[Begin Sumi Seki File 1]

Interviewer:
It is 10 o'clock, March 29, 2004. My name is Dale Sato and I will be interviewing Sumi Seki, Sumiko Sek, today as part of the South Bay Oral History Project. The audio equipment recording this interview is being monitored by Joh Sekiguchi and the interview is being catalogued by Lily Nakatani.

This is the first CD of the interview of Sumiko Seki being recorded on this date. Thank you for coming today, and let's begin the interview.

Okay, let's start, maybe…where were you born, Sumi?

0H01M18S

Seki:
In San Pedro, but it's an area called White's Point, and that area used to be the recreation area for the Japanese, the whole Japanese community---L.A., San Pedro, anywhere. And they used to have a fujinkai [women's association], but my father and mother were farmers on top of the [San Pedro-Palos Verdes] hill.

Interviewer:
I see, and when were you born, what year and date?

Seki:
November 24, 1924.

Interviewer:
All right; since you mentioned your parents a little bit, maybe we can talk a little bit about your father and your mother. So, what was your father's first name and last name?

Seki:
Midori Seo, and I was told by relatives that he came to Hawaii first looking for his father which… his father came to Hawaii

when the sugar plantation first started, but he left about eight sisters and brothers and the money wasn't coming in. So they sent my father to Hawaii to look for him and send him back home, because he wasn't sending the money home. But he wasn't in Hawaii, so he came to the mainland [continental U.S.]and which… I don't know how he got his passport or how he broke his contract at the plantation, but anyway, he found my father, I mean, his father in Fresno picking grapes. So, my father worked two jobs, as a cook and worked out in the field, and made enough money to send my grandfather back home.

Interviewer:
And your grandfather's name was?

Seki:
Sadazo Seo. And I forgot what 'machi' [town] he came from, but it…the name Tojo, Atezu-gun, something Hiroshima, Japan is all I remember. But my father never went back to Japan or anything, and then my mother came in 1913, and I was told that my mother and father were cousins. And so, my grandfather probably set them up as a bride for my father.

Interviewer:
And her name was?

0H03M55S

Seki:
Kazue Henmi and that was 1913. And they went to work in Glendale in an orange orchard, and then they went to Laguna Beach, and then this property in White's Point… Mr. Nakagawa was there before him… farmed this White's Point area, and then my father took the lease over from him, and that property all belonged to Ramon Sepulveda. And they've been there since 1913 until the outbreak of the war. Well, until we evacuated, April 5, 1942. And so, it was hard farming, because it was dry farming, and they went by the weather and if it didn't rain, what do they called it---the produce that used to come from that area, they just couldn't make the profit from it. So, in the meantime, if there was no vegetables or anything that was growing there, they worked for Ramon [Also Roman] Sepulveda and beautified the whole area of White's Point.

Interviewer:
Do you mean they were planting flowers or…?

Seki:
Flowers, trees, roads, and White's Point, the recreation area, I have a picture of my father with a horse plow---not plowing, removing all the rocks and all. And I think all the farmers all helped out at that. But those great big boulders and everything; and then it was a big pond that they had made. And then there was a hotel, restaurant, swimming pool, and then, like a bath house, but they had a stage inside there where all the Japanese kenjinkais used to have their picnics and Japanese dancing, sumo, relay racing, and just an ordinary Japanese picnic---they used to have every weekend. And sometimes I used to sneak away from selling tomatoes along side the roadside, go down there and run a couple of races and come home with a prize. **[Laughs]** And those prizes were like pencils and tablets and things that we could use every day when we went to school or something; so it was very nice.

Interviewer:
Were these holidays that… that were Japanese holidays, like Girls Day, or…?

Seki:
No; it was annual kenjinkai [prefectural] picnics that they had organized in their own little community or something, and then they'd make reservations with the owner of the hot springs, and the recreation area. But it was funny, one side was Royal Palms---it's a state beach now, but Royal Palms was a private club like a park, but the Japanese weren't allowed to go there, and it was almost in the same area, but they had their own picnics and we had our own picnics, but we never bothered each other.

0H07M46S

Interviewer:
How did you get the feeling that you weren't supposed to go over to the other place?

Seki:
I think the Japanese people knew better not to crash anybody else's doings, and they were very law-abiding citizens, so they never attempted to go over there. And Ramon Sepulveda, he used to come to our house every day; used to come down on a horse down a canyon down to our house and used to rest at our house and all. And, if we weren't allowed to go anywhere; we never

pushed our way into it. You know so we just never had any trouble.

And so, the relationship between Ramon Sepulveda and the Japanese farmers was very close. He…it was share-cropping on the farm, and if there was no vegetables to market or anything, in exchange he would let them work for him and repay what the land uses was. So... well, that was until his youngest son, Ramon Sepulveda got well, retired from coming to manage his land, so his youngest son came, and then everything changed. Everybody had to pay their rent regularly; it was all money, money. It wasn't exchange and favors or work for Ramon Sepulveda. So, the attitude toward the landlord changed quite a bit.

Interviewer:
Some of---in that area you hear names like Vanderlip and Phillips; so they were owners or landlords after Ramon Sepulveda?

Seki:
No; they were landlords in Palos Verdes, and Ramon Sepulveda only controlled... well, I would call on this side of where Trump---Donald Trump has his [Ocean Trails] golf course, now. It was all on one side, and we call it the San Pedro side. And then from there on, it's Palos Verdes side. And so... what do you call it---we, well, I guess when the [San Pedro] Farmers Association used to be together, we were more close, because I used to remember all the Palos Verdes people used to come down to White's Point and stop over our house and rest a little bit, and then go back home. But after the association split, not too many of the Palos Verdes people used to drop by, like the Ishibashis, Muras and the Yokotas, the Asais; they just---were just close friends, like neighbors and all that.

But, I guess, as we---as I grew older, I guess they were all busy doing their own thing, because they had enlarged their farm and all that. So all the children all helped their parents work on the farm and they never grumbled or anything, because that was part of their job. So today, when you think about it, it's like child labor. The parents probably would be put in jail, or whatever, because they…kids really had to work hard in those days. If we didn't work, we wouldn't eat.

0H11M42S

Interviewer:
Let's go back a little bit and we'll come back to this part again, I think. When you were born, I imagine, there weren't any hospitals, and things like that. So, were you born in the house that you lived in?

Seki:
Yeah; I think so yeah. But my sister, I think, there was no midwife in San Pedro, so, I think she was born in Los Angeles where there was a midwife. So, but Los Angeles was a long ways, so I don't know if my mother stayed a couple of days in a boarding house, or whatever, where the midwife lived. But then, by my time, there was a….

Interviewer:
And you were born, and the date you were born was---what was your birth date?

Seki:
November 24, 1924; and that was, I don't know if that was Thanksgiving. But I remember we raised turkeys one year, and I had a pet turkey. And that turkey as it grew older, what do you call it? We had it for Thanksgiving, so that was supposed to be part of my birthday present---that they ate my turkey. **[Laughs]** So for a long time, I couldn't eat a turkey. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
Were you the oldest in the family?

Seki:
No; I have an older sister that was nine years older than I was.

Interviewer:
What was her name?

Seki:
Takako, and I had an aunt in Buenos Aires, [Argentina] and so they---he… what my cousin in Mexico City tells me that he was a, not a... something to do with the government down in Buenos Aires, and then his time was up, so they were going back to Japan, and then my sister….

Interviewer:
Was this a time when you were young?

Seki:

No; when my sister was nine years old; I wasn't born yet. And so they---since my father couldn't go back to Japan, so they sent my sister that was nine years old with my aunt to go back to Japan. So she stayed there nine years in which I never knew I had a sister until the time she was coming back, and that was 1932, I think she came back. And so, one of the neighbor ladies told me; she said, "Oh, isn't it---aren't you lucky, your sister's coming back?" And I says, "What?" She says, "Yeah; your older sister's coming back," and I never knew I had a sister until then. Then I had another brother in which he was seven, I think; and we had the Endo's barge [at White's Point] that used to---the fishing barge was pretty popular and people from all over used to come and get on this little water boat to go out to the main barge. And then the kids, I think there was about five or six kids always bugged Mr. Endo, "Gee, give us a ride to go out to the barge. We'd sure like to go out to the barge." So, he says, "Okay." So there was about, oh, five or six kids that was on the boat, and then when they got close to the big barge, my brother happened to be seasick, so he put his head down and I guess he was ready to vomit, or what, but the two boats collided together and he smashed his head. And so, in the olden days, it was a Model T and by the time he got to the hospital in San Pedro, it was too late. So that accident happened. Then I have a….

0H15M26S

Interviewer:
And his name was---the one that had the accident, his name was?

Seki:
Kazuo

Interviewer:
Kazuo

Seki:
And then, five years later, Masa, my brother was born. And then he was such a rascal; and then I was born a year after that. But there's five years lapse between my sister, Kazuo, and Masa and just a year apart with my brother. But the reason that I call Masa a rascal was that he did everything opposite of what you're supposed to do right, but he'd do it the opposite way. And so…. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:

Can you give me an example of that?

