

Toshiko Kubota

[Begin Toshiko Kubota CD 1]

Interviewer:

This is CD number one. It is 1:55 on March 31, 2004. My name is Dale Sato and I will be interviewing Toshiko Kubota today as a part of the South Bay oral history project. The audio equipment recording this interview is being monitored by Yoko Okinishi and the interview is being cataloged later on. All copyrights, title, and any other rights arising out of this interview, whether in its entirety, part, or derivative form or whether in audio, written, or any other format, shall belong to the South Bay Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. Copying of this interview recording, whether in its entirety or part, is strictly prohibited without a written authorization from the South Bay Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. This is the first CD of the interview of Toshiko Kubota being recorded on this date. Thank you very much for inviting us to your home, and let's begin the interview. Okay; could you start by giving me your full name?

Kubota:

Oh, my name is Toshiko Kubota.

Interviewer:

And could you tell me the name of your father?

Kubota:

It's **Kazumasa** Kubota.

Interviewer:

Did he have any English nickname?

Kubota:

Well, they call him Kay.

Interviewer:

Kay okay; and your mom?

Kubota:

It was **Hisa** Kubota.

Interviewer:

Did they call her **Hisa**?

Kubota:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

Toshiko Kubota

Yeah; and are you the oldest in the family?

Kubota:

No; I'm the middle.

Interviewer:

You're the middle. So your older sister...?

Kubota:

She passed away last year, August 7th.

Interviewer:

And her name was...?

Kubota:

Yoshiko.(OK)

Interviewer:

And did you have any other older brothers or younger brothers?

Kubota:

No; I have a younger brother. He was born in Japan and he lived his life there. He passed away in Japan...

Interviewer:

I see.

Kubota:

... over maybe 15 years ago.

Interviewer:

And his name was...?

Kubota:

Nichibei.

Interviewer:

Kubota?

Kubota:

Kubota.

Interviewer:

And did you have a brother here, also?

Kubota:

No.

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer:

Okay. Okay. Okay; so I'm going to just go back a little bit about the Issei generation, your parents' generation. Your father came through which port?

Kubota:

San Francisco.

Interviewer:

San Francisco; and did your mom come together with him or...?

Kubota:

No; he came when he was 16 years old, so that would have been... he was born in 1898, so 1914 I guess he came over. He came because his father was here. But then when he arrived here, his father had passed away. And he was in an accident. He was killed at ? .

Interviewer:

When did your father arrive in the United States?

Kubota:

It was 1914 in San Francisco.

0:03:31.9

Interviewer:

From San Francisco?

Kubota:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

Do you know what prefecture he came from?

Kubota:

Shizuoka. (OK)

Interviewer:

Shizuoka; we're often curious about why the Issei came over. Do you happen to know that?

Kubota:

Well, he came over because his father was here already and he was working. I don't know what kind of work, railroad or what, I don't know. But then he was killed in an accident before my father arrived, so my father was on his own when he came. You know, 16 years old and he had to make his own way.

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer:

And did he stay in San Francisco? Is that where his father was?

Kubota:

Well, he went to work with---I don't know. I can't think of his name. But then, you know well, he was also from Shizuoka -Ken and he was working on the farm in Lompoc, I think, and so my father worked over there with him. And he must have worked, oh, not in one job, but then I guess he moved different places. But then he went back to Japan and got married, and then my mother came over here.

Interviewer:

What year was that?

Kubota:

Let's see; what year? Let's see; she was born in 1902, so she was about 19, so it must have been about 1921. So, let's see; if she was... see if he was 16 he must have been 22. He was awful young, wasn't he, to get married? But then I guess he was on his own, so...

Interviewer:

So did she arrive with a visa of being a picture bride?

Kubota:

No; he went and got married in Japan and they came back. So I don't think it was a picture bride.

Interviewer:

So it was an arranged marriage among their families?

Kubota:

Yeah probably; uh-huh.

Interviewer:

I see; okay.

Kubota:

Because she's from Shizuoka, too.

Interviewer:

And so as far as your parents were concerned from Lompoc?

Kubota:

Lompoc

Toshiko Kubota

0:05:59.2

Interviewer:

Lompoc; and then where did they go from there?

Kubota:

Well, I know he was... at one time he was doing some fishing, you know with----in----was it Wilmington or San Pedro, that area. There were a lot of Japanese fishermen up there and he worked on that, too. But it wasn't for him because he used to get seasick; so he quit that, you know? **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:

So he came to this area maybe in 19...?

Kubota:

Well, I know that when I was born in 1927----my sister was born in 1924----and when I was 6 months old we all went to Japan. My mother, father, and my sister and I went to Japan and my brother was born in Japan. And then I stayed there until I was about 4 1/2. So that makes it, what, 1931 or 1932. I came back here. But my brother didn't want to come; so he stayed in Japan and he never had a chance to come again, because we went back there again, my mother and I, in 1940. That was before the war started. But he didn't want to come back. So he was in Japan the rest of the time.

Interviewer:

You're father didn't care for fishing very much and, you know usually the Issei came over with some kind of background maybe in farming or something like that. Was his family in Japan engaged in farming or some other business?

Kubota:

Probably farming, but I'm not sure because his father was here already, you know when he was 16. So I don't know what kind of work he had been doing.

Interviewer:

Were there many people who came from Shizuoka to this area? You mentioned that your father had a friend.

Kubota:

Yeah; now he... now what was----his name was Hayakawa, and he became a big-time nursery. He had a big nursery out here before the war. And I think he had two partners, but I don't know whether they're Shizuoka or not. But there were other people here who were also Shizuoka like; do you know the Atsumi family?

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer:

No, but you can just say their names.

Kubota:

Yeah; **Atsumi** family... well anyway, they live a couple of blocks down the street. They're also from **Shizuoka**, and I just know these people because we used to have a **Shizuoka -ken**. It was like there are other groups that had Kenjinkai, you know? And we used to have annual picnics and we saw all these other people every year. You know, maybe once a year.

0:09:17.1

Interviewer:

Yeah; could you tell me... I mean you were a child, but when you went... what memories do you have of these Kenjinkai picnics? I mean what did they do?

Kubota:

Oh, it was a big thing, you know? It was an all-day thing. We usually went to Elysian Park in L.A., and they had to go and reserve the place early so that they could have the whole area. And they'd put up a big stage and have all kinds of entertainment and door prizes and that kind of thing. It was all day.

Interviewer:

So if they reserved a stage, then can you remember what kind of program they had?

Kubota:

Oh, they had Japanese odori and singing and things like that, you know. It was a Japanese program.

Interviewer:

And what about for the kids? Were they...?

Kubota:

Oh, they used to have things for kids. They'd have races and stuff like that for the kids; entertainment.

Interviewer:

So was that held, like, every year, once a year?

Kubota:

Yeah; every year usually in July.

Interviewer:

Toshiko Kubota

So when your family settled in this area in Wilmington...?

Kubota:

No, we were----my sister and I were both born in Wilmington.

Interviewer:

Oh, that's right.

Kubota:

And my mother used to work in the cannery in Wilmington. But then that was before we went to Japan. And when I came back when I was about 4 1/2, in 1932, they lived on Denker Avenue over here. But my father was doing some other work. He was selling cars. He used to sell Chrysler and Plymouth cars. And in those days Plymouths cost \$500.00. I mean the Chrysler was \$500.00, so Plymouth must have cost a lot less, I guess.

Interviewer:

Do you remember what cannery she worked for; I've heard that there were several?

Kubota:

Oh, let's see; I can't think of it.

Interviewer:

Star-Kist or...?

Kubota:

I don't know if they had Star-Kist in those days; more like Chicken of the Sea. But then there was a cannery that a lot of Japanese women worked at over there.

Interviewer:

Was this common work for Shizuoka Issei women?

Kubota:

No, there were a lot----all different----you know people from different parts of Japan. Like they're all probably my mother's age, I mean, you know in their 20's probably.

Interviewer:

It seems to me that selling cars was rather an unusual occupation for that time. How did he get into that?

0:12:02.8

Kubota:

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I don't know; he was the type of person who liked to talk to people. He'd talk to anybody, you know so that was a good thing for him to do because he made a lot of friends and he always liked to talk to people, so it was a good thing for him to go around doing that kind of work, I think. It probably suited his nature, you know? In fact, my nephew, my sister's oldest son, used to like what his Grandpa did, so that's what he's in. He sells cars. And, you know he's already 51, I think. But then he tried---he started university a couple of times, but he didn't like that. So I guess college is not for everybody. But anyway, so he's still working selling cars, but he's doing real well. This is out in San Diego, so I don't see too much of him.

Interviewer:

It sounds like he must have been very fluent in English, your father.

Kubota:

Yeah; he went to---he took some classes at SC way back then, you know.

Interviewer:

Would that be in the 1920's?

Kubota: Let's see----yeah, something like that. Well, maybe before 1920's. I don't know. I know he took some legal classes, too, because I've got some old law books of his from way back. Then he did help the----during World War I he helped as an interpreter. So that's like when the war broke out, you know they were picking up a lot of Issei for any little excuse, you know and my father was not picked up by the police. But it was because it was on the record that he did help the U.S. that way. But he really was not in the service, but then I guess in those days it didn't matter.

Interviewer:

Way back then, there weren't many hospitals and so forth, so when women had children, how did they handle that?

Kubota:

Oh, very----it was----my sister and I were both born----my mother had a midwife and so we were....

Interviewer:

These were Japanese midwives?

Kubota:

Yeah, uh-huh; so we were both born at home.

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer:

Did they have to bring midwives from---where did these midwives work? I mean live?

Kubota:

I don't know; I guess they just went to people's homes as needed, you know? I don't know what kind of a....

Interviewer:

I just wondered if they were all located in Los Angeles or if they were in the South Bay area _____?

Kubota:

Well, this person must have lived in the South Bay I would think because I wouldn't think that---she probably didn't drive, you know so she must have been kind of, like, living in the neighborhood, maybe. And I don't know whether she was really trained to do that, but then maybe she was good at it, you know? So maybe that got to be her work, I guess.

0:15:15.7

Interviewer:

Did your mom ever talk about, you know the difference of living in Japan and then coming here and America was a new country, of course, for the Japanese. Did she ever talk about the difference in living?

Kubota:

Gee, I really don't recall. I think---her family grew rice in Japan. I mean I guess she did mention it was hard work, but she was still young, so I don't know how much---what she did like that?

Interviewer:

Did she have any English skills?

Kubota:

No; she went to English classes, but I don't think she---she didn't learn anything from it that I know of. But I know after the war, you know she was working in a clothing---well, a manufacturer of women's dresses. So she worked, you know using a power machine for I don't know how many years. At least---it was from the 40's; _____ she probably started. She worked until in the 60's, so she probably worked about 20 years.

Interviewer:

You mentioned your dad took some classes at USC, and he also took law classes?

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota:

Oh, he was taking some---just for his own help; I mean, you know for his own information, I guess?

Interviewer:

I'm surprised that they allowed... you know the Issei---

Kubota:

Yeah; I don't know. Yeah, I don't know under what circumstances or what, but then he did take some classes. Maybe---well, the **setup** was probably a lot different from how it is now, you know? They probably had night classes at different locations for all I know. I don't know. Not on the campus maybe.

Interviewer:

Do you have many memories of what the community looked like when you were born and grew up?

Kubota:

Well, I don't have any memories of Wilmington because I was born there but I left there when I was 6 months old.

Interviewer:

Yes, that's....

Kubota:

Yeah; then we lived down the street over here about three blocks down on Denker. In fact, I've lived all my life within a maybe six-block radius. You know, in about how many houses? I lived on Denker and I lived on 165115 Western Avenue, and I lived at 1427A Market Street, which is now called 162nd Street. And I lived next door, and then I lived in this house... about six houses, you know in a very close area.

0:18:11.0

Interviewer:

We can hardly imagine what it must have looked like in the surrounding area. I mean were there businesses or was it all...?

Kubota:

No.

Interviewer:

What did it look like?

Kubota:

Toshiko Kubota

It was just all vacant. There---I don't think there was anything on this block at all because the school at that time---there was a school but it was a very small---Denker was a very small school. And I don't know if there were any houses over here because I lived on the other street. And a lot of this area was just vacant lots because we used to, like my friend and I and her sister, we used to walk to the library, you know at night. And nobody bothered us, you know. And we'd be pushing this big, old buggy with her little sister in it, you know. The library was at Western Avenue near Gardena Boulevard. So we did that, like, at 8 o'clock at night or something and nobody worried about it. Of course in those days everybody had their doors unlocked. You know, nobody locked their doors. And they had their lights on and nobody cared, you know? But it was a safe neighborhood and you didn't have to worry about things like you do now.

Interviewer:

And when you wanted to buy grocery or other, you know other services were they available?

Kubota:

Yeah we did; we used to go to a market over there on Western Avenue. It was called Harrison's Market, and they're not there, of course, anymore. But just, like, day to day. You don't buy a lot of things because you're not going by car, you know. You just buy like milk and bread and that kind of stuff. But it was just neighborhood stores.

0:19:58.3

Interviewer:

So your mom coming from Japan, directly from Japan, I guess you mostly cooked Japanese foods.

Kubota:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

How did you get---what kind of Japanese food did you usually eat at that time?

Kubota:

Gee, I guess it was plain food. I guess just like a lot of people, just rice and eggs or wieners and hamburgers. I mean, you know and different kinds of food she would make, you know.

Interviewer:

And when she wanted to buy things like Tofu or something very Japanese, how...?

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota:

Oh, there used to be a man coming by in a truck with Japanese foods. I think he may have come about once a week. And so people would buy stuff from that man. So he probably came from L.A. maybe, you know? And there used to be a man coming around selling fish, too---fresh fish. See, that's when like bread used to be, like, 10 cents a loaf. And milk was maybe 5 cents a quart, you know. And wieners were, like, 5 cents a pound. So it was very cheap in those days, you know? And the Helm's Bakery man used to come every day maybe. I don't know. I don't know---he used to make the rounds every day and my sister used to go out and buy things and she would just charge it. And my mother would pay him at the end of the week, you know. But everybody was very trusting in those days.

Interviewer:

Maybe people don't know about the Helm's Bakery. Can you kind of describe what it was like?

Kubota:

Well, they came in a truck. You know, even for the Helm's Bakery, Helm's... there's a building in L.A. and they have a---I don't know what's in that building now---but then like it was being used for---to sell things. But I can't recall exactly what they sell; not furniture, or maybe... I don't know. There is a Helm's building in L.A. I know. That's originally where they---maybe the administration office of that bakery was. But then they used to have these trucks that went around the neighborhoods to sell pastries and breads and, you know rolls and stuff like that.

Interviewer:

And these Japanese vendors; do you recall any of their names?

Kubota:

I don't.

Interviewer:

Yeah; I'm thinking, well, they sold vegetables, but I wondered what kind of vegetables they might have been able to sell. Did they have something like napa or...?

Kubota:

_____, I just don't remember. Probably they did; but then in those days, too, a lot of people grew their own vegetables, you know. So I really don't know what kind of vegetables they had.

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer: Who were the neighbors who were living in this area? I mean were they all Japanese?

0:23:12.6

Kubota:

Oh, let's see; I lived on Market Street around the corner at **Halldale** and my girlfriend lived there and she was the same age as me. She had a sister, an older sister, and two younger... let's see; one younger sister and one younger brother. And her name was Ogi---O-g-i---and I don't know what Kenjin they were. But then anyway she was my best friend and she passed away in 1972, I think, in an automobile accident. She and her husband were killed. And anyway, they lived around the corner. And on Gardena Boulevard and Western there used to be a Dr. Honda there; he and his family; and Yasuko the youngest---no, Shinya was the oldest son and Yasuko was the oldest daughter. She and I were classmates. Or maybe she was a half year younger than me. But, you know he was picked up by the police on December 7th and they really harassed him. They said he was the leader of the Black Dragon or something; I don't know... and he committed suicide when he was in, you know in the jail. He drowned himself, you know in a bucket of water or something, I heard.

Interviewer:

So did his family know where they had taken him to?

Kubota:

It was just the local police department.

Interviewer:

Oh, it was the local police department.

Kubota:

Uh-huh, just right down the street.

Interviewer:

And his name was Dr....?

Kubota:

Honda.

Interviewer:

Do you remember his first name?

Kubota:

I don't know.

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer:

Were there other---were there Caucasians living in this area, too, besides the Issei and Nisei families?

Kubota:

Well, let's see; you know my classmates, I had three---there were three of us---four classmates, three of them plus me. And one of them lives right down the street. You might want to interview her. Her name is Hatsumi---married name Morita but... what was her maiden name?

Interviewer:

That's okay.

Kubota: Anyway, she was one of my classmates and another one was Haruye Miyake Her name was Nagaoka but she lives on Vermont, you know not too far---about 158th and Vermont. And the other friend was---she lives in Long Beach now---her name is Harriett Kitano. Her maiden name was Yanaga and there were about I think five girls and one boy in that family. And they used to live on Normandie over there by Redondo Beach Boulevard. But they're long-time Gardena people, too.

0:26:15.3

Interviewer:

What businesses did their families have; were they farmers?

Kubota:

I'm not sure; they might have been but---because that whole area, they owned all that land in that area. But then I don't know if they farmed it or not. I don't know. I guess in those days, I mean I didn't think about those things, what their families did, you know? So I really don't know what they did.

Interviewer:

We often hear of people leasing the land or renting, but there were a few perhaps who owned land. Do you---I know it was when you were very---a child, but for example did your family rent the house or lease it?

Kubota:

No; when we moved to the Market Street address there, that was when I was 10 years old and my father bought the land---bought the house through using somebody's name who was an Nisei; but he was of age, you know so he was a son of the minister, Japanese minister, and his name was... let me see, was it Takeuchi; I can't think what was his name, but anyway....

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer:

What were other ways that Issei and Nisei could get land?

Kubota:

Well, I know there was a, you know Calvin Uyeda or Rose or Haruko Uyeda or that was his wife. She was my best friend, but his father, Mr. Uyeda used to lease the land for them because he was an older person but he was a Nisei. He was able to... he was an American citizen and anyway he was able to lease land for other people in his name. So I think he did a lot of people's, you know farmland that way.

Interviewer:

Were there, like, Mexican families or other Caucasian families living in this area also?

Kubota:

Yeah, in fact the house that's across the street that way, the third house from the corner, I think a friend of mine---her name was Angelina Contreras---I think she lived there. And another Hispanic family---Celia Hernandez, I think---was a neighbor, and that house is still there. I don't know; I've never seen them since, but then maybe it's their families that live there. I don't know.

Interviewer:

Did the Japanese families talk to their neighbors?

0:29:01.6

Kubota:

Well, we used to have a Japanese Baptist church right down the street. They used to be on the corner of what is now Dalton and Gardena Boulevard where the triplex is there. It used to be the Baptist church there. That same church is over there on 158th now. So we had... I don't know the numbers, but there were quite a number of Japanese Nisei young people who went to church there.

Interviewer:

Tell me a little bit about your school years. The first elementary school you went to was...?

Kubota:

Oh, I went to Chapman Avenue school over there on... oh, what street is that; Marine?

Interviewer:

Uh-hm.

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota:

And then later on I guess when we moved I went over here to **Denker** Avenue school.

Interviewer:

Did you have any memories of your school years here?

Kubota:

Well, not really, you know. That was just---I just don't remember any particular thing that would be worth mentioning, you know?

Interviewer:

Any particular teachers?

Kubota:

Well, I know there was a Miss Downs. I think she was a---my homeroom teacher. That's the only name I remember. The other teachers, I just don't remember the names. I guess they didn't make an impression on me, you know. Well, I know the principal--I can't think of her name---but she used to have purple hair. Everybody used to look at that all the time, you know.

Interviewer:

I imagine there must have been Caucasian kids, Caucasian American kids also on the playground. Did everybody kind of play together or...?

Kubota:

Oh, yeah; I used to have some Caucasian friends. I remember their names but I just don't---haven't seen any of them after the war. The only one I remember seeing was, her name was Marilyn and she, after the war when we came back here from New Jersey, she was working at the Post Office, so I'd get to talk to her, you know.

Interviewer:

What kind of games did kids play in those days?

Kubota:

In those days?

Interviewer:

Do you recall any?

Kubota: Well, I used to play with the Ogi kids, you know Haruko and her brother Mamoru and their friends and we used to play, like, touch football on the grass all the time on the lawn. This

Toshiko Kubota

was when I was around 11 or 12---10, 11, 12. And I remember her little sister was how many years younger---maybe six years younger or maybe more---anyway, she'd always want to go wherever we went, you know? And sometimes we didn't want to bother with her. You know, one time I remember a time where we tied her to a tree and we left her there, you know? But we used to have a lot of fun, though. You know, I used to stay more at her house than at home, you know because her mother liked to do things with the kids. And whenever she---you know she'd have parties with the kids, well, you know the kids around and I remember her brother **Mamoru** standing on the table one time making a speech, you know about Henry Ford, you know; so but little things like that.

0:32:26.2

Interviewer:

Since families were talking---when you were home, did your family talk in Japanese or English?

Kubota:

Oh, it was Japanese.

Interviewer:

So when you went to school, wasn't that a kind of shock to _____?

Kubota:

Well, when I started in American school, you know I was 5 or 5/12 or something, and I used to play with the girl next door and she was strictly English, you know and I was speaking Japanese. But we got along okay. And then so, of course, I went to school and, you know when you're that young you can pick up the language real fast so there wasn't any problem. But then I know whenever they sent notices home, you know it wasn't strict like it is these days, but, you know they would send home notes for mothers to read or whatever it was. I knew my mother didn't read English so I would just throw it out on the way home. I never took anything home.

Interviewer:

I see; did they help... you're saying that you picked up English pretty quick, but did the teachers help in any special way with the kids who spoke Japanese and suddenly they had to learn English?

Kubota:

No they just had to learn; but when you're young like that, it doesn't---it didn't bother me any. You know, I can't recall anything bothering me like that.

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer:

And then you went on to middle school or junior high school.

Kubota:

Yeah, I went to Perry. This school, Perry, used to be a six-year high school---from seven to twelve. And at that time, before the war, those six grades, we only had no more than 500, I think. And there was only one black kid in the whole school. He was very popular. I don't know where he lived, but then he must have lived in the Gardena area. But he was very popular because nobody had seen a black person before, you know?

Interviewer:

Do you remember his name?

Kubota:

No, I don't remember his name, no.

Interviewer:

Yeah; would you say that---what percent of Peary was maybe Japanese students?

Kubota:

Gee, I don't know; there weren't that many Japanese, but then it wasn't---gee, I have no idea. My class, see, like if there were 500 in the school and the school was really not one grade. You know, one seventh grade. It was B-7 and A-7, so there were, you know like 12 grades in the 6-year school. So in my class... see, if you divide the---12 into, let's see, how many would that be... 12 into 480---into 500; let's see, it would be about 200---400. No, there weren't that many Japanese kids because I remember there were only about altogether in my grade....

Interviewer:

And that would have been seventh grade?

Kubota:

Yeah, B---B class or A class there were, like, there might have been only about 12 Japanese kids in, like, B-7. And everybody just continued on together throughout, you know whatever. But I was and I left there when I was in B-9, or A-9, whatever, war broke out,

0:36:26.2

Interviewer:

So December 7th you were in the ninth grade?

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

Could you tell us---tell me a little bit about that day if you remember?

Kubota: Yeah, I remember that. See, that morning, that was a--- December 7th was a Sunday. And my sister said she heard on the radio that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. See, my parents had a lot of friends at Terminal Island. And so they were going to go visit friends that Sunday in the afternoon. So she told them you better not go. There's a war that just started. They said, "Oh, I don't think that's true," you know. So anyway they went and, you know there was a bridge over there they had to go through **but they wouldn't** let them come out, you know when they were ready to come home. And so they were taken to jail over there at Terminal Island. And so they were kept there overnight. And so luckily there was a friend of ours was staying---an older---who was older than my sister. She went with them, with my parents, because she was born in Wilmington, too. But anyway she had friends out there, too; so my parents took her. And she called us on the phone that... "What happened?" And so anyway but she stayed with them, I guess. And then the next day they came home. But then my sister didn't go to school that day, that Monday, but I went to school. But anyway, there wasn't---I don't remember any, you know ill feelings or nothing as far as the kids were concerned.

Interviewer:

What did your parents---do you---what did your parents say when they got back about their experience?

Kubota:

Well, they said they had to have a **?**. They took them in and they put numbers, you know numbered like a prisoner, you know across their front and they had to have pictures---you know they took their pictures and that's all they did. But then they released them the next day. That's just for the record, I guess.

Interviewer:

Did your---do you think that they interrogated them in any way?

Kubota:

Well, nothing---they didn't say anything, so I don't know.

Interviewer:

How did your parents feel after this experience?

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Kubota:

I don't think it bothered them, really.

0:38:58.2

Interviewer:

So you went to school the very next day. None of the kids---did they change, treat you any differently?

Kubota:

No, no; they didn't.

Interviewer:

Did your teachers say anything about it?

Kubota:

No, I don't recall.

Interviewer:

Okay; and so from Pearl Harbor until---tell me about what happened with your family from Pearl Harbor.

Kubota:

Well, you know as I said they were---the police department went to pick up a lot of the fathers in these families because they were suspected of one thing or another, you know. And they were really mean to them. I heard that they---there was, you know a lot of Japanese people with a picture of the Emperor in their house. And they would take the picture down and step on it and stuff like that. Nasty things like that they would do. This is just the local police. No, I think that probably the FBI was in on it. They were the ones that did that. And anyway, but then luckily my father wasn't taken in. And we had... let's see, then we had blackouts at certain times, you know because there were--- they said they caught a submarine or saw a Japanese submarine in the neighborhood. I don't know if they really did or not, but everybody had to have blackout curtains in the house and things like that. And then the order came to evacuate and so we volunteered to go, our family---you know, the four of us. We went on April 1st. We went to Manzanar. Because we went to Manzanar, we had had to move around like a lot of people. See, a lot of people who were taken in to Santa Anita they were---we were taken to different camps and that kind of thing, but because we volunteered to go, we didn't have to move. You know, we just stayed put there all the time. So maybe that was a good move, you know?

Interviewer:

Do you recall what month that was?

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Kubota:

April 1st.

Interviewer:

April 1st; were there a lot of other families from this area doing the volunteering?

Kubota:

No, uh-uh; there wasn't anybody from Gardena that went because they---one of them moved to their relatives in L.A. or, you know things like that that they ? , but, you know my girlfriend's family, the Ogi family, since my girlfriend wanted to come, go to Manzanar because I was there, so their family ? came to Manzanar. But I don't recall any other people there I knew in Gardena in Manzanar. They went to, like, Arkansas or Arizona. Some people even went to Wyoming, you know?

0:41:59.8

Interviewer:

When you talked about the FBI or local police being mean to people, were those mainly families in Terminal Island Did the FBI come around to Gardena?

Kubota:

Yeah, they came around through Gardena; uh-hm.

Interviewer:

And so you heard of them...?

Kubota:

Yeah; you know how people talk about different things, but that's the way I heard it.

Interviewer:

So you knew of families where the FBI visited?

Kubota:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

How did it make the community, the Japanese community feel after all of this visitation by the FBI?

Kubota:

Well, I guess it really scared them, you know because some of the fathers were sent to, like, Crystal City, and then so when the

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rest of the family had to evacuate, the mother had to take care of everything, you know instead of the father. And I guess it was really hard on them, especially with the children probably very young in those days, you know?

Interviewer:

So this case where Dr. Honda committed suicide, this was at the local jail?

Kubota:

I thought it was the local jail, but I don't know. I might be mistaken. I don't know.

Interviewer:

And this would have been about the same time---about...?

Kubota:

It was at December 7th he was picked up.

Interviewer:

Oh, so it was soon after that?

Kubota:

So I think he committed suicide one week later.

Interviewer:

Oh, I see.

Kubota:

But I heard he was really harassed, you know by the police or whoever.

Interviewer:

You mentioned the Black Dragon? I've never heard of this before.

Kubota:

Yeah, I had never heard of that---never heard of that before; but that's what they were accusing him of, being the head of the Black Dragon group in California or something, you know?

Interviewer:

I'm just going to go back a little bit, you know before Pearl Harbor. In the community you mentioned there were---what organizations were people active in before the war---the Issei and Nisei?

0:44:19.8

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota:

Well, the only one I know of is a Kenjinkai you know.

Interviewer:

Were there business associations, also?

Kubota:

Not that I know of.

Interviewer:

I wondered if there were gardeners groups or things like that.

Kubota:

I don't know of any gardeners before the war. I didn't think Japanese did any gardening before the war. They were either farmers or that kind of work. They didn't do gardening that I know of.

Interviewer:

So when you mentioned farming in this area, what kind of produce did they grow?

Kubota:

I know there used to be a lot of strawberries. You know, that's why they call that area the Strawberry Park, around---where is that---Vermont. [redacted] at about Redondo Beach Boulevard on one side and the other side would be way over... what is that; Marine or Rosecrans. It's a big area, you know.

Interviewer:

I did read something about a kind of strawberry festival. Do you recall as a child going to that?

Kubota:

Uh-uh, I never went to a strawberry festival.

Interviewer:

Yeah; were there any other big community events besides the Kenjinkai picnics?

Kubota:

Well, I used to go to Japanese school ever since I was maybe eight or something---seven or eight. And right after regular school, you know my sister and I, and a lot of us in this neighborhood, the Japanese school was at where Gramercy and 162nd. That was called Moneta Gakuen and that area was really called Moneta, not Gardena before the war.

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Interviewer:

What was that building like? I mean was it a small little thing?

Kubota:

It was just a frame building, uh-huh. And then one part of the--
-they had a stucco building for classrooms and I think that was
torn down when they put the present building up, you know the JCI
building.

Interviewer:

I see; so what was it like to take Japanese class after school?

Kubota:

Oh, I thought it was fun, you know. It was a lot of work,
though, because you didn't have---you know the older kids if they
wanted to go watch football or whatever they couldn't do it. You
know, they had to go to Japanese school. You know, so, every
day, you know five days a week. But then the people who farmed,
you know they sent their kids to Saturday school, just, you know
one day, whereas the ones who lived around here, for instance,
that were not farmers, we went every day school.

0:47:09.6

Interviewer:

Did your parents teach you any Japanese writing or reading before
you went to Japanese school?

Kubota:

No, we just learned it in school. I went about five years at
least maybe. Maybe I started earlier. Maybe I started when I
was about 6 years old, I think. Yeah.

Interviewer:

Did Moneta Gakuen have any kind of events or activities?

Kubota:

Oh, yeah; every year there was a graduation ceremony, you know
with all the parents and everybody present. And once a year we
had like a Ondo-Kai.

Interviewer:

A kind of sports...

Kubota:

Sports event; yeah.

Interviewer:

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... day or something?

Kubota:

Where all the classes, whether a Saturday or every day classes go together and there was a red team and a white team, you know. It was an all-day thing.

Interviewer:

And they would do what?

Kubota:

We had races and.... I know my girlfriend and I, Haruchan and I, we were short, you know. We were small all the time, you know? And no matter how many new kids would come into the school, we were always the shortest because they would have the two teams--- a white team and a red team---march onto the field, you know with their red caps or white caps on, you know and they went by height, okay. And she was the head of one side and I was leading the other side, and we would come on the field and you know what we would do? We would change feet so that everybody would be off. They would be off, you know; so we did that on purpose every time, you know. I remember doing that.

Interviewer:

Did they teach---did they celebrate Japanese holidays also at the school like Girls Day or something like that?

Kubota:

I really don't recall that, but I remember the Emperor's brother came one time for something because we were going to---he was going to help plant a tree there, a cherry tree, and he came down from Japan to do that for the school.

Interviewer:

That was in the 1930's?

Kubota:

Oh, it was a long, long time. It must have been in the 30's, I guess, because... yeah; it had to be in the 30's yeah.

Interviewer:

Sounds like it was a big event?

Kubota:

Uh-hm, uh-hm.

Interviewer:

When the kids had to learn Japanese, I mean how did the Japanese teachers go about it?

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Kubota:

Well, they were from Japan, you know these teachers.

Interviewer:

Yeah?

Kubota: So---well, they **did it** though, because in our class we had to learn the parts of speech in Japanese and all that kind of thing. You know, the subject and the verb and all that kind of stuff. And I used to read---be able to read Japanese novels or books, you know which I have never done since. So, you know you forget that if you don't do it.

Interviewer:

I mean you had American teachers and Japanese teachers. Were there any differences in how the teachers handled the classes?

Kubota:

No, they were about the same, I think, you know?

Interviewer:

Were these teachers straight from Japan or were they residents here?

Kubota:

I think they were residents, really.

Interviewer:

They were full-time residents.

Kubota:

Uh-hm.

0:50:33.0

Interviewer:

Okay; do you have any other memories of growing up? I mean we're talking about pre-war time.

Kubota:

I know my girlfriend and I were really, you know we liked to play practical jokes on people all the time, you know? We even I think one time... our teacher happened to be the principal of the school, you know and he was very strict with kids. One time we let out the air on all his tires. We punched a hole in his tires, you know? And another time...?

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Interviewer:

Didn't---wasn't there any punishment coming?

Kubota:

Well, he didn't know we did it. So anyway; I knew what we had to do, though. Being a Japanese school like that we didn't have any custodians, you know. So every day, or at least one day, maybe Friday, every time we went to school, we had to all get in line and pick up all the trash that was in your path so that you could, you know because there is nobody to do the cleanup work. And then somebody had to---or girls were assigned to clean all the toilets and all that kind of stuff. We had to do it.

Interviewer:

Were only the girls assigned the toilets?

Kubota:

No, all the boys, too; of course they did the boys' and the girls did the girls' toilets but since there was no hired people for that kind of thing, you know. They ought to do that over here, too. Get the kids to, you know be more careful about throwing stuff on the grounds and things like that.

Interviewer:

Do you recall any of your Japanese teachers' names?

Kubota:

Yeah, my teacher's name was Shingo, and he's still... I don't know; I think he lives in Pasadena, because we had a reunion back here in the 1980's sometime. And he came, and there was a Serizawa-Sensei and there was a... let's see; I forgot who my sister's teacher was. There were only about six teachers, I think, you know.

Interviewer:

Were they all men teachers?

Kubota:

No, there were two; Koide-Sensei, she was a lady and Sekisawa was a lady. And there was another lady teacher and Shingo was a man. And there were two other men, but I can't think of their names.

Interviewer:

When the families wanted to do fun things, you had the Kenjinkai picnics. Did they ever go to the beaches around here?

0:53:30.3

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Kubota:

Oh, yeah; we did, because see my father was always working, you know Saturdays and Sundays. And so the Ishihara family lived down the street from us and they used to have a feed and fertilizer store on Western Avenue just like Kuida does---have a feed and fertilizer store on Gardena Boulevard, I forgot. But anyway, the Ishihara family... there were two girls and four boys, and the two girls were the ages of my sister and me. Anyway, so the father always took us four girls to the beach and parks and different places like that, and my mother and you know his wife; so we went places. He took us a lot of different places. And then this Ogi family....

Interviewer:

Any particular places around here?

Kubota: Well, I remember we went to Cabrillo Beach. I don't know if there is a Cabrillo Beach anymore, but I think there's a museum out there now, Cabrillo Beach Museum. But he took us to different places, and my father always took us to movies. Every time there was a Shirley Temple movie he took us, you know to the movies. And Haruko Ogi, her father was in the hauling business; he used to haul crates. You know, he goes to a market and---I don't know if anybody in these days has that kind of business---but anyway he had a workman there. He was maybe 10 years older than us, you know but, like, we were how old? If we were 10, he might have been 20. But then---he was a young man---but then, you know he would do this for his boss. He would take all his kids and go to the movies, take us to the movies, you know sometimes. But as I said, you know the youngest sister was quite a bit younger than us. If she wanted to go home, he'd take us all out and we'd have to go home, no matter at the beginning of the movie or what, you know? So a lot of times we didn't see the whole thing. But that was all right because we went to the local movie every Saturday and Sunday. You know, it used to be where--there's a department store on Gardena Boulevard right now across from the post office. There used to be a theater over there, and we all went to the movies, like, twice a week. Because it changed, you know. Saturday and Sunday was different movies. But it was only a dime.

Interviewer:

Were there certain places that Japanese could not go to or stayed away from that you could recall?

Kubota:

No, not before the war, I don't recall anything like that because there used to be a Japanese movie house, too, over on Western Avenue where... let's see; where is it now over there? Western

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and it used to be there was a little Japanese community out there, of shops. You know, there used to be a place that made Tofu and there was a Chinese restaurant. You know, we call it a chop suey house run by Japanese. And there was a furniture store and like a grocery store over there and there was a photographer. But it was a little, you know gathering of Japanese stores there. And in the back there used to be a little movie theater, and that's when they had---they didn't have talkies. This man was... what do you call it, benshi... you know, he would speak the parts of all these actors, you know. And we used to go there all the time. Once a week we all went. Everybody went to the movies, you know over there. It was a weeknight, though. I mean Friday night.

0:57:18.9

Interviewer: Did your parents make you learn---not make you--- did you learn Japanese cultural things, like flower arrangement or...?

Kubota: No, I was too young, but my mother used to go flower arrangement and tea ceremony, and she used to take cultural lessons and that kind of thing. So after I---you know after the war you know I was already---I was 17 or 18 then---but anyway I took up those same things, you know. So I don't know why but maybe it was because of my mother I did that, you know? I was taking flower arrangement; so I took it for about 20 years. And I took koto lessons for about five years. I took piano lessons. And what else did I do? I guess maybe that's probably---that's enough, huh? That tea ceremony I didn't care for. It was too slow. I couldn't stand it, you know, because you know when you go into that little room, you had to count the number of steps to take before you sat down. And then you had to turn the cup around so many times. And you do that with the brush, you had to do a certain kind of figure in it. I forgot what letter you write. You know, the Japanese word, the way you do it. You're supposed to do that word while you're whisking that brush around, you know. It couldn't stand it. It was too slow; and so I didn't do too much of it.

Interviewer:

Did the kids have any sports activities? You mentioned movies and going to the beach---Cabrillo Beach.

Kubota:

Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

Did they have sports tournaments or anything?

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Kubota:

They had a pool over there in Redondo Beach that we went to the pool sometimes, you know.

Interviewer:

This is a swimming pool?

Kubota:

Swimming pool, uh-huh; and that's about all, because I was too young for other kinds of sports. Yeah, we played, like, touch football, but that's about all, you know. Or we played hopscotch, you know when I was younger, and jacks and those things.

Interviewer:

But did the older kids have organized sports tournaments or games?

Kubota:

Not that I know of, because my sister and I were---well, my sister was how old when the war broke out? She was three years older than me. She must have been 16 or something like that.

Interviewer:

You mentioned your dad was very busy on the weekends because that was his business, to sell cars. Were his customers usually to other Issei and Nisei?

Kubota:

Yeah; he sold to... yeah; he had... a lot of the people, you know him because of that. And he was president of the Shizuoka-ken group, too. My father liked to talk, you know so [REDACTED], too. He was a block manager, you know. So I think he would have liked to run for some political office if he were an American citizen. But he did get his citizenship, you know after the war. But then he probably thought he was too old then, you know?

Interviewer:

He did get his citizenship after war?

Kubota:

Uh-hm. Uh-hm.

Interviewer:

That was in 1950...?

Kubota:

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Fifty-something, yeah.

1:00:37.4

Interviewer:

I'm thinking; I'm really intrigued that your father was a car salesman.

Kubota:

Oh, yeah; well, there was... he worked for this---the only Japanese dealer that I knew of, his name was Tada, T-a-d-a, and he was younger than my father. But he owned the dealership for Chrysler and Plymouth in L.A. He used to be....

Interviewer:

He owned the dealership?

Kubota:

It was on 2nd Street, 2nd near San Pedro.

Interviewer:

No Ford dealerships?

Kubota:

Uh-uh no; he was selling Chrysler and Plymouth.

Interviewer: Yeah; so did people go to the dealerships to check out the cars?

Kubota:

No he usually visited all these people. They were mostly farmers and those people probably didn't go to town very often, you know.

Interviewer:

Did they also have insurance coverage and things like that? Was that something that the Japanese...?

Kubota:

They must have had insurance, but I don't know who any Japanese who was doing that, but there probably was, you know?

Interviewer:

I'm thinking about the community. I mean were there---you mentioned there were local police.

Kubota:

Uh-hm.

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Interviewer:

The police stations; were they---did they treat the Japanese residents of this area the same way as other people?

Kubota:

Yeah; they were---you know there was no discrimination as far as I know. I didn't feel any anytime.

Interviewer:

What other services were available?

Kubota:

Well, the only thing... excuse me; discrimination was when after the war we came back from, you know back east and we were trying to find a place to live in this area and I remember them---I don't know what at what point that was, but it was in this neighborhood---it said they don't rent to Japs; you know, that kind of stuff. And then we went one time to buy an ice cream cone near the Coliseum and they said they're not going to serve Japs, you know? But that was about the only two times I ran into that. Otherwise, I never noticed it. But I know when you see my brother-in-law---my sister got married when she was at Manzanar and her husband passed away after nine months. And see, that was about the time I relocated to---after school, after graduation I relocated to Philadelphia. And he passed away in August. And so my mother, my father, my sister-in-law---my sister's sister-in-law---and her sister, the two of them, there were five of us, had to take the train to go back from Philadelphia to Manzanar. And see, the trains were just filled with service people all the time because regular people didn't travel in those days. But anyway, we were afraid that, you know there might be discrimination. But you know these soldiers were very nice to us. It was packed and there was no seating, but they gave us their seats, you know? I was surprised that they were that nice, you know? And that's when, while we were on the train, it was August 5. I think they had dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, I think. But anyway, it was that time.

Interviewer:

So you were working outside the camp...?

Kubota:

Yeah; see after graduation I went to Philadelphia and I was working for the Quakers, American Friends Association of Quakers.

Interviewer:

What kind of work was that?

Kubota:

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I was just doing office work, secretarial work. And I was going to business school out there. And then I was supposed to go to--
-I moved out to Philadelphia because I was going to go to Temple University. But then, see, my mother and father were in Seabrook, New Jersey, and there was nobody to tell me I had to do this, you know. So I said, oh, I don't want to go, you know because all my friends, classmates, were going to UCLA already over here. I said I don't want to go out there all by myself, so I never did go.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

1:04:59.1

[End Toshiko Kubota CD 1]

[Begin Toshiko Kubota CD 2]

Interviewer:

It is 3:14 on March 31, 2004. This is a continuation and the second CD of the interview of Toshiko Kubota on the same date being conducted by Dale Sato for the South Bay Oral History Project. The audio and catalog persons remain the same. All copyrights, title, and any other rights arising out of the interview, whether in its entirety, part, or derivative form, and whether in audio, written, or any other format, shall belong to the South Bay Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. Copying of the interview recording whether in its entirety or part is strictly prohibited without a written authorization from the South Bay Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League. Let's continue the interview.

Maybe we can go back and talk a little bit more about this voluntary evacuation. Was there any discussion in your family that you remember about, you know waiting or doing the voluntary evacuations?

Kubota:

I don't remember.

Interviewer:

Why did they choose that rather than something else; if you can think...?

Kubota:

My father wanted to go to Manzanar because relatives---family were going to Manzanar also. And so April 1st we were told we could only take one piece of baggage per person. So I don't even

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remember what I took, but it was probably just underwear and, you know stuff like that.

Interviewer:

So you were how old at the time?

Kubota:

I was probably 13.

Interviewer:

Yeah; ninth grade.

Kubota: So anyway, see my father had already sold his car; so he had taken the car. He was taking the car that was from the dealership, an older car. And I remember on the way into L.A., because we had to go to Union Station to catch a train, so he was going to turn the car over to somebody else, you know over there, but I remember the headlights, one of the headlights went out. So, you know under the circumstances it was kind of scary, you know because we left early in the morning. But, you know we got there okay.

Interviewer: So what happened to your house and all your furniture and belongings?

Kubota: Well, in fact we had---I forgot what we had for breakfast, but we had breakfast before we left and we just left the dirty dishes in the sink and we left because the people across the street, the **Dench** family, it was a German family, they had two girls like my sister and I and the father said that he was going to look after our house for us. So we took to him at his word and he did take care of the house. And he came to visit in Manzanar a couple of times and brought over anything that we wanted to have. Like he brought over my mother's sewing machine and my scrapbooks and stuff like that. And he was very nice. And later, about two years later, he said he wanted to buy the house because in fact I guess feelings were kind of bad towards the Japanese all over the place, you know and he said, "I don't think you'll be able to come back to Gardena right away," you know even after the war. So he said he would buy the house from us. So we sold---my father sold the house to him.

0:03:46.1

Interviewer: And this is the property on which street?

Kubota: It's on what is now 162nd Street. It's right across the street from the Perry Junior High playing field.

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Interviewer: Do you recall how much you sold the house for?

Kubota: Gee, it was very little.

Interviewer: It was very....

Kubota: You see that was in those... I know when we came back the house is probably been about the same price. It was, oh, it was in---just the thousands. It's not, like, hundreds of thousands. It was maybe---I don't know if it was maybe under \$10,000.00, because houses were very cheap in those days. But then so was income very low; so by comparison I really don't know what the selling price was, because like I said, a Chrysler was selling for \$500.00 in those days, so houses, too, might have been very low; because people didn't make that much money, as I recall, you know.

Interviewer: What were the other families or neighbors doing with their belongings? Do you recall?

Kubota: Well, I think somebody told me they had left their belongings with somebody associated with the Japanese Baptist Church, like a white family, you know? They left their stuff with them or something like that. I don't know. I don't know, maybe some other people did, too.

Interviewer: In the 1940's, I'm trying to imagine what Gardena looked like still. And we talked about the Japanese businesses. What else existed in terms of community things, for example banks or...?

Kubota: Well, you know what is now Gardena Boulevard, I mean it was Gardena Boulevard in those days, too, but there was a Farmers and Merchants Bank on the corner of Gardena Boulevard and that cross street where the post office is right now, catty-cornered from there was a Farmers and Merchants Bank there because Saturdays my sister and I would go pay the house mortgage. You know, go to the bank and pay that. And then so other Saturdays we would go pay the utilities. There was a gas company and water company and Edison company. They had little places over there, so we went to pay those bills. And the theater was on the next block over there across from the post office.

0:06:44.6

Interviewer: The Japanese theater or the other theater?

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Kubota: Oh, no. No, that was the regular theater. The Japanese theater was on Western Avenue. But there wasn't too much. Oh, the Kurata family had a department store right next door to the bank, was it? It was on that side of the street. And there was some Japanese businesses on that street, too. But it wasn't as, you know as many stores as there are now, but then even now, see, Gardena doesn't have that many stores. It's a very small, you know shopping area.

Interviewer: When someone for example wanted to buy a car and they needed to---they didn't have enough cash and they needed to get a loan, how would families go about that? Do you happen to remember?

Kubota: I have no idea. My father never talked about that; so I don't know. I don't know.

Interviewer: Okay; thinking of the time since you were born until that war time, Pearl Harbor, and growing up in this area, were there any family or cultural values that you think you learned through your parents?

Kubota: Well, I don't know. My mother was always telling us how to behave, you know and that kind of thing, but I think all parents did that with their kids.

Interviewer: Were there things that she told girls to do versus boys?

Kubota: No, there were just two of us girls; so you know I don't know any difference.

Interviewer: I mean what were girls---what were you not supposed to do?

Kubota: Oh, my sister was a klutz. She was always falling. My mother used to get after her all the time. She was always falling and scraping her knee and stuff like that. And she was always falling down the stairs at the school and all the time she was doing that, you know. But anyway, well, she grew up to be an RN, you know so she was all right afterwards, you know but she was really.... My sister---my mother used to call her what she didn't know anybody as bukiyo (clumsy) as her, you know.

0:09:15.7

Interviewer: Did they make you study for three hours every night or were they very strict on discipline?

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Kubota: No, we just did it. We just our homework and that's all. You know, nobody had to tell us. I don't remember.

Interviewer: I think that it's perhaps an embarrassing question to ask you, but being girls and going through our stages in life, and when we began our period, did Japanese parents---mothers---handle it in any particular way? If this is too embarrassing you don't have to answer.

Kubota: No, I really don't remember. It was just natural, you know. I don't remember, because my sister, being older, she had her periods earlier than me, and so when I got it there was nothing. Nothing unusual about it, you know?

Interviewer: Your mom didn't say anything special?

Kubota: Uh-uh.

Interviewer: I see.

Kubota: But then I used to have cramps all the time. My sister never was bothered with cramps, but I used to have to be out of school one day every month because of that. I used to have cramps so bad, you know.

Interviewer: I wonder if Japanese mothers, you know when girls had cramps if they told them to do a certain thing or drink a certain tea or did your mom say anything about that?

Kubota: Uh-uh.

Interviewer: Was she working all this time at the cannery?

Kubota: Oh, see, no, no. She worked at the cannery only a couple of years; because later she went to sewing school and she was very good, a very good seamstress. And she used to sew for her friends, you know. In fact, she used to sew my sister and my---well, sew us new dresses every holiday that came along. I mean not just Christmas and New Year or whatever. I mean like St. Patrick's Day, Valentine's Day---any holiday she would make us new dresses. And people were so envious of us because we always had new clothes, you know? But then I thought, "I'd like to go to a store and buy my dresses once in a while." You know? But my mother did better sewing than what was sold in stores but, you know I always wanted to buy Shirley Temple dresses because, you know it was very popular in those days. So for school, you

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know every September, she'd buy me about two or three new dresses like that. But otherwise, she always made our clothes.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Was this a sewing school in Gardena?

Kubota: No, it was in L.A., I think.

Interviewer: And she would drive to...?

Kubota: She---or was it in Gar---no, in those days I think it was on Western Avenue in Gardena. There used to be a lady who did---she had a little shop over there.

0:12:16.7

Interviewer: This was an Issei lady?

Kubota: Yeah; an Issei lady; because I remember... you know the Mikasa Company? That Mrs. ... what is her---what is that company who owns that? The man's... oh, what is his name? I have his book that he wrote; his biography. But anyway, his wife used to be, well, her name was Sakaye and she used to go to the same place over there. And I used to follow her around all the time or whatever. She probably....

Interviewer: Why did you do that?

Kubota: ---doesn't remember. Because I liked her, you know? You know, so anyway so it was over there. It was on Western Avenue.

Interviewer: Was this a common occupation for Issei women or an Issei woman?

Kubota: No, I don't think so, but she liked to sew. So that's why she went to sewing school.

Interviewer: Did they also learn how to sew kimonos?

Kubota: No, my mother didn't learn how to do that. So my mother was really up on, you know styles and all that. You know; because she would take us to L.A. shopping every once in a while. We went in on a bus because my father was working. And she'd take us to Bullock's and those places and she would go at---they don't have yardage anymore there, but that's where she used to buy all her yardage, you know? And we used to sit for hours looking at style books, you know? They don't even have that anymore. I don't know---maybe they do.

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Interviewer: Did she teach you sewing?

Kubota: No, I never did like sewing because I thought why should I learn since she sews so well. You know? So I never did learn. But my sister went to---at Manzanar she took sewing, but then it wasn't any use either for her, you know. Because when I was in seventh grade, you had to take sewing. Homemaking, you know. And I never---I just---I remember making one blouse and that's about all. But they knew---our teacher, her name was Maloney, you're not supposed to take your work home, you know. But I didn't like to sew so I used to take it home. And Hatsumi who lives down the street over here; now she used to sew for her family since she was very young. And she loved to sew. So she would do some of my sewing for me. But one time, you know I forgot to take it to school, but then, you know this teacher liked Japanese or she liked me, so she didn't say anything. So I never did get to sew, learn how to sew.

Interviewer: Yeah; you had mentioned the Japanese Baptist Church. This is in the pre-war period. So on Sundays, did you go to that church?

Kubota: Uh-hm yeah; I went every Sunday, my sister and I.

Interviewer: Your mom?

Kubota: My mother went to---she was brought up as a Buddhist like most Japanese are, but then she went to the church with the adults in the evening.

0:15:31.8

Interviewer: She didn't feel that it was a conflict or anything?

Kubota: No.

Interviewer: How big was this church at that time?

Kubota: Gee, I don't know.

Interviewer: I mean did all your neighbors and friends go to that church?

Kubota: Yeah; it was all Japanese. It was all Japanese; but all my friends were you know there.

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Interviewer: I wonder what it was like. I mean what was Sunday school like? Do you have any memories of Sunday school class or church services?

Kubota: Oh, I really don't remember anything about the church. You know? I guess it didn't make any impression on me, maybe.

Interviewer: Do you happen to remember the reverend at that time?

Kubota: There was an older reverend and a younger one. The younger one was Paul Nagano. And the older one was---I can't---I don't know the name of that minister, but there were, you know like, two. Two ministers, you know... one for the younger people and one for the Isseis.

Interviewer: So this was a Japanese-speaking service?

Kubota: Uh-hm; no, for the Isseis it was, but for the younger people it was English.

Interviewer: Yeah; was your dad also raised as a Buddhist?

Kubota: Yeah; but he never went to church.

Interviewer: He never went to church?

Kubota: No.

Interviewer: Okay; so at the time of the evacuation, did any--- you know you had a Japanese church. I mean what happened to that church during the time of the evacuation?

Kubota: Well, I don't know what happened during that time at all. But they, you know started over again after the war and they're over there now.

Interviewer: I mean did the---did anybody from that---from the Baptist church come around to help people move or evacuate?

Kubota: I don't recall anything like that, no.

Interviewer: Okay all right; let's move on to now you are arriving at Manzanar and you said it was April...?

Kubota: First.

Interviewer: First---of 1942.

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota: Because tomorrow it's the anniversary, you know?

0:17:57.8

Interviewer: Ah, yes. So do you have any memories of that journey there or...?

Kubota: Uh-uh; well, we went on this old train. It came out of moth balls maybe because, you know they didn't have lights on the train. They had to come around lighting kerosene lamps. And you had to keep all the windows closed. I mean curtains. You couldn't, you know you couldn't be looking out the window. But then after the train---it went to Bakersfield.

Interviewer: Were there other people on the platform?

Kubota: Oh, yeah. I mean there were a lot of people getting on the train because they're all going to Manzanar. And they came from all over. Not too many from Gardena, maybe. We were the only ones from Gardena. They were mostly from L.A., maybe.

Interviewer: I mean were there guards there or soldiers? Did any of the...?

Kubota: There probably were, but I don't remember.

Interviewer: You don't remember; uh-hm.

Kubota: Yeah; there must have been, because they were the ones that made sure that our window draperies were closed and they came around to light the lamps, you know.

Interviewer: That was from Union Station, right?

Kubota: Uh-hm.

Interviewer: Were there any other memories of that journey?

Kubota: No. I don't have any.

Interviewer: Did people bring food with them or...?

Kubota: I really don't remember.

Interviewer: Okay; so then you arrive at Manzanar. Are there any memories of that---first impressions?

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Kubota: Well, you know they assigned us to this cot, or rather room with.... They had---was it how many feet... 100 feet? The length was 100 feet and they had it sectioned off into four units, and so it was, like, 25 feet. And there were my father's relatives. I mean he called them his relatives, but I don't know. It's just a man who was his relative, because the wife really was not his wife, you know and he had two girls. And there was four of them and four of us, so eight of us in that space. And she was the meanest woman I ever saw, you know? We haven't spoken to them since. You know, because she was so mean to us.

0:20:24.0

Interviewer: How was she mean like?

Kubota: Well, she wanted the lights out at a certain time whether we were doing anything. She wanted everybody's lights out and we couldn't do anything. And they finally found another place in the same block to move to. She uprooted all the plants we had around the house. You know, around the bungalow. And she did mean things like that, just out of meanness. And I know her husband, or rather this man... he was my father's relative. He was a barber, but he was a real nice person. But I guess he couldn't take it, his wife being that way. And he used to always say he was going to go commit suicide. And so, you know the mother would make us go look for him or go follow him to make sure he was all right and that kind of thing, you know? And she was very odd.

Interviewer: Was this feeling of depression and wanting to kill yourself... was that unusual at that time among people?

Kubota: No; at first we kind of took it as a joke, though, you know being our age and everything. We didn't take it seriously, but maybe she did. I don't know.

Interviewer: So you---are there---what did it look like when you walked in?

Kubota: Well, we had to make our own mattress out of straw. We had to go gather the straw. You know, they had bales of straw or whatever and we had to stuff the mattress and that was our mattress, you know. And there were all kinds of holes, potholes in the floor because they used cheap wood, you know with knotholes in it, you know. And we had to cover them all up with---you know when you open a can, the lid. We had to nail it over the holes and that kind of thing. Yeah; because it was very dusty out there and it would all come through the tar paper, and

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it was kind of miserable, you know. And then they weren't finished with building our block yet and it was just like dugouts all the way around when they were doing the plumbing. And it was all dug up, you know to the restroom. And the restrooms, you go there and there aren't any partitions. There are rows of toilets, you know with no partitions in between or whatever. And the showers are all around the wall, you know. So we never took showers, you know our family. We'd wait until, like, 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock when everybody was gone to bed because I didn't want to go early. So we all went later. And every time we went to the bathroom, my mother would take a towel or something. She'd, you know stand there in front of me so I would have a little bit more privacy. You know that kind of thing. But I never did get used to that.

0:23:26.7

Interviewer: How about meals?

Kubota: Well, we had how many buildings? Was it twelve barracks to a block? Yeah; there were six in a row---six in a row; two rows of six bungalows. And all the people who worked in the mess halls were probably amateurs. You know, they never did any cooking. But then they had good pancakes. I loved pancakes, you know? So I used to go three times I used to go. They were shocked that I would be eating so much pancakes, you know? But otherwise the food was not too great. And my father used to be--he worked as a kitchen inspector. He would have to make the rounds of all the kitchens in the blocks, you know in the camp. And so he got to know these people. And so they would give him the food. So my mother used to cook at home. We used to have a hotplate. She used to cook our meals. So we didn't go to the mess halls that much, you know after a while.

Interviewer: You said he was a---he became a block manager?

Kubota: Yeah; he was a block manager.

Interviewer: What did a block manager do?

Kubota: Well, each block had what they call a block manager. And they had a meeting, you know of all the block managers in the camp, so they kind of had similar rules or whatever to run the blocks or the camp, you know.

Interviewer: So were they a kind of go-between between the WRA and the people who lived in that area.

Kubota: Yeah; uh-huh. Uh-hm.

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer: So did they have a lot of meetings in each block?

Kubota: Yeah; they probably maybe once a month or whatever. If they had any problems, I think.

Interviewer: Well, having arrived at Manzanar and your family decided to voluntarily relocate, were your parents---how did they feel or what was their reaction when they arrived, if you can recall?

Kubota: Well, I don't think that---my father wasn't the type to complain about things, and neither was my mother. So we didn't have any---I don't remember anything about that kind of complaints.

Interviewer: So how long were you there at Manzanar?

Kubota: Three years.

Interviewer: Three years. Okay; so what would a typical day be like?

0:26:00.5

Kubota: Well, you get up and go to school, you know?

Interviewer: Oh; did they have school started up at that time?

Kubota: Well, we went in April and they didn't have formal school. I mean it wasn't set up that soon. But then we did have classes. Classes were in---let's see---I forgot what blocks they were. I was living in block five, and so block one was administration and it's just a---block two.... I don't know, about three blocks or two blocks, maybe, were used for classrooms.

Interviewer: What about the teachers? Were they brought in from neighboring areas or...?

Kubota: Yeah; I don't know which areas they came from. But, you know I think they were from different places.

Interviewer: Were they all Caucasian?

Kubota: Uh-hm.

Interviewer: Caucasian teachers.

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota: Yeah; once in a while we did have a teacher---a person who might have been a teacher before, you know? But I just knew one. You know, he was the only teacher in Japanese that I knew of.

Interviewer: Oh, there were Japanese-American teachers?

Kubota: Uh-hm, uh-hm; just one that I know of.

Interviewer: Well, you had just come from being---you were in middle school or kind of middle school or high school. Did you think that the classes were poorly taught compared to what you had left?

Kubota: No, I didn't---I think they were okay, really. Although I did have one teacher who was---a social studies teacher---he was blind. And he was the teacher.

Interviewer: He was blind?

Kubota: Yeah; he was blind. And he taught social studies. And it really got me mad one time when, you know everybody had to give a talk about the book or something, some report. And he says, "You're reading that, aren't you?" And I said, "No, I'm not. I memorized it." And all the kids said, "She's not reading it." But he gave me a "D" just because he thought I was. You know, he didn't believe the kids. But then anyway, his name was ?Greenley?. I remember that name well.

Interviewer: Did they have textbooks and maps and desks---

Kubota: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: ---and all the equipment like that?

Kubota: Well, desks, I don't know if we had desks in the beginning. We probably got them eventually, but I really don't remember whether we had desks or whether they were kind of small tables and chairs. I guess it didn't impress me, you know?

0:29:05.1

Interviewer: So you remember that teacher especially.

Kubota: Yeah.

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer: Because he gave you a "D" on your report. So school would end about what time, and then what happened after that?

Kubota: It must have been like 3 o'clock I guess.

Interviewer: And then we're talking about kind of like the daily schedule.

Kubota: It might take about 15 or 20 minutes to walk back home, you know. And then I'd probably do my homework. There really wasn't much to do, you know?

Interviewer: Did they have any other activities, like in the evening, for students?

Kubota: I don't remember. They might have, but then.... They did have movies in the **fire break** area, you know between the blocks. But then that was outside in the summertime or when the weather was right for it. But then it was very dusty all the time in Manzanar, and that's how I got my allergy. You know, I've had allergies ever since---ever since 1943. You know, I should sue the government for that, because if it wasn't for that, I wouldn't have my allergies, which I still have. It bothers me all year round.

Interviewer: So what could you do? Was there a clinic or a hospital?

Kubota: Uh-uh. No, it was just a---you know it used to bother my eyes, my left eye especially. I used to bandage my left eye all the time because I couldn't keep it open because it was just bothering me all the time.

Interviewer: Did they have a hospital?

Kubota: Yeah; they had a hospital, but then they didn't have any specialized people. I mean just general. I never thought of going to a doctor for that.

Interviewer: Well, people could only carry so much of their belongings, so it must have been a different climate there. So what did people do when they needed clothes?

Kubota: Well, you know people started ordering from Montgomery Ward and Sears Roebuck. And everybody had catalogues and they'd be ordering all the time. And sometimes you'd get some nasty notes in there from people filling the order, you know?

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer: Really.

Kubota: Yeah; prejudiced people.

Interviewer: Do you recall what they would write?

Kubota: I don't remember exactly, but I think they were kind of nasty sometimes. I didn't get any but some people used to tell me.

0:32:02.5

Interviewer: Did your mother resume sewing?

Kubota: Oh, yeah. They gave us---everybody in the camp, no matter what age---they gave us a navy pea coat. And those are very heavy wool, you know? And they're big because, you know they're not made for Japanese. So my mother used to remake those for a lot of people. Cut it down and---you know. So she was busy all the time doing that.

Interviewer: So....

Kubota: Oh, we used to play Mahjong a lot at Manzanar. We used to play, like, from Friday night, we used to play all day Saturday and all day Sunday. And my mother used to cook, you know make our dinners and we ate at the table while playing.

Interviewer: So the first year goes by. The second year comes. I mean did you feel differently about living in this Manzanar?

Kubota: No, it didn't even bother me. It was like being on a long vacation, to tell you the truth---like being in camp or something. I mean some people took it hard, but it didn't bother me.

Interviewer: When you say they took it hard, how...?

Kubota: I mean some people resented it and that kind of thing, but it didn't bother me.

Interviewer: And then the third year came along and---oh, at a certain point the WRA sent out certain questionnaires asking about your loyalty to....

Kubota: Oh, that was more for the men, the boys.

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer: Is that something that your father filled out?

Kubota: No, it was just---I think it was for boys who were army age, you know whether they would support the U.S. and would the fight for the U.S. or not and that kind of thing. And that's why a lot of people had to be moved out to **Tule Lake**, the ones who answered no.

Interviewer: Remember family discussions about that or within the block?

Kubota: We didn't have any boys in our family, you know so we didn't. It never came up.

Interviewer: Yeah; but maybe your father heard about these things because he was block manager?

Kubota: Uh-hm. I don't remember any _____ discussion at home.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you still had your brother in Japan who was born in Japan. And all the time before camp did you have any communication with him at all?

Kubota: Before camp?

Interviewer: I mean you said you went---you....

Kubota: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah; we had---my parents did.

0:35:05.0

Interviewer: Your parents did.

Kubota: And then my mother and I went to visit right before the war.

Interviewer: Oh, we didn't talk about that, did we?

Kubota: We went June through September. And the war started in December.

Interviewer: Was there any urgent reason why you went to---you visited Japan?

Kubota: I think my mother probably wanted to have him come back with us, but he didn't want to do it.

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer: Okay; and then Pearl Harbor happened. You are now at Manzanar. So did you have any communication with him during that period?

Kubota: No, uh-uh. No, I know my mother's mother passed away during the war because when the area was bombed or something and the house caught on fire and her mother died in the fire. So the Red Cross notified her.

Interviewer: So this was in what part of Japan?

Kubota: Shizuoka.

Interviewer: Shizuoka; so you had no word about what happened to your brother?

Kubota: No, but we heard that he had volunteered when he was 16 or something. He was on a submarine.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Kubota: So we knew that he couldn't---being, you know in the war service, he probably wouldn't be able to come back here, you know for a while anyway. But he didn't want to anyway.

Interviewer: Did you ever find out what area his submarine...?

Kubota: No. No.

Interviewer: I see. Was this something because your brother was there and because now Japan was the enemy, was this something that the family felt like they weren't going to talk about that?

Kubota: No.

Interviewer: Okay all right; now you're in the third year at Manzanar. Where were you when the war ended? That would have been I guess August.

Kubota: Oh, see, that was the time we---I left Manzanar in June, right after high school graduation, and my brother-in-law passed away in August. He passed away August 3rd, I think. So we were going back from back east to Manzanar for the service. And that's why we were on the train. You know, they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. _____, you know. And then we went on to Manzanar, had the service, and went back east again.

Interviewer: So you left in June. What was that for?

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota: Relocation. After, see, the camps closed in '45, see.

Interviewer: Oh.

Kubota: And I think my sister stayed in Manzanar along with her in-laws, you know until November.

0:38:01.0

Interviewer: What made you decide to go to the east coast?

Kubota: Well, because I was going to Temple University.

Interviewer: That's right.

Kubota: You know; but then I didn't do it.

Interviewer: But you had to support yourself then.

Kubota: Well, I was working for---see, after I was working for the Quakers, after I got back from Manzanar, I worked in the office of Seabrook Farms.

Interviewer: In New Jersey?

Kubota: New Jersey. And I was getting paid \$25.00 a week, including lunch.

Interviewer: So at that time that was good pay?

Kubota: Well, average, I guess, because after I came back here the following year---1946---I started working for the school district. As a steno I was making \$153.00 a month, which was pretty good, you know? But that's only \$153.00. That's better than in Manzanar when I was working on the work experience program four hours a day. I was making \$8.00 a month.

Interviewer: And what kind of work was that?

Kubota: That's office work.

Interviewer: Office work. Did you work in a certain particular...?

Kubota: Yeah; I was working in the agriculture department.

Interviewer: Agriculture department, okay.

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota: Yeah; I remember one time they were short of help and they had to clean how many chickens... 10,000 chickens. You know, there were some people who were killing the chicken and all of us in the office had to go help pluck the, you know feather off. I never ate chicken for a long time after that, you know. That's terrible.

Interviewer: Did they have any trouble at Manzanar? You know, I mean your family sounded like you adjusted well. But other people didn't.

Kubota: Yeah; there was. I forgot their name, but then there was somebody in camp who was accused of being an **inu (dog)**, you know telling on other people, you know to the guard men or something. And people were aware of that and they were after him. I don't know. They beat him up, I think. But that was a big thing then. I can't even think of this guy's name because, you know I just don't remember.

Interviewer: What happened to him after that?

Kubota: I don't know whether he was moved out of camp or what happened to him.

Interviewer: Your work at Seabrook. What did it involve?

Kubota: Oh, just working in the office, that's all.

Interviewer: Working the office meant typing?

Kubota: Yeah; typing, yeah. Uh-huh.

Interviewer: So there were quite a few Japanese from camps working there?

Kubota: Uh-hm, yeah. They were recruiting Japanese workers. So a lot of Japanese went out to Seabrook Farms. See, they make the---what's that frozen food? It was very well-known brand. Is it---I don't use frozen foods, so I don't know. But it was a well-known brand that they used to package out there. Vegetables mainly, you know.

0:41:26.0

Interviewer: So the Japanese were out in the field harvesting these crops?

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota: No, no. They're doing---they're freezing it, whatever, and packaging it.

Interviewer: Ah. So how long were you there?

Kubota: Oh, I was just there six months, maybe---through August; so June, July... eight months because we came back here in March '46.

Interviewer: So when did your family decide to come back to California?

Kubota: Well, it was March 1946.

Interviewer: March, uh-huh. So you were in New Jersey. Your mom and dad were still at Manzanar?

Kubota: Yeah; no. No, they were in New Jersey.

Interviewer: Oh, they....

Kubota: After I relocated to Philadelphia, they came out to New Jersey.

Interviewer: Oh, they did?

Kubota: Uh-hm.

Interviewer: Were they able to find work there also?

Kubota: Oh, yeah. That was the purpose of their moving there because they were recruiting workers.

Interviewer: Well, how did the Japanese in the camp find out about these various jobs?

Kubota: I don't know if the people from the company would go to Manzanar or inform the War Relocation Authority to recruit members from anybody at any other camps whether they were interested in relocating.

Interviewer: Your sister accompanied your family, too?

Kubota: No, she stayed with her in-laws. She stayed in Manzanar.

Interviewer: She was married at Manzanar.

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota: Yeah; but then see, her husband had passed away in December of---no, I mean August of 1945.

Interviewer: Was he a soldier?

Kubota: No, he was a doctor. He was a dentist. But see, that year was a very bad year for my sister's mother-in-law, because she lost her husband in camp. He died of cancer. And her oldest daughter, who was a teacher who had relocated to Philadelphia earlier, she passed away. And then my sister's husband who was a dentist was the oldest of the family. He passed away. So she lost three people in a matter of six months.

Interviewer: That must have been very difficult. So now your family has relocated to Seabrook. And your family made the decision to come back. Was it because Seabrook Farm closed down or...?

Kubota: No, no.

Interviewer: How did that happen?

Kubota: No, my father---we always wanted to come back to California. So we thought we might as well do it at that time. So there was another couple that came back with us.

Interviewer: From Gardena?

Kubota: No. They lived in L.A. but then they came back to California at the same time. They lived in L.A.

Interviewer: Was there fear of going back to the west coast, do you think, among the Japanese?

Kubota: Well, we heard kind of reports of things, you know people **mistreating** the Japanese or making nasty remarks and that kind of stuff. Other than that, I mean yeah, people were kind of afraid of facing those people, you know? But you had to start somewhere.

0:45:03.7

Interviewer: Okay; so then you---how did you travel back to California?

Kubota: Oh, by train.

Interviewer: By train; all the way?

Toshiko Kubota

Kubota: Yeah uh-huh; because in those days I don't think planes were all that---it was mostly by train in those days, in the 40's.

Interviewer: Probably some people took buses, perhaps?

Kubota: Could be.

Interviewer: Yeah; so....

Kubota: Because I know we took---see, before we came back here, we took a taxi because we wanted to kind of look around in New York City and Washington, D.C., so we went by taxi. There's a tunnel under the Hudson River that goes into---from New Jersey to New York. And so the taxi driver took us to different places.

Interviewer: I see.

Kubota: We went up the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building and different places. And the RCA building---that's the first time I saw television was 1946. They had television then. It was just starting.

Interviewer: Your first time to the east coast, first time for television?

Kubota: Yeah; uh-hm, uh-hm; because television was still not public yet. They were still working on it.

Interviewer: So what was your reaction to television?

Kubota: I thought my goodness, you know things have really progressed, you know?

Interviewer: Okay; so now you're back---so you could come back to California. So did you come to Los Angeles directly?

Kubota: Yeah; we---our relatives had a rooming house on 14th and Broadway. So they let us have a few rooms, you know over there. So that's how I started working for the school district, because the school district in those days was on Broadway and 11th. So I had a friend, a classmate, who happened to be working over there already, and she told me why don't I go over there and get a job, too. So that's---and I stayed there for 46 years for the school district, you know.

Interviewer: What kind of work did you do there?

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Kubota: Well, at the end I was---I started as a steno, but I was a financial analyst when I retired. But I've been just all over the place, not just one location, you know.

Interviewer: And what about the rest of your family?

Kubota: Well, my father went back to selling cars. And my mother was working in this clothing place making dresses, sewing dresses. Then my sister in the meantime had come back from Manzanar and she decided she wanted to be a nurse. So she went to school. And my girlfriend, too, Haruko, she wanted to be a nurse, too. So they kind of went---got the training not in the same place but then they started working about the same time.

Interviewer: Were a part of that student---many students were invited to go to different colleges or universities. They weren't a part of that?

Kubota: No, my sister did it on her own, because my sister went to the Good Samaritan. They had the Johnson College of Nursing and she went there. And she started working at the Good Samaritan Hospital. And my friend went to---she went to SC school over there. And then she started working at the Harbor General Hospital. Oh, no, no; she worked with the school district as a school nurse for quite a while. In fact, that's where---she was a nurse's training---she was a nurse's aide at the General Hospital, and then she went to school and got her RN. She was working as a school nurse.

0:48:54.2

Interviewer: So they came back to Gardena. Why did they choose Gardena?

Kubota: Who, my friends?

Interviewer: No, your parents.

Kubota: My parents? Oh, because we lived here all our---before that we lived here all our lives practically.

Interviewer: Did you know of other people who were settling back into Gardena?

Kubota: There were quite a few Japanese families here already.

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Interviewer: So by that time you had sold your house to the German family.

Kubota: Uh-hm.

Interviewer: Was it difficult to find housing? I've heard that from other people.

Kubota: Well, the people---there were already Japanese people in real estate business already. So we bought---I think we bought the house next door from the Kamiya Realty. And then this area here was a vacant lot, so we thought at the same time we'd buy the lot. So we built the house five years later.

Interviewer: Did you feel that there was a different feeling about Japanese after the war, from other people I mean?

Kubota: Well, it was mainly from people who had moved into Gardena during the war, not the old timers, you know that were here before.

Interviewer: Did they, like, ignore the Japanese or how did they react to the Japanese coming back into this community?

Kubota: Well, I don't know. I just didn't---it really---you know those things don't bother me. As long as it doesn't affect me personally, I don't---and it didn't affect any of---my mother or my father's business, so it didn't affect us that way. We just took it in stride, and you just have to---it takes time for people's feelings to change. Some people never change, but then you just can't let that bother you all the time.

Interviewer: Were you able to save enough money from all your earnings in order to buy the house?

Kubota: Yeah; we had to... see, that's why the house when we first bought it, it was in my mother, my father, and in my name, the three of us, because my sister wasn't with us, you know at that time. And so we all pooled our money and bought the house. And that's what we did the same thing with this house. See, my father said we ought to build more units here, not just one house because you can make money off the units. But I said we don't want to be bothered with units. We want a house, you know? So anyway my mother and I decided we'd just do a house.

Interviewer: So the property must have gone in you and your sister's name?

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Kubota: Well, no; not the beginning. This house was in my mother and my father and me---this house.

Interviewer: But they weren't citizens.

Kubota: No. That's okay. It doesn't matter.

Interviewer: It didn't matter.

Kubota: It didn't matter.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Did Gardena have a reputation for being more open to Japanese coming back, say as opposed to Torrance or Redondo Beach or...?

0:52:14.9

Kubota: I don't know. We never looked the other way---

Interviewer: You never looked.

Kubota: ---because we always lived in Gardena so we just wanted to come back to Gardena. You know, and there were a lot of realty people, Japanese realty people already, so we didn't feel that.

Interviewer: So when you came back or when you---were you commuting from Los Angeles to Gardena every day to go to work?

Kubota: No, I lived in---I worked in L.A.

Interviewer: So you lived and worked in L.A.?

Kubota: Yeah; and then that was about three years. And then we moved over there in 1949, next door, and then built this house in '53.

Interviewer: So was the community about the same as you remembered before the war, or had it changed?

Kubota: Well, there were a lot more houses, you know because the houses across here were built during the war, because that was all vacant before the war.

Interviewer: Were there other new housing tracts in other areas, also?

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Kubota: There weren't too many new housing tracts, but then, you know here and there. Because in those days I don't know that they did so many tract homes yet.

Interviewer: Oh.

Kubota: You know, right after the war. It took a little while before that started.

Interviewer: So we know that you told us that there were real estate agents who were Nisei I guess.

Kubota: Uh-hm.

Interviewer: What else was there as far as the Nisei or Issei community? In terms of businesses I mean?

Kubota: Gee, I don't know.

Interviewer: If you can recall.

Kubota: Well, I don't think there were too many Japanese businesses, really, you know because that was right after the war. And these realty people, I don't know whether they really were entirely Japanese companies or they worked for, you know like a Caucasian group or what. But then there were enough Japanese people in real estate business already by 1949, you know? But then there were doctors that were here, dentists and optometrists that had their businesses. But, like, shops and stuff I don't think there were Japanese shops yet.

Interviewer: How about people that went back into agriculture? Did they go back into farming? Do you remember seeing fields still?

Kubota: Yeah; there were still fields, but then there were people that were in the farming. But then I don't recall by name who they were, although I do know that, like the Kobayashi family; they had about six children. Because I was working for the school district then, and I believe they sold a lot of their land to the school district or school housing, you know schools. Because see, the department I worked in had to write up all these board reports that went to the board, any transactions that the board were involved in. So I saw all that coming through. And they sold it for a good deal of money, their land, you know. And then another family sold a lot of their property to the school district, too, for schools. So they made out okay. You know,

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some families that had older kids, you know in the family. They owned land. They did okay, you know as far as that goes.

0:56:18.5

Interviewer: So the pre-war organizations were the Kenjinkai and some churches, ethnic churches. After the war did the Japanese start organizing social organizations or JACL or churches or whatever we had?

Kubota: Well, you know they started classes for different cultural, like, Odori or koto, flower arrangement and tea ceremony and all that, because they had their own little groups, you know?

Interviewer: Uh-hm. So Moneta gakuen started up again?

Kubota: No, they never did. They were looking for people who were on the original board at the time. So JCI---I think they bought the property from those people or something. I don't know where that money was during the war or what happened or anything. But they were looking for old members, family members that were involved in the board. You know, the old school; and so JCI was from way back after the war.

Interviewer: Didn't they---you know it was just after the war. America had won the war, but Japan was the vanquished. Didn't the Japanese feel self-conscious about starting up cultural activities again?

Kubota: I didn't get that feeling.

Interviewer: You didn't get that feeling? Okay; do you have any other memories of that period---I mean after camp, 1940s-1950s?

Kubota: No, not really.

Interviewer: Okay.

Kubota: I do remember, though, that, you know like the Sumitomo Bank was always---the oldest bank, you know. They're a lot older than the Bank of Tokyo or Mitsubishi or those banks. Sumitomo has always been here since before the war. The other banks were not here before the war. And I remember when we were going to build this house, I went to the Bank of America, because we used to bank there, too, you know and they wouldn't give me a loan. And there was a man named Kubota there, too, who I don't know---he's no relative---but anyway they didn't give us a loan. And so

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I said, well, I'm going to go to Sumitomo and they gave me a loan right away. It's not coming through.

Interviewer: Okay.

Kubota: Anyway, so....

Interviewer: Did they give you a reason why they didn't give you a loan?

Kubota: I told them I have an account here and I've had an account here for several years. How come you're not giving me a loan? But then they said it wasn't approved. So anyway, I just said, well, I'm not going to fight them. I'll just go to the **Sumitomo** Bank and they gave me a loan right away. So I've been banking with them ever since.

Interviewer: Okay; were your---did you and your parents receive any reparations at the time that, well, it was the late 1980's and there was a movement to get reparations?

Kubota: You mean the \$20,000?

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Kubota: Yeah; my sister and I got it because by that time my father had passed away and my mother had passed away just three months before that was approved.

Interviewer: Oh, that was in... what year did your father die?

Kubota: It was... see my father died in '72. And my mother was in '88. And it was in '88 when Reagan signed that. And he signed it---see, my mother passed away in April and he signed it maybe July or August. Maybe it was August. In fact, you know it was kind of strange, but you know my father passed away on April 20, 1972, and my mother passed away April 20, 1988. You know, so I figured he must have come after her.

1:01:06.0

Interviewer: So you were a successful career woman.

Kubota: Yeah; I worked so many years, you know. But they have a real good retirement system, so it's working out okay.

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer: Did you feel that you were an exception about the Nisei women having a career; and women going to work still wasn't terribly en vogue?

Kubota: I don't know. I didn't think of that because there are so many Japanese women working for the school district. Every office had Japanese. But then after I retired and, you know I used to go visit them all the time. After a couple of years, my goodness, there were so many---all the Japanese were gone, practically, because they were about the same age as I was when they started, you know. And there were so many Hispanic and blacks, you know, and a lot of Filipinos working there now.

Interviewer: Was there any special reason why Nisei women gravitated towards teaching, in your opinion?

Kubota: Gee, I don't know. They probably thought it was a safe profession to go into.

Interviewer: Did Issei parents kind of encourage their children to go into certain professions?

Kubota: Well, they probably---if they were boys they probably told them they should go into being a lawyer or a doctor I guess. You know, like a lot of parents still do. But then, you know college is not for everybody, either.

Interviewer: At the end of your parents' lives, did they kind of reflect on their lives? I mean the Issei and Nisei as well? They went through tremendous times in American history.

Kubota: No, my mother never did, you know. She might make a remark once in a while about something, but she never went back to any, you know reminiscing about anything like that. I know my girlfriend's mother used to tell us that---she was very good at storytelling---and she would say that when she first came over here they were wearing corsets over here. And they didn't wear corsets in Japan. And this lady didn't know what to do with it. So she saw one lady wearing it outside her dress because she didn't know what it was for, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah; that would....

Kubota: Or somebody went to a store to buy eggs and she didn't know how to say eggs in English, you know. So she was making out like a chicken, you know?

Toshiko Kubota

Interviewer: Yeah; looking back on your own life, is there any particular lessons or values you think that you absorbed from your parents as far as your own life is concerned?

Kubota: Well, I don't know. But then I'm very persistent about things. If I start something, you know I just keep at it like I did at my work, you know? Because several times I thought I think I'll sign up and work something---like sign up and go to Japan, because I had a friend who worked in Japan. I mean she left the district on a leave and she worked for the Japanese---I mean it was a civil service job that she worked in Japan. And so I thought I wonder if I should do that. And several times I thought of doing something, but I just kept with it. You know, and it was a good thing.

Interviewer: When did your parents hear about your brother?

Kubota: Oh, that was---he passed away before my father even.

Interviewer: But he did survive the military?

Kubota: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, he survived the war; because he got married and he had two girls and I still communicate with them. And so anyway, his wife is still okay. She's a little bit younger than me, but as far as I know she's okay.

Interviewer: Your oral history will be preserved and probably by several generations they will listen to it. Is there anything you would like to say to the future generations as far as learning from your lifetime experiences?

Kubota: Maybe it might be interesting to talk to my niece. You know, she lives next door. She bought the house several years ago because she wanted to be---maybe she could be of help to her mother, you know. But I'm glad she is there because she helps me, too.

Interviewer: Okay; is there anything else that you would like to add to this?

Kubota: No. It's not, like, my autobiography.

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much and we truly appreciate that you gave up your time. And it's really precious that people share their lives with us, especially when we have no vision or no memory of what it was like then. So thank you very much.

Kubota: Oh, you're welcome.

South Bay History Project Interview:

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Toshiko Kubota