect of the camps was that everyone forgot how to work hard, because they didn't have to! That made their adjustment to 'freedom' somewhat difficult.

When asked what he thought about hearing the announcement that all Japanese would have to leave, both George and Masako said they didn't think much about it then, because as

Japanese, they had been raised to follow the orders of their elders, and they had always complied with everything. At that time, neither one felt this move would affect their lives as much as it did. At that time, Japanese didn't question things. Both George and Masako agree that today it would be difficult for the government to impose the same measures on a group of people. Our society is much more outspoken, and would be much more willing to stand up for their constitutional rights.

On the trip to whichever camp they were sent to, both George and Masako experienced the same thing, in that the shades were pulled over the windows of the trains or busses, so they could not see where they were going. When they were let off to stretch their legs, they were guarded by military personnel carrying what they remember to be machine guns. These rest stops were always in the middle of a desert somewhere, with no place to run, so they are unsure why the guards were instructed to wield guns.

Neither George nor Masako were mistreated in any way during their stay in Camp, and are not aware of anyone else being mistreated. Masako's father had a stroke just prior to going into Camp, and after that it was difficult for him to walk. In the camps, there were long lines for everything they did, and Masako's father was given special permission to enter the mess hall dining area from the back, so he would not have to stand in line for such long periods of time. Japanese ran the main area of the camps... cooks, doctors, teachers, dentists, etc. The administration was Caucasian, and their facilities were in the front of the camp, near the entrance.

When relatives would come to visit George or Masako's family while in Camp, they were not allowed to come inside the compound. Masako's brother was serving in the U.S. Army, and when he came to visit them only once during the approximately 4 years her family

was at Tule Lake, he was in uniform, and even then, forbidden to come inside. They had to visit through a barbed wire fence, with guards posted at each sentry all around the compound. Even with all the guards, one time George and some friends managed to leave the camp, and ended up walking to the nearest town. There they ate ice cream sodas, played some pool, and basically just enjoyed their short taste of freedom. They returned to camp expecting to be in trouble, because surely someone had noticed they were gone. To their surprise, no one ever mentioned a thing, and everything continued as if they had never left! George laughed a lot throughout the interview, but he laughed the most when talking about his one adventure to town!

Masako's biggest enjoyment seems to be when they got to order shoes and clothes from the Montgomery Ward or Sears catalogs. She expressed great joy as she recalled the experience. Shoes seemed to be a popular item to buy, and besides being able to order from these catalogs, they were also given 'shoe coupons' by the government every so often. They could buy shoes from the camp's canteen with the coupons, and they also had a monthly clothing allowance of something like \$3.00.

When both George and Masako's families were finally offered a release from camp after the war was over, they chose the option of going to Japan, rather than going back to where they lived in the United States before being interred. They spent approximately two weeks at sea, in what they recalled as a most miserable voyage. Masako was seasick for four days straight, and at one point she feared her mother would die because she was so ill. The men had their sleeping quarters at the front end of the ship, and the women and children slept at the rear. During the voyage the men and women could visit each other. When they landed in Japan, George said he was extremely shocked. There were Japanese people either dead or dying everywhere he looked. The country had been extremely devastated by the war. There was not enough food to feed the

citizens of Japan, let alone the newcomers arriving from America. Slowly things improved in Japan. Both George and Masako worked for the United States military occupation while in Japan, and after about 4 years or so, they returned to the United States. George returned before Masako did, and eventually they met after being introduced probably by family or friends; neither one could remember exactly how they met!

When asked how being interned had affected the rest of their lives, both George and Masako agreed that they had learned patience, and hopefully to be more tolerant of people. They both said they hoped such an event would never happen again. Families lost everything, and Masako especially expressed the feeling that she didn't like being uprooted. The adjustment to both being in camp and then later being released from camp, according to Masako, must have been more difficult for the women than the men.

Many Japanese Americans do not enjoy talking about their experience of being interned during World War II. The memories are of times that created a lot of anxiety, and most people would prefer putting those times behind them. George and Masako Okabe have never really discussed those times with even their own children, mostly because their children have never asked questions! However, while they don't make it a point to discuss their years in Camp, when someone does ask them questions, they feel it is good to talk about their experiences, and they do so willingly.