Seki:
Well, I could say... when the war broke out they put a limit mileage, how far you could go away from your home... well, it was five miles. And he says, "The hell with it; I'm not gonna bother with that." So he was in Long Beach, and I think he was speeding or what, but he had to show his driver's license, and it said Masanobu Seo on there. Well, that's a Japanese name, so they put him in jail with all these Isseis at the City Hall in San Pedro. He was with the Isseis ..

Interviewer:
And how old was he?

Seki:
... all the Isseis that got picked up December 7th.

Interviewer:
Oh my goodness.

Seki:
Yeah; so he was in there. And then....

Interviewer:
Can we---I want to go back up to your early life again. And so, you were the baby of the family, so to say?

Seki:
Yes; but I did everything my brother did.

Interviewer:
You did?

Seki:
Yeah; I followed him and he used to pull some mean tricks on me, too. He'd tell me go into that hole that was the drainage ditch. So, I go in the hole, but I can't get out. So **[Laughs]**… so I think he had me there for about half a day, and then I started crying. And all I remember was a man on a horse come by, and I guess he heard me crying, so he came and got me out, but that's the only way I know how I got out of that drainage ditch. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:

Okay; **[Laughs]** let's go about back to, maybe, the daily life in your family when you were a child, and do you kind of remember what it would have been like. Was your mother waking up first or something like that?

Seki:
Yes; she used to wake up, oh, I guess about 4 o'clock in the morning to get things… See, my mother was the boss of the family and my father was just like the lady of the house. So my mother used to hire the man that used to come and tell them what to do and everything, but my father used to go and get them, especially at the peak season. He used to go to Los Angeles to the boarding house and tell the owner that he wants, maybe 12 men or 20 men to pick the string beans or sweet…the peas... and then tomato time. And then when they come, then my mother used to tell them do this and do that. So, she used to run the farm. And so… and she was a tiny little lady, but she really took care of the farm. And that was from 1930, no from 1913 to 1942. And then, about two years before World War II, we started selling, planting celery, and that was a lot of work planting celery, because the water had…the City water had come out to White's Point, but until then it was just the regular tap water that Sepulveda used to put in a tank and then run it down to the farm. But it wasn't much; it was just the household water that we had. And then a lot of time....

0H19M46S

Interviewer:
So at 4 o'clock, she'd…

Seki:
Get up and then cook the rice and something because she had to feed those workers, the Japanese workers. So, she made okazu or something and have it ready.

Interviewer:
Okazu would be?

Seki:
Like, mostly canned things And we had chicken, so the meat part would be the fresh chicken that we had. So, she used to mix the vegetables like takanoko [bamboo] and dried mushroom, or sato imo [mountain potato] Or something, all in cans. So, she used to make okazu that way, but I don't remember eating too much

tomato and okazu out of the vegetables. Only string beans, I remember. But…

Interviewer:
So she served the meal, and then?

Seki:
And then, again in the evening, because they stayed in the back, well, it was…it wasn't a shed, it was… because we used to store seeds in there. It wasn't a barn, but it was an extra house for the men that we had; because we used to have a lot of the rooms; it wasn't attached to the house, but it was another house that we had that they used to sleep in. And then, sometimes late… this was closer before the war, we got the Terminal Island people when they didn't have fish or anything; so he would call the main men that he wanted people to come pick string beans or something. And then the men when they're not out to sea, and they used to come, and he used to go down to the ferry to pick them up.

Interviewer:
About how many men would he hire?

Seki:
From Terminal Island; I think it was, maybe five or six at that time. But, still, when the Isseis came back after the war, I remember a few of them thanking me for my parents, saying that it was, what do you call it, great pleasure of working on your mother's farm or your father's farm, because it helped them get a little income when they're not working.

Interviewer:
And when your father would go downtown to the boarding houses to…?

Seki:
No; to the ferry.

Interviewer:
To the ferry.

Seki:
Yeah, to pick …because they would come across the island to the ferry…

Interviewer:

Terminal Island people.

Seki:
... and then bring them...

Interviewer:
But sometimes he would drive them…?

Seki:
... to Los Angeles to the boarding house.

Interviewer:
And he'd pick up about five men or something?

Seki:
Sometimes it was more than that they used to pick up. And they used to go in the truck, because they used to be packed in the back of the truck to come.

Interviewer:
About how many men, do you think?

Seki:
Sometimes, it was ten that used to come.

Interviewer:
Were they all Japanese Issei?

Seki:
That was Japanese Isseis; yes. But then, still, we had regular Mexican people used to come every year. And they stayed in another area in the back, and it had a little wooden stove. And then, I think they used to bring their back pack to sleep in. But I don't remember a bed or anything back there.

Interviewer:
Did Ramon Sepulveda help get these men?

Seki:
No; no. He was the king. **[Laughs]** He used to come on a horse down this trail from San Pedro, downtown San Pedro.

Interviewer:
I'm just wondering, you know, if they didn't live in that area, the Hispanic workers or Mexican workers, then…?

Seki:
See, the Mexican people, it's seasonal work. They used to go to Simi Valley or Conejo or somewhere to pick those oranges and fruits, and then when that's over, then they used to come over. And I think it was around January that I forgot what his name is, but I always think of him because when I was a kid, I used to go and beg for tortillas all the time. **[Laughs]** Yeah, my mother tells me, "Don't go because they have to buy their food, and you go over there and beg for food, they won't have any food to eat." **[Laughs]** But it was so good, because it's home made. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
Since you mention the buildings, maybe kind of give a picture of your house and all the buildings surrounding it; I mean just tell me in words.

0H24M20S

Seki:
You know the Japanese people didn't paint their house, it was all raw, brown wood like you would see a barn today.

Interviewer:
Did your father have to build this house himself?

Seki:
No; I think it was Mr. Nakagawa or Ramon Sepulveda, because we rented this house…it was a white house and I think it was like a Victorian house, and it was white. But all the little houses in the back they weren't painted. The barn wasn't painted, either. And I guess it was livable, because there was a couple living in one of the houses there for a long time, and they---the husband worked for us on the farm. He used to drive the horses and later on we got a tractor and he used to run the tractor, but it wasn't a new tractor, it was just an old tractor. But then that was more or less like the modern era. But I remember when I was small, it was all horse and sled and plow.

Interviewer:
Sled?

Seki:
Plow, you know those that plow the dirt?

Interviewer:

Yes, yes; you said a sled. Do you call the plows a sled?

Seki:
We used to plant our own hay also for the horses.

Interviewer:
Yes; and green beans…

Seki:
And where the hays were planted, it was the land that wasn't very good for vegetables, so they used it…because you don't know what part of that land that you leased is gonna be good for string beans or good for tomatoes or what. So as years go by, you know what area is good for what. So they would plant it, and then the part that isn't good, you plant hay, and what do you call. And, I think the hay, when they used to bring it, it used to cost a lot of money. So, if you grow your own... but I remember we used to slide down the hay... the pile of hay inside the barn. I remember that.

Interviewer:
Did your father when he came, and your mother, too, did they come from farming families in Japan so they knew something about farming?

Seki:
Well, I don't remember as far as farming. I know that my father's side was very poor, because all his brothers---I wouldn't say sisters, he had two sisters---but the brothers all had different names, and if they went to this "Yoshi" family, they would go into a rich family.

Interviewer:
They were kind of adopted into another family?

Seki:
Yes.

Interviewer:
I see.

Seki:
But when my father came, most of all his sisters and brothers always asked for money; so we were always in the position of an argument all the time, when a letter came, because they would say please send me some money **[Laughs]**. And so it just seemed

like when they do write the letter it seemed like all you have to do is pick it off the street and send it. So they thought well, why not ask for money? So, he sent my aunt that went down to Mexico City through college, and then this Ichimi I think he was one of the younger sons, he put him through college, and that was in the olden days, so it was really something for them to be able to go to college.

And so, what do you call it, but, here in America, we suffered. And they never felt it; but now, when I talk to my cousin, I email her every so often and tell her about the hardship we had here and they didn't even know anything about it because the money was there and they just spent it like water, I guess.

Interviewer:
Let's go back to your house again. I want to get a kind of visual picture. If you walked in the front door, then…if you can remember your old house, what did you see?

Seki:
Well, we usually came in from the back. The front was our parlor, and then Mr. Oyama that stayed at our house, he was a carpenter, and so he fixed our kitchen. I think in the original house it was a very small kitchen, but I remember that we had this big table and it had chairs and all the men used to sit around and eat. So it was a big…well, it was a separate room so you called it a dining room. But it wasn't a fancy dining room; it was just another room addition, and then the kitchen. And we had running water, and then the water went down and then it watered the trees that we had, fig trees and olive trees.

Interviewer:
The water that came from the sink in the kitchen?

Seki:
Yes; and then on this other side was the water that had cooled from the night before and it ran down and watered the pepper tree---not the fig tree. They had a cypress tree; all different kinds, but it was a different kind of tree on this one side. But all the water was made use of, everything; we never threw anything away as far as water was…because before I was born, one of my friends was telling me that they had to take a big tank, put it on a wagon, and go out to Point Fermin to get some drinking water and water to wash dishes. And it was somewhere around [here]…today we'd call it [where] the Korean bell [is

now], and you could tell. And this picture that there was hardly anything. This was 1932; that's after I was born. But then before that there was no water.

Interviewer:
So what did people do to bathe, because the Japanese love to bathe? Did you have a bathroom in the house, or was…?

0H31M01S

Seki:
No; it was a little shed outside. At first, we had Mr. Oyama built us a nice, wooden bathtub, regular Japanese bathtub, well it had a roof and everything. It wasn't like it is today where you use this redwood tub, you know and you gaze out at the star; it was a regular, small little, looked like a little outhouse thing. But us kids get too busy playing, and it was our duty to put water in that bathtub and put wood underneath and start a fire and heat up your water. But we'd forget to put the water in; so the bathtub kind of---the bottom burned out **[Laughs]**. So I don't know how many times they had to replace it. So as you replaced it, then, it went into a metal tub, and then the fancy part was omitted, it was just a regular galvanized tub; so one or two people could get in it. But that was a relaxing way that the people when they worked hard on a farm, come home and take a hot bath and then go to bed.

Interviewer:
Did they take a bath the Japanese way?

Seki:
They had the, what do you call it, the Japanese-style…it wasn't the American porcelain tub, it was round Japanese tub.

Interviewer:
So they washed outside?

Seki:
Outside, yes; with the bucket or a tub or something---they washed outside and the water drained out into the side there. But a lot of the Palos Verdes people used to come down to White's Point. And they had Japanese tub, but in the olden days, it was regular sulphur [water]. And then in 1932, the sulphur stopped coming up because on account of the earthquake, and then they start pumping seawater into the tub. And, which, nobody knew the difference, only the smell. When it was sulphur, it

smelled like rotten eggs, but as years went on, the smell didn't go on; it was just seawater they were putting out there.

Interviewer:
So the kids were hauling these buckets of water from which place? Did you have a well?

Seki:
From Point Fermin; they'd put it on a wagon and then bring it back home.

Interviewer:
No; at your house you had this tub in a small shed, and then it was the kids' responsibility to put wood underneath and to…?

Seki:
Yeah; we had running water. That was probably from the Sepulveda tank up on the hill. And then, there was enough water to wash dishes and what not. And then enough for bath; but before that, they had to go to Point Fermin on the wagon to get their water, because there's no water out there.

0H34M26S

Interviewer:
So, let's go back to the house then. We're still going through the house, and you have this large room with a huge dining table,—and...?

Seki:
Then the parlor, and then we had three bedrooms. But, for today's standards, it was a small bedroom. It wasn't a mansion or anything. It was just… it was---I think it was one of Ramon Sepulveda's summer house because he had several houses that were empty. And then I remember, we used to…. See my mother didn't know who lived in there when I was growing up, but I used to say the yellow house, the brown house, or so-and-so, and then I used to deliver our vegetables to them, just for being good neighbors. So, I says oh, I'm going to the brown house today, because I'm going to take her some tomatoes, or something.

Interviewer:
Do you remember her first name?

Seki:
Mrs. Hess.

Interviewer:
Mrs. Hess?

Seki:
Yes; two sisters used to live in the brown house. And then Mrs. Bennett lived there, and then we had some Russian families living out there. And when I read the history books today, the Russian people from Alaska used to come down to get the sea otters. So, there's different things that are left out there at White's Point down in the ocean…by the ocean that there was a railroad track that used to push the boat on this track, and I was just wondering if the sea otter people used to live down... there was a house along the cliff and then there was a Russian family that used to live next door to the Takemiyas.

Interviewer:
Do you think this was in the 1920s or '30s?

Seki:
That was early '20s.

Interviewer:
Early '20s.

Seki:
Oh, yes, in the early '20s.

Interviewer:
And they were farmers?

Seki:
No; I don't know what they did. And as far as the Caucasian people, we didn't have much to do with them. It's only us kids that we made contact with them, because they had kids of their own, or something. But we never associated as families, you know like going over for coffee or anything like that. We just kept to ourselves, you know, because they were busy on the farm, and what they did, the Caucasian family, we don't know.

But this yellow house that lived on the Point, Mrs. Sado used to live there for a long time, and I don't know why they went down on the bottom, because I remember my mother telling me that Mrs. Sado used to take care of my brother, and later on, she said that she can't take care of my brother, because he was such a gosa gosa boy, and she can't keep track of him.

0H37M37S

Interviewer:
Running around all over?

Seki:
Yeah, and she can't chase him all over…you know, try to trail him; so she... what do you call it... refused him, anymore. So, what do you call it, and then to go further than that, there was the Japanese abalone fishermens down there. And they were some of them that were left behind were farmers up on top. And I was just wondering, there's a Mr. Hatashita that was an abalone fisherman. I was just wondering if they went to Palos Verdes after they left San Pedro. So, I don't know if they're the same family or what, but it just goes back a long ways, you know.

Interviewer:
So you had your main house and then how many other buildings around this house?

Seki:
I think the one closest to the house, and then there was another one, and then behind that... so there was three different sheds. One big one that was next to the house, so it could be four.

Interviewer:
So one house was used for the laborers to stay overnight?

Seki:
Yeah; and then the Mexican laborers had the two back areas, so they had a wooden stove and a chimney. And then I remember back in the '30s, they had a longshoreman dock strike or something? And I think some of the dock workers were working for the Japanese farmers, because, you know the dock strikes last a long time, and they needed, what do you call it, some money and everything, so they were helping the farmers.

But, I remember one time that they came and they put gasoline on a sack and they put it in that smokestack, you know they had a wood stove and so the smokestack went outside, and they came at night and they, what do you call it, try to put a fire onto the chimney part. And I remember the workers coming to the house and waking us up and saying that the house was, you know, they try to put the house---the shed on fire. And then they tell me in San Pedro they used to have the Ku Klux Klan out there. And

which, I didn't know it, because it was, I guess, probably, before my time. But I guess the dockworkers, the union was pretty strong and they just didn't want them to go out and work on their own instead of picketing the docks or something. But they were strong, the longshoremen.

Interviewer:
Was anybody injured or killed in that fire?

Seki:
No, no; they put it out, I guess real quick. But I remember that time when they had that strike that they came and got some of the workers. I guess they wanted to make sure that they don't come out there to the farm and work as laborers. And then the wages were only, what…15 cents an hour and then they went up to 25? I think just before the war it was 25 cents an hour on the farm where we were. But maybe some other farmers were paying more, but I remember that 25 cents was pretty hard on the farmers because the days go by so fast with little income coming in.

Interviewer:
And how many acres do you think your parents farmed?

Seki:
According to what that nature park-- it's called, it was 130 acres, but they didn't farm right in one section. They had, if some Japanese would go back to Japan, or quit farming or something, then my father would go and lease that land. And if it's no good, he gives it back to the Sepulveda, or maybe another farmer comes and want to try that piece of property. But he farmed quite a few places in San Pedro [Hills]. Mostly along the shore side, you know, because the housing wasn't like it is today. It was still open, and then they removed the rocks and there were big---big stones all over. They put it on a sled and put it up on one side, and, what do you call it, they…most of the big ones are thrown into the ditch, I remember, there was a big gun... well, it's just the shell of a big gun that was placed on one of the ranches where we lived; but there was a big ditch and most of the rocks went down into the ditch and they put a whole bunch of stuff in there to fill it up and kind of smooth it off a little bit. But it was really a big ditch when we were growing.. because that was the dividing line of one farmer to the other. And that's the only traffic that came from San Pedro also in the olden days, that is. And, mostly everything was…not the Japanese people, but the other people

used to ride horses... not as a hobby; it was their transportation. Today, it's just like having a horse in your backyard or something, use it as a hobby, but it was transportation in those days.

0H43M47S

Interviewer:
You had two horses on your farm?

Seki:
I think…I remember we used to have…we must have had about four of them, because I remember when the war broke out, my father had two brown horses and he was talking to the brown horses. But I remember we used to have a white horse when we were little because I used to try to get on it. You know the fences that go around the horse stable? I used to get on the fence and get on top of the horse and try to act like a cowboy, because you see, the kids played cowboys and cops and robbers and whatnot, so I used to try to copy them. But, we never got hurt or anything, because they were pretty tame horses.

Interviewer:
You had other animals, like chickens?

Seki:
Yeah; we grew chickens and one year we had turkey, but we had the weasels and the weasels wiped out the whole chickens one time. And I remember the chickens, it was my job to wring the necks of the chicken and every time we had company, that was our meat **[Laughs]**, but I had to clean the chicken, you know, feather them and all that. That was one of my jobs.

Interviewer:
How did you like that? How did you feel about that?

Seki:
It was something that we just had to do, so we just did it. And I believe that that was how it was on the farm, too, because I think we all went through the same thing. We never said, well, so-and-so got to go to the show this weekend, I want to go too, or whatever. If the parents said no you can't go, you just don't go. And then, I remember, my mother always tried to keep me away from the Caucasian kids because they didn't have to work as hard as us, and she thought that they were going to spoil us. So she just kept us away from them. But at school is altogether

different. We played a lot, but after school we had to come home. We just couldn't mix with them.

Interviewer:
Let's go back to…about daily life. Your mom got up at four and prepared the meals…

Seki:
Meal, yes…then…

Interviewer:
…and your dad had gotten the men from whatever place, and then what happened?

Seki:
... and then they came, and then my mother would tell them, well, maybe, the hillside was all string beans, so she would tell the men, you know you go here or something, and then you work up there, and then I think at 11:30 or 12 o'clock they come down---the Japanese people---the Mexican people they have their tortillas and everything; they had their own lunch. And then, what do you call it, then, I think it was four or five o'clock is when they all came down, and then my father took them back.

And then, the other Japanese that came from Los Angeles, they stayed at the back house. Well, I call it the back house, but it was one of the houses that was back there. But as far as farming, I think all the Isseis, they all…it just seemed like we all suffered together, and they always talk about their crops and stuff, it's just a daily thing, and you never tell them that so-and-so got rich, it's always like a **suppai shuppai ?**, a **suppai shuppai ? [hard times?]** or something, you know, because this year wasn't good. But if it rained real good and they planned it. I think they're in the winter, it's peas, they would plant the peas, the green peas, and then after that it's the beans. Springtime is the beans. And then after that, I think the squash and the cucumbers, and then the tomatoes was last. And us kids had to pick the cannery tomatoes, I remember after school. And we didn't have to go to Japanese school only on Saturdays. But some kids went every day, but ours was…they needed us to work, so we picked 'em. But, my brother; you never saw my brother working; he's out there playing. **[Laughs]**

0H48M26S

Interviewer:

Okay; when the kids were…when you were growing up, what kind of play did you do, because today, you know, the kids use…are on the internet or they're doing Game Boy or something like that. When you were growing up what kind of things did you do to play?

Seki:
Oh, when we went…we gathered at Japanese school on Saturdays. We had "Capture the Flag." We played tag football. Then our Japanese school teacher made us girls start learning how to crochet, I remember. But and then we had a girls club afterward, and we all made our, I think it was sharkskin material…I think that was popular at that time, and we all had white skirts that we had to make. And the teachers taught us how to cut out [patterns] and sew.

Interviewer:
You were how old about?

Seki:
I think we were 12 or 13 at that time, I think.

Interviewer:
When did you start Japanese school? When did your parents send you to Japanese school? How old were you?

Seki:
I think I was about seven or something. I just had…my father used to go to San Pedro to sell tomatoes, and I tagged along. And he stopped at Mr. Kito's family and they were getting ready to go to Japanese school. And I wanted to go with them so bad; so my father let me go with them, and from then on I had to go to Japanese school. I got myself into that one. **[Laughs]** I didn't have to go to Japanese school, but then I wanted to go, and then after that. But it was a close-knit family... you know, all the families were close-knit…this was only on the San Pedro side.

Interviewer:
What languages were you speaking at home when you were growing up?

Seki:
Japanese.

Interviewer:
All Japanese?

Seki:
Yes; so... that's because my mother didn't know how to speak English. But things changed when my sister came from Japan. I had to clean house; I had to do everything the Japanese way.

Interviewer:
Which would be?

Seki:
Clean house and wash dishes, and scrub the walls, and wash the windows, oh, sometimes I had to cook, but I didn't know how to cook. And she would teach me how to make okazu and stuff, but I didn't want to learn from her. And then later on, I fought with her and I kept telling her that she's not my mother so quit telling me what to do. **[Laughs]** And so, because until I was nine, I was on my own, and when my mother tells me to help her on the farm, you know outside or something, we always did that. And then, during the winter is when my mother couldn't work out on the farm; that's when she used to really clean house and do everything, because she couldn't go outside. But in the meantime, it wasn't like cleaning house every week, or every day or whatever. As long as the kitchen dishes were washed and clean and put away. And in those days we had the iceman used to come to put ice in the icebox; we had the meat man come; we had the milkman come; we had the bakery come. So everything was to the house.

But my mother was telling me that all her jewelry was stolen, because in the olden days, the doors were never locked. And she thinks it was the meat man that used to come and…because he used to bring a slab of bacon and the bacon used to be hanging. And then one of the Sepulveda boys, Benny, he was a rascal, and he used to come with his friends all the time. And he used to make himself home, and all that rice that my mother cooked for the men, he knew that it was in this little cabinet. He'd get over there and he'd eat that, put shoyu [soy sauce] all over the rice and go to the chicken shed and get the eggs and fry himself an egg, and he'd eat. My mother then would come home and no rice. **[Laughs]** But, they knew that Benny was there eating the rice. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
Where did the Japanese family get the…you mentioned canned bamboo and…

Seki:
We had the general store come over. And then the grocery man, he'd take orders what do you want.

0H53M26S

Interviewer:
These were Japanese Issei vendors?

Seki:
And they used to come from Terminal Island also, this grocery [man]. And then from LA used to come this truck, he had yardage. If you want shoes, he would get the size of the shoe, and everything---medicine, everything. Everybody had the same material [fabric] clothes or whatever. He would have the dress made and bring it.

Interviewer:
So, did your mother sew your clothes?

Seki:
No; my mother didn't sew. Our next-door neighbor used to sew us, because she had a lot of children and she used to stay home and she used to make clothes. I mean, sew clothes for people.

Interviewer:
This is in the White Point area?

Seki:
Yes.

Interviewer:
What other types of…some women sew dresses and clothes for the kids, and, what is it... Mr. Oyama would build…?

Seki:
Yeah; he was working for us on the farm and everything. In his spare time he would remodel the kitchen, and the backhouse.

Interviewer:
And what other kinds of services or businesses? I mean it was according to the family that were certain families tofu makers or…?

Seki:

Yeah; they would come... and…but those people that went from farm to farm to work, seasonal work? They had a bad name for them, the Japanese people. They wouldn't let their daughter marry them, because, I think they used to call them "blanket katsuki"[itinerant peddlers]. Something you carry the blanket on your shoulder, I forgot. There's a word for that, and the Japanese people, I mean the farmers, didn't want their daughter to marry those people.

Interviewer:
Did the parents want their daughters to marry what kind of people?

Seki:
Especially people from Los Angeles; you know, they had nice office jobs, and, of course, they wanted to have them marry doctors or lawyers or engineers or whatnot. But there wasn't too many of those in the olden days. Because, I remember my sister came in 1932 and different people would, the 'baishakunin' [matchmakers] would come and ask my mother if….

Interviewer:
These are go-betweens, like, for arranging marriages?

Seki:
Yes; and my mother says no, she's too young yet, she and she just came from Japan and she has to do…help us a little bit on the farm; so she can't let her go, or something. I remembered. But….

Interviewer:
So people when they did become older and got married, was it always through the go-betweens?

Seki:
Yeah, they did. If you didn't have a go-between, it wasn't, what do you call it... that marriage wasn't, well, it's not, what do you call it, not... I don't call it legal, but isn't as classy as when you have one or two or three go-betweens, because the more you have, the more…supposed to be a better class of family or something. But you've got to pay them; you're paying, you know, the... what do you call it... the baishakunins, you have to give them a gift, so some people make a business out of that. You know, if you have a daughter or something, you make sure that he goes and looks for a husband for her.

But it seems like everybody that married, married outside of their own community, because I remember when I was growing up, I says, "Oh, God, I hate him" or I hate…I hate people in my own community because you know them too good. So, the girls---the older girls, they all marry somebody outside of their own…because I think that the parents didn't want them to marry another farmer. You know, they wanted them to be like, what do you call it, a better life than being a farmer. But, then, if you marry somebody in those days in Orange County that had a big farm and come from a rich family, yeah, they'll let you…I guess they'll accept that family and let the daughter go, but I think that's how it was, but I don't know, I wasn't the marrying age. **[Laughs]**

0H58M23S

Interviewer:
Okay; we're going to go back and talk about school life, because we haven't talked about school life so far. You've talked about going to Japanese school on Saturdays when you were about seven, whether you planned that or not **[Laughs]**; so what about…when did you first start going to school or did you start learning at home as far as public schooling?

Seki:
Oh, public school; it was a must that we all went to Point Fermin Grammar School, and they had a bus for us, but the people from Palos Verdes when I talked to them, they had to walk to Point Fermin from way at the…where the Ishibashis used to live, the three boys used to walk all the way to Point Fermin.

Interviewer:
Would that be how many miles then?

Seki:
Oh, call it about 10-15 miles, but everybody used to walk. I know we used to walk 3-4 miles everyday to go to San Pedro High School. But that was because one of my Japanese neighbors had taken over the Takemiyas' farm. They started walking, but before they came, my mother gave me five cents a day for the school, I mean, regular city bus. It was 2 l/2 cents, one way, but if you got a round trip for five cents, you could go to and from. But, so I had five cents a day, but sometimes I'd walk home and use the 2 l/2 cents to buy candy, and I walked three miles home. And then, I call it the short cut, but then if we come up, well, today it's 25th Street. If we come up 25th Street

and come down this big, deep canyon, it was a short cut. So it was, well, I call it 2 l/2 or 3 miles, somewhere in there. But in those days three cents or 2 l/2 cents, you could buy a lot of candy in those days. But everybody used to walk.

Interviewer:
Okay; so what was the school, what was the name of the school?

Seki:
Point Fermin Grammar School.

Interviewer:
What memories do you have of Point Fermin Grammar School?

1H01M01S

Seki:
Oh, there were mostly Caucasian kids; we were the only Japanese kids when we were growing up in that time, and, what do you call it, we got along fine with them. Only it was when we were in school, we played with them and everything, but then, as soon as school was over, the bus used to bring us back. But sometimes I wasn't able to stay after school or anything, like some of the Caucasian kids did, because I had to come home and make the bath and get that…and then I had to wash the rice to make rice for the evening. That was my job. But, then sometimes I would miss the bus on purpose and stay and play with the kids., **[Laughs]** Tthen, come home, and I'd get scolded. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
What kind of after school activities did they have?

Seki:
Oh, they used to have, like, kids' baseball and stuff. But then, they never had no boys' club or anything in those days; so most of the kids didn't stay after school, it was only the Caucasian kids that did, if they did…and it wasn't for long. They all went home maybe about 4 o'clock already, everybody was home. So, it's not like today that they have activities that boys club and everything like that. The kids had to come home because the bus brought them home. Only the Ishibashis used to tell me when they used to walk from Palos Verdes to Point Fermin; they used to buy a loaf of bread and by the time they got home, the bread was gone, because they used to eat it all the way home, and that bread was supposed to be for the next day's lunch. So but George [Ishibashi] was telling me that they

used to stop by our place and pick the figs and eat a lot of figs and then they used to go home that way and that kind of satisfied their stomach. But the cliff side was the shortcut. If you go alongside the cliff, you get home much faster than you do on the road. And you could tell, on this [map] road zigzagged a little bit. But when you take the cliff, you get home faster.

Interviewer:
Wasn't it difficult that when you first went to school and you were speaking Japanese all the time at home and then you entered school and everyone was speaking in English…was that difficult for you?

Seki:
No; at school we spoke English, you know. It wasn't like the Terminal Island people. They spoke Japanese all the time when they came across; they were speaking Japanese all the time, but we were speaking English, you know.

Interviewer:
Did your father…your mom didn't speak much English, but did your father speak English?

Seki:
No; they spoke Japanese. But I guess we knew better not to speak Japanese to the kids, because we spoke English. And then when we were playing, we're speaking English, so we never had difficulty speaking, but as far as learning, it was pretty hard. You know, English language is pretty hard learning from the beginning, you know. So, it was hard, but as far as speaking and playing with the kids, regardless if you don't speak English, you make friends.

Interviewer:
Did the kids start from kindergarten or first grade?

Seki:
Kindergarten and my mother put me in kindergarten, because there was nobody home to take care of me. So I remember I had to stay back in kindergarten, maybe two years, so that's four semesters, and everybody is bypassing me, and I was so wondering, gee, how come they get to go to first grade and I have to stay in kindergarten, but I wasn't old enough. You had to be six by the time you get into first grade, so my mother must have started me when I was four years old, and then it was A and B. The first

grade [session] was A, and then the mid-semester was B. So, I remember that I wished that I could be passed to the first grade.

1H05M42S

Interviewer:
Was that the first time you saw English language books---when you went to school?

Seki:
Yeah, because we never had no English. Oh, my father used to get newspaper from…he used to sell tomatoes down in downtown San Pedro. And so they wanted to get rid of their newspapers so my father used to bring it and that was our toilet paper in the olden days. So, I used to read the comics and all that. So I was…probably couldn't read, but I could see the pictures. So, what do you call it, I was exposed to the language, even if I can't read, I could speak. But I think when we're playing cops and robbers, we all spoke English; so it wasn't too bad.

Interviewer:
Do you have any memories of certain teachers?

Seki:
Yeah; the principal, Mr. Johnson used to whip my brother all the time. **[Laughs]** And it was…the principal used to take his belt off, you know, and whip them. But then, this Forrest Armstrong, they…he lives in Garden Grove now, but we talk about olden days, and he says a lot of that probably wasn't your brother's fault; we kind of edged it on the principal…. **[Laughs]** Because, you know, they…the kids would kind of tease him, or something and he'd get mad and start hittin' him, and then they would kind of fight, like, you know, and so they always what do you call it, break up and say, 'well, he did it, he did it, you know…'and so they would blame my brother. But the principal used to take his belt off and whip them.

Interviewer:
How about the girls? Did they kind of tease each other and did you ever get angry at their teasing, too?

Seki:
Well, I remember one girl when we were in grammar school…she said that her mother said that she can't play with me. And I says, "Why?"; and she says because you don't believe in God.

And I says, “What?” She says, “Yeah, you guys believe in an idol and that’s Buddha.” And I says, “Well, gee, I don’t even go to church and how come you say that to me?” **[Laughs]** And so, what do you call it? But, the Caucasian girls were very…you know, we all played together and all; so there wasn’t no…I didn’t feel it in those days, you know, the discrimination like we do today. But…and then during the summer the three months we’re off, I had no communication with them. But one of my girlfriends, Beverly Winters, had died in the meantime, and I didn’t even know that, you know. It wasn’t until afterwards, we went back to school and they told me that Beverly Winters had died.

Interviewer:
This is in elementary school?

Seki:
Yeah; so, we had no communication during that summer vacation.

Interviewer:
You must have felt really bad…sad.

Seki:
Yeah; because we were, you know, real close…and then there was Alice Cross, and they lived close to the Fort MacArthur. And Fort MacArthur…the kids used to be bused down to Point Fermin Grammar School. And then in the afternoon, the bus…the truck used to pick the kids up and take them up to the upper reservation, and we made good friends with them. And then sometimes when I missed the bus, on purpose…I used to cross Fort MacArthur, but I was always wondering, gee, where are those trucks going? And I never knew that they had those tunnels until after the war. And then, I knew that we weren’t supposed to be in there, crossing---taking the short cut, but I’d hurry across. And one time I lost my glasses in there, because there’s weeds all over the place, and I had to go underneath the barbed wire fence. So I must have lost it at that time, but I don’t know…but it was a big thing when we got glasses in those days. **[Laughs]** I think it only cost, what, about $5 or $6 in those olden days; yeah.

And then we got our teeth fixed at their…I think it was through the PTA or something…10 cents…they fixed our teeth for us. And then, I think they had exercise class or something, because my shoulders weren’t setting right…I was kind of hunched over, so they made me go to the exercise class at Cabrillo Grammar

School. So I'd take the bus over and come back, went to regular school. But they had different things that I guess they have it today, too, but then it was all free for me at that time. But…and then to get my teeth extracted one time, I had to cry, because it was one of my molars. I guess it was too much candy. **[Laughs]** It was only 10 cents to have it pulled out. My father had to go with me because I wouldn't let them pull my teeth, you know. So, I guess they sent a note out saying that he had to be there.

1H11M21S

Interviewer:
What were your favorite subjects in school?

Seki:
Oh, in junior high? It wasn't history or anything, it was nothing special. But I had social studies that I liked, and then I think in my days, I was one of the first Japanese girls to work in a cafeteria. But everybody…I don't know if it was that we felt like being through the PTA, they're paying for our lunch or anything, it wasn't that. My girlfriend was working there and they asked me if I wanted to work in there, but it was the pots and pans…I had to wash the pots and pans, but I worked there. And…

Interviewer:
Did you get…did the students get paid for this?

Seki:
No; we just got our free lunch---free lunch, yes. But it was experience, you know. And then the teachers were very nice and then I remember one year when Hollywood Bowl was first built, they had the Easter Sunrise Service over there. And my father had to take me there, but the teacher had to bring me home because he didn't…they didn't know what time the bus was going to return. But that was a big thing to be able to go on a field trip like that. I guess other people went, but then, I wasn't able to go. And if I wasn't able to go; we just---we don't cry over it, you just can't go. So I don't know how the other kids, if they ever went on a field trip, then that's my experience that I went.

Interviewer:
Let's say in your elementary school days, how many other Japanese children were there in your class?

Seki:
Just the ones that lived out in White's Point is what I can remember---the Fukumizus and the Takamiyas and us.

Interviewer:
So, there were maybe two or three others…Japanese children in your class?

Seki:
Yes; but in the olden days when…I guess when my sister was little and then the Ishibashis…I guess there was more, you know, but I don't remember when they went. It's just what they told me that they went to Point Fermin, they had to walk and all that. Then when we were going…I think about the fifth or, no, I forgot what year, but then they had buses to go out to Palos Verdes and bring them. But I don't think they came to Point Fermin. I don't remember. Oh, it was junior high school…they bused them to junior high school, I think it was, because I remember the bus going to Palos Verdes.

Interviewer:
How was junior high school when you changed from elementary school to junior high school?

Seki:
Oh, it was fun.

Interviewer:
It was fun?

Seki:
Yeah, I have a picture of my junior high school picture if I....

Interviewer:
What were the fun things about junior high school like?

Seki:
They treated me just like any other Caucasian there. In fact, by that time I was able to "smart back" at them.

Interviewer:
What does that mean, "smart back" at them? **[Laughs]**

Seki:

I think I'm up here somewhere [looking at a graduation photo] That's me, right there.

Interviewer:
Oh, right in the center, yeah.

Seki:
So... when I look at that, my girlfriend, she had this and she took it all through the war, and she said she found that, so she gave me the original. This is not the original.

Interviewer:
It says "Richard Henry Dana Junior High School, Class of Summer 1940." So you were…

Seki:
I went from the seventh grade.

Interviewer:
I think we're going to take a break right now.

Seki:
Oh, good. See my junior high school picture?

[End Sumi Seki File 1]

[Begin Sumi Seki File 2]

Interviewer:
It is 11:30 on March 29, 2004. This is a continuation of the second CD of the interview of Sumiko Seki on the same date being conducted by Dale Sato for the South Bay Oral History Project. The audio and catalog persons remain the same.

Let's continue the interview, Sumi. We were talking about your school life, and you went on to junior high school at Richard Dana Junior High School?

Seki:
Yes.

Interviewer:
What memories do you have of junior high?

Seki:
My first memory was it was kind of a culture shock to us, because we had the Terminal Island people joining us in junior high school, and they spoke nothing but Japanese. And we spoke English and all that and… but I kind of knew some of the Japanese because, as I said before, they used to come to the farm to help us, and some of them used to live down at White's Point before Terminal Island was built.

And so, my father knew them, and then their children was among them. But they spoke Japanese.I kind of understood what they were saying, but as far as they were walking from the ferry to junior high school, they used to cross people's lawns for short cuts and go through the gas station and everything, and so they [neighbors] were complaining. So, they used to come to the school and tell the principal please tell the students not to cross the gas station, or the…cut corners on the lawn or something, but they would call all the Japanese in there, instead of just the Terminal Island group. So, we would get blamed for them, and then we start kind of mouthing off with one another, saying, "Just because you guys cross people's lawn and crossing the gas station, we get blamed for it, but it's not us; it's you guys, so you correct it." We used to kind of mouth off and then they used to call us…called me, especially "namaiki."

Interviewer:
What does that mean in English?

Seki:
Because…smart aleck, you know. In other words, just because I speak better English than them, they thought that I was better than them. **[Laughs]** But that was just kid stuff; you know…we just…today we kind of laugh about it, but then what do you call it, those little things happen.

But, other than that, they're, what do you call it, real studious students. They really got a lot of awards for their work. They can't speak English in those days…they couldn't speak English very good, but they could read and do things very

efficiently. But us…we're just struggling along, but they were smart kids. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
Why do you think there was a difference?

Seki:
Well, I think they were more efficient…maybe they didn't have to go out in the fields and work as hard as we did; they'd just go home and study, I guess. I don't know. We were....

Interviewer:
Did you have a lot of homework that you had to bring home?

0H04M13S

Seki:
Well, it's…like history, you know, you put in your term paper, or just different things…school things…and then, they were allowed to stay after school to go into different clubs, you know, like Japanese clubs, or if they want to go into sports, they had the tennis clubs, or just different things. But us farmers, we had to go home; we had to go to work, so we weren't able to …but as far as school work, they were very smart. And we used to have a fellow by the name of Kanshi Yamashita very intelligent fellow. Every…especially, when we have assembly or something, he was always appointed to be the speaker or something. I remember him; he was very intelligent, very likable fellow.

Interviewer:
Did the farming families on the peninsula try to compete with the Terminal Island students in a way, like getting better grades, or…?

Seki:
I don't remember as far as…maybe, in the olden days before my time like Fumi Tanaka, KayTagami, and then there was a Kuriya sisters I think in some of the albums, I've seen their picture in the, what do you call it, Japanese clubs or some kind of clubs. And those days, those girls, I think they wear those fancy hats; I think that was a style. I think I remember them. Some of the pictures I saw, they have those fancy hats, and real…

Interviewer:

Did they wear these hats to school?

Seki:
No; when they went out on Sundays and stuff.

Interviewer:
Now junior high is the time when boys become aware of girls and girls become aware of boys, what was it like in the Japanese community as far as boy/girl relationships?

0H06M26S

Seki:
Nobody…I never saw anything like that, because our parents really put their foot down on us. We couldn't….

Interviewer:
What did they say?

Seki:
I never seen any Japanese holding hands with another Japanese, you know like they do today; it's just an every—day thing. No, because they would tell you that so-and-so was boy-crazy, or so-and-so was…maybe they did it behind our backs, but I didn't see it.

Interviewer:
In your family, what did your mom and father…did they give you any rules?

Seki:
No; if we ever did anything, it's always behind their backs. **[Laughs]** Because I remember one time…it was Sam Fujikawa, and Sam and George, I think the two brothers, and, what do you call it, I guess they were trying…I think there was a couple of other girls with me, and I mouthed off saying, "Yeah, come on over; I'll go out with you.", or something like that. But, boy, when I got home, I was thinking boy, my mother would really kill me if…and I hid. When they came over to the house, I wasn't around. I just hid. **[Laughs]** I didn't want them to know because, boy, because I was just playing around, just saying, "Yeah, come on over." And I guess the other girls were real surprised at me, but I think I was already in high school at that time when I was just…because after school…I mean, this is Japanese school, they used to have, I don't know what kind of

gathering it was, but then, we used to gather at the Japanese school up on top of the hill…

Interviewer:
This is the hill in San Pedro?

Seki:
San Pedro, right there where the Elks Club is right now, used to be our Japanese school. We used to be down on 6th Street, and, was it **?Milar?**, or, 6th and something…but there was a hospital there, and I guess the Caucasian people all around that area there saying that we were making too much noise. You know during recess, we used to get out in the street and play kick ball or something like that, and I guess the Caucasian people didn't like that or something. I don't know, they said we were making too much noise, so we had to move. And then, they pulled the Japanese school up on top of the hill, and so most of my life I think we were on top of the hill. And we had Girls Club and stuff, but then…. oh, yeah, they used to have Friday night Bible Study, that's right. But I never was into church too much.

But the boys used to all come, and they had a new car, and us girls piled into Sam Kobayashi's brand new Pontiac and we took it for a ride. And we were coming down that Palos Verdes Drive, and there's a lot of curves, and what do you know? And it was Archie, he came from Terminal Island, Nanchi and the other boy was Mutsuo Shintani and us girls were in the back seat, and the two boys were up front. And one of them liked Nobuko real well, so we were teasing him about Nobuko, and he went over the cliff. And the only thing that was holding the car was that back axle…the kind of---round thing that hangs between the two tires. That's the only thing that was hanging…holding the car, we were hanging over. We got out of the car and we were surprised what happened, and then somebody stopped to help us and Lily went to her farm, and asked…. Well, she didn't say anything to her father or mother, I think one of the boys got the truck and brought the truck up to this accident place and pulled the truck out. And then, what do you call it, we went home, I mean, we went back to the Japanese school, but none of us says, "Don't tell Sam we got his car. Don't tell him what happened and everything. And everything was okay; he didn't know for many years what happened. We didn't tell him. **[Laughs]** We almost got killed. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:

Now when you talk about the Japanese school and, of course, about the farms, I assume that people were leasing the land?

0H11M18S

Seki:
They didn't own it. No; everybody leased the land up there.

Interviewer:
Do you remember how much, you know, it cost? Did your friends ever mention…?

Seki:
No; but when Louie Sepulveda, youngest son of Sepulveda, took over the managing the farms, our little white house…we had to pay $20 a month for that…rent for that house. But I think the farm crop and thing, that was … what do you call it when, it's not…when it goes to market, the market sends the bill to, I think, Sepulveda first, and then the farmers got whatever is left. What do you call that? You… sharecropping, that's what it was…sharecropping; so, I don't think the money came to my father first, so, I never saw him paying the rent. It was already deducted by the time he got his share. But the rent, I remember my mother really complaining about the $20 that she had to pay for the…well, I guess, the barn and all the little houses all went in together, you know. Now, I got to get a drink of water; okay.

Interviewer:
So out of this money that your father got from Ramon Sepulveda, did he pay his workers?

Seki:
Yes; because I remember every Friday night, my mother used to make sake.

Interviewer:
Oh, Japanese wine.

Seki:
And with the paycheck, everybody got a glass of sake and their paycheck. I remember the line of workers, and each one got paid and then they had a glass…a cup of sake. And they were real happy. And the wages wasn't, what do you call it, it was, was it $2.50 or something. I remember my father writing the checks, and it wasn't much.

Interviewer:
This is for one month?

Seki:
No; one week.

Interviewer:
One week.

Seki:
One week yeah; but $2.50 went a long ways in those days. And then, I don't know if…well, I don't know maybe it was 15 cents an hour…10 cents an hour those workers used to get. But….

Interviewer:
Did your mother charge for the meals also?

Seki:
That I don't know--I don't know. I thought it was just…she was grateful she had some help, so, as far as meals and all that…but I remember my father writing the checks every Friday, and then my mother, what do you call it, I think all the housewives all used to make sake in those days. And to get the rice and everything, you used to buy it by the 100 pound sack of rice. It wasn't just a little 25 pound sack---it was 100 pounds. And then, the grocery men used to bring the rice to us. You order it, and then, you know they used to bring it to us.

Interviewer:
Is this rice that came from Japan on the ships?

Seki:
No; I think---I remember in those days it was Arkansas rice because that was very popular in those days. Now it's called Sacramento rice that they go for. But, I think it was Arkansas and Louisiana rice. That's kind of behind my mind that it was, in those days. And when we went to [concentration] camp, there was some Japanese down in Louisiana left from those days. So, and one of them was a photographer, so he took our graduation picture from Monroe, Louisiana.

Interviewer:
I'm going to go back a little bit to the lease situation. Did you ever see…I mean, was it a verbal agreement with Ramon Sepulveda and your parents or was there something written down?

0H16M04S

Seki:
I have a lease from 1913 that my mother had it in her strong box, and it had---they bought the farm from Nakagawa in 1913 and it was through Ramon Sepulveda and one room in the barn was reserved for Ramon Sepulveda. And so when I think back and I asked this of Tagami, older sister, she's gone now, but I says, "How come it says this...". And she says, "Yeah, when he used to come down on horseback, he used to rest at your house. I says, "Oh yeah, I didn't…but this one says the barn." Well, there was rooms in the barn besides where the horse stall and where we store the hay on the side where my father had a lot of pipes and stuff stored when I was growing up. But then, there was a room there. And then, Haruko was telling me that Ramon Sepulveda used to rest at your house and he used to take a nap at your house every day. So, I says... oh by the time I was growing up, he never did that; he used to go to the yellow house at the Point [Fermin] when I was growing up.

Interviewer:
Did he ever join you for meals?

Seki:
No; it was just Benny. Benny used to, because....

Interviewer:
Benny was his son?

Seki:
The son, yes; he was real playful and Albert was the oldest. He worked at the bank. There was Bill that took care of the water department, and that was at Channel Heights. Today it's called Channel Heights, but it was all swamp land in those days. And every time… there was a tank up there -- I'd call it the Japanese school area, there was a big water tank. He used--- Bill used to pump the water up there for our household water and everything. When the water was low, there was a meter, scale I call it, a scale, a water scale... if the water got low, the little arrow used to go way down, so we didn't get much water in those days. So my father used to go on the side so he could see from, I think 25th Street, the arrow and when it was low, he used to go over to Bill and says, "Hey, Bill, no more water…will you put some water in the tank," or something. And so, I remember going over there.

And then, there was Benny, there was Louie, and there was Albert; and Albert was the one who took care of the golf course. He was a watchman, right, because he didn't have much education. And, well, neither did Louie; he went to San Francisco to play baseball for a long time, and his father used to tell the Japanese farmers that he went to San Francisco to go to law school. But I told that to Mrs. Bennett and Mrs. Bennett says, "Phooey, he was over there playing baseball, not going to college."

0H19M25S

Interviewer:
You're talking about semi-professional baseball?

Seki:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
So Benny used to come over to your house.

Seki:
Yeah, him and... well, I think they were just 18, 19 years old in the olden days that they used to come over and just play around and just be mischievous. But I remember when I was growing up about every month, he used to bring over different girls, and he... I think tried to show my mother that that was his girl friend he was going to marry her or something. But my mother used to speak to him in Japanese, saying, "No good, no good; throw away, throw away." I remember her---that word 'throw away;' means, she's not good enough for you and get rid of her.

Yeah, but she used to converse to him in Japanese. They kind of understood broken English, like you know, but they would understand. And they were just young fellows, you know, but it's funny, he used to always bring his girls over to our house to show my mother. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
What kinds of…when you were growing up as a child and as you got older, were there certain Japanese values that your parents taught you or would reinforce…all the time?

Seki:

Yeah; but she would tell me that don't do anything bad, because in those days, you know the Isseis used to scold us, too, if we did anything bad.

Interviewer:
What would be something bad?

Seki:
You know, like if we try to turn over a rock in their yard, or just do mischievous stuff or something, they would scold us. And then, it won't be long before it got around and to tell our parents. And, but, really, if we got scolded by somebody else it really registered, you know. Because nobody did anything bad in those days, because all the Japanese kids were all well-behaved. I don't remember anybody doing anything bad. It was only my brother that did anything bad.

And then I remember the Takemiya family used to have relatives in Venice, and that used to be a celery area. They grew a lot of celery and so they used to come and visit the Takemiyas, but my brother always thought that that was his territory---he didn't want nobody around there, so he used to gather a lot of rocks, and throw rocks at that fellow that used to come visit the Takemiyas. Because he felt that that's his territory and he better not come in there. But he never did that to nobody else. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
This brother's name was what?

Seki:
Masa

Interviewer:
Masa. I mean certain families had…they were Buddhist or Christian, or it was values that they learned from the old country…Did you notice anything?

0H22M54S

Seki:
See, my mother…they went once a year to the Zenshuji they were members of that church, and the priest used to come over quite a bit, but to us kids, it didn't mean nothing to us, because he used to stay over by the weeks, because if he was kind of ill or something, he'd go down to the White's Point hot springs, but he

would stay at our house. And then he would walk down, and my brother's ashes were at the church, also. So they were very close over there. But my parents never forced us to go to that church or anything; so we were, what do you call it... we had no religion. She didn't want me to be a Christian.

Interviewer:
She said...?

Seki:
No, that was a no, no. And I used to sneak out to go to the Friday night service and stuff. But, actually, by that time we're teenagers already, and we used to…I wonder if I have that picture? But we actually went to have fun. You know, it's just every Friday night, you know Mrs. [Virginia] Swanson (Yamashita) , she was a missionary there, and, what do you call it, she just want us to socialize with one another and then she would have sermons and stuff. And David Nakagawa was…used to come there, and, but nobody got out of hand, I don't think.

Interviewer:
If somebody did, then in the Japanese American community, what would happen?

0H24M40S

Seki:
Oh, I think the whole family would be condemned. You know if…they would go after the family for not teaching that kid not to do that, because I think the Japanese family---the roots are real deep. And if one gets out of hand, they condemn the whole family. That's why in camp if, what do you call it, any rumors about that family or something. They'd almost go into the closet, because they would condemn them for a long time.

That's why like when the boys ran away from Santa Anita there, they hush-hush, because they would tell [that]…well, she's the family that the boy ran away or something…she belongs to that family or something, and they would not just condemn the boy that ran away; they would get the family. And so, I don't know, it…no fault of the family, you know, the parents, but then, they can't do nothing about it, and so it just…but I remember my brother, when we were having that redress thing, and I wanted to bring the story out how the government treated some people, and he got real mad and he didn't want nobody to know that he was one of those boys that ran away. So…. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
I guess we'll talk about it more, later. **[Laughs]** Yes; in your home, did you have Japanese-type things?

Seki:
Yes.

Interviewer:
I mean….

Seki:
We had the Buddhist shrine, the Emperor's picture, and the Japanese flag, and a regular Shinto…yeah, the priest used to come over every time he used to come over, my mother and father used to have a little service of their own, but we didn't have to be there.

But, what do you call it, somebody used to come---a Caucasian fellow---used to come to buy tomatoes at our ranch there. He told my sister to get rid of---this was way before the War---to get rid of anything Japanese. And he must have been an FBI agent, but he knew what was going to happen years coming you know. So he told her to get rid of everything. But she never did, but when the war broke out and everything, everybody, I mean, everything that we had Japanese went down the outhouse---the toilet. And today, if anybody digs up the Japanese families' outhouse, I bet you they could find a lot of nice things in there. It's probably no good, no more, but then that's the quickest place to put things and they wouldn't look, you know, into outhouse those things.

Interviewer:
So, what happened when somebody died in the Japanese community? Did they have funerals or…?

0H28M02S

Seki:
They went to Evergreen to have their funeral and cremation and everything. But it lasts for a long time. It wasn't just for one day or two days; it lasted a long time. And then, I think afterwards, they came, the couple or whoever had lost a family member, they came to thank the people that came to the funeral; but it lasted a long time, I remember.

Interviewer:
You mean they would have a funeral---rituals for several days?

Seki:
Yeah; I think they…might have kept the deceased at home for 24 hours or something. Somebody kept guard on the casket all night and all day. I forgot how many days... one day or two days or something…And then, I remember they'd go to Evergreen, and then they'd have cremation; they didn't have burials. If they did, they would bury in San Pedro, downtown San Pedro, at the cemetery, but they mostly cremated them; and then kept the ashes at the church.

Interviewer:
At the Buddhist church.

Seki:
Yeah, at the Zenshuji. It was after the war is when we buried my brother at Green Hills. And that was in 1949, that Green Hills would bury Japanese people. That Kamiya boy, Frankie, when he graduated high school, him and another fellow were racing down, I think Western Avenue…it was just being cut through, but the boys were racing there, and the car collided with somebody else, and Frankie died, and he wasn't---couldn't be buried in Green Hills. He was buried at Evergreen, and then when they opened up Green Hills to let the Japanese be buried, they brought his body…casket back and re-buried him in San Pedro.

Interviewer:
This is after the war?

Seki:
Yeah; after the war.

Interviewer:
Were there any other discriminatory rules like that where you couldn't…?

Seki:
You couldn't buy houses until 1952, I think it was. You know, the signs would go up in Long Beach, well, I….

0H30M43S

Interviewer:

This was after the war?

Seki:
After the war; yeah.

Interviewer:
But, before the war did the Japanese families kind of know that they weren't supposed to do this or they weren't supposed to do that?

Seki:
No; but I remember if you were a twin, they wouldn't bury the two twins together in Japanese families.

Interviewer:
In Japanese families.

Seki:
Yes; because this…his name is Ichimachi, but he's known as…he married after the war and he took the wife's side of the name, but his former name was Ichimachi, but his wife died of childbirth, and I think they both died. And one was buried in Wilmington; the other one was buried in San Pedro. And so, after the war, they wanted to re-bury the boys, but they didn't know where that Wilmington…Wilmington is only one block big, you know and it's one of the oldest cemeteries around here, but they couldn't find his ashes; so they just got some dirt and took it back to Japan and I think they got the ashes from San Pedro or at the church, wherever they left them, and they took it back to Japan.

Interviewer:
That was the custom, that when someone died, they took all the ashes back to Japan?

Seki:
Back to Japan. That's what I was…understood, you know. But, my brother, I think he died in 1923 or something. His ashes was kept at the church; yeah. Yeah; but I remember, if you're a twin, they kind of hush-hush.

Interviewer:
So when you say if they were twins… if they were twins, people kept quiet, you mean from Japanese culture point of view, it was bad luck or something to have twins, or there was...?

Seki:
That was one case that I know of…I could…the Nakaharas--that Mary and Pete Nakahara…they're pretty well-known. They're twins, but you never knew that they were twins and they were born, oh about … let's see Mary is 83 or 84 now... so I guess they were born in the early 1920s or something? I forgot; but nobody knows that they were twins, so I kind of think that it was hush-hush in those days. Today, it's nothing, you know, but then, in the olden days, you never knew that they were twins.

Interviewer:
Were there other kinds of superstitions that the Japanese had?

0H34M25S

Seki:
Oh, when you saw a fireball, that somebody was going to die. You know those fireballs that you don't see them very often, but once in a while they would see these flares? But I remember when I was a kid, the Tagami family that ran this place, she ran up the hill to tell my father that---what she saw out in the ocean. And there was supposed to be a death, and she was real scared. But, we never saw anything like that. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
Let's talk a little bit about these Kenjinkai [prefectural association] kind of... were they picnics, or all day things?

Seki:
Yeah; it was an all day thing.

Interviewer:
Was this on a Sunday or something?

Seki:
Well, sometimes they had them on Saturday and then Sunday, also. And they come from all over---busloads---from Los Angeles, mostly Los Angeles. And once in a while we'd get from Norwalk or so, wherever they had Japanese school. Where they had big gatherings that, you know, they would say, let's go down to White's Point because they have a…it was a bath house and it was a stage and everything, and all the Japanese girls did their Japanese dancing, and then in the back, they had a small area, and then they'd have benches and all, and they had relay racing for the kids. And then, it was mostly a relaxation for the bath house and, they had rowboat. And before my time, they had a

swimming pool, but the waves knocked it down and a lot of people…but in those days, it was the restaurant was for Caucasians and everybody used to go there. Russian people…

Interviewer:
You're talking about a restaurant was there at White's Point?

Seki:
At White's Point. Yes, upstairs was a Japanese cuisine; downstairs was for Caucasian. It was mostly sandwiches and what not for the Caucasian people. And then, I think, Friday nights, I remember, and we were just kids, and they used to tell us to go home. And we didn't know how come, but all these men from Los Angeles would come in nice suits and everything, and that must have been Friday nights or something, but they had gambling upstairs. And to us gambling was a no-no, you know. It was hush-hush deal, and so they used to tell us kids to go home because they didn't want us to see them gambling.

But to me, you know, like hana [fuda-Japanese card game] and all that kind of…to me, I didn't know they were playing for money or whatever, you know. But, I don't know what other kind of gambling they used to have, but when I talked to other people, they said that Yamato Hall in Los Angeles was a big gambling place. So, when I think about it, I think the Los Angeles merchants gather up all the money and all to run this place, because that took a lot of money to run, and to build so I think that the merchants from LA had something to do with this finance part, because I find out that the Terminal Island people used to make their money and take it to Los Angeles and spend their money in Los Angeles, and they got their what do you call it... finance through people coming into Los Angeles. So... and then Kay was telling me

Interviewer:
Kay?

Seki:
The daughter of the Tagamis that ran this place. She told me that they made $1,000 on one weekend or one Sunday---that's how many people used to come to buy different hot dogs or ice cone or whatever. The profit that they made was $1,000 and that was way back in the 20s, so imagine how much money that the people used to spend.

0H39M11S

Interviewer:
When you talk about bathing, does that mean swimming or does that mean hot springs kind of bathing?

Seki:
They had a swimming pool then, and they rented the swimming pool, I mean the swimsuits. It was grey, I remember. So the swimming pool was very active in those days. That was when the Caucasian people and everybody could come, and then when the swimming pool broke down and everything, and the restaurant started going down and everything, it just seemed like it went back to only the Japanese that used to come down there. And the other Caucasians…oh, and the Russian people came down to bath in the Sulphur springs quite often. But at the end, it was just Japanese that used to come down there.

Interviewer:
I see; so they paid a little bit to get into the bathing area and they paid for food, and I think you mentioned a barge…what was that all about?

Seki:
That was on the side, right here. Right here…Endo's barge; it was…according to....

Interviewer:
What was that barge for?

Seki:
Fishing.

Interviewer:
Fishing?

Seki:
Yeah, that barge, it was a sports fishing barge. It was an old lumber ship that Endos had converted into a fishing … big barge. And they had two water taxis that went there. This is their pier, [looking at a photo] and they had two, well, they sit on each side---a water taxi, I call it that went out there.

Interviewer:
So you paid a little money to be taken out to the barge?

Seki:

I forgot how much, maybe a dollar or so, you know. I don't know. By the time we were growing up, we used to ask "Hideo, Come on, Hideo give us ride up to the barge;" He wouldn't do it so I never got a ride out to the barge. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
Is this like 2-3 miles out?

Seki:
Yeah; I didn't bring that picture out, but then it was out 2-3 miles.

Interviewer:
So did they get good fish there?

Seki:
Yeah, they used to get a lot of fish. And then, I think they had other barges sitting out there, but then, the waves, the storm come up, and there was a big rock between White's Point, the hotel and Royal Palm…there was a big, long rock. They would, what do you call it... the wind would knock the barge and break it all up on the big rock. I remember it was out there a long time. But we call it the Endo's pier, you know, because Mr. Endo used to run it.

0H42M22S

Interviewer:
Was he a San Pedro fisherman? How did he happen to get this barge, or maybe it was a shipwreck, or how did Mr. Endo get it?

Seki:
I think he might have been a fisherman at one time.

Interviewer:
What was his first name, do you recall?

Seki:
No, but he had three children; one was Hideo. The other one was Minoru, and a daughter named Yuriko, Lily... and, what do you call it---very nice people.

Interviewer:
And so, while the men were out fishing or bathing, did the women do something different or the children?

Seki:
No, oh, yeah... this article in this book that I was reading…I think they wanted to sue…there was a lawsuit on that White's Point hot spring, because I think they wanted to call it a Sulphur spring, or some kind of thing that I think they got a permit as a sanitarium in order to build this---something about a sanitarium when they first built that. And they didn't want…well; I think Tuberculosis was a no-no in those days. You know, it was kind of a hush-hush deal. So they had to change the name or something. And I hear that the lawsuit went on for a long time, and something about the name, it was.

Interviewer:
You call it White's Point?

Seki:
Yeah, we call it White's Point with an apostrophe "s," but I think somebody wanted to change the name and call it White Point, just plain white. But it's easier saying White's Point. Everybody calls it White's Point.

Interviewer:
Was this someone's name?

Seki:
I don't know where they got it. But when you look at that area, that white shale rock looks white, so we thought that might be it. But there is a fellow by the name of Mr. White; so they might have named it after Mr. White. I don't know.

Interviewer:
What were they doing besides fishing? Did they do any diving off that barge for abalone?

0H45M15S

Seki:
No; I think the diving part, like abalone fishing, they use helmet---you know those big brown helmets. And they, what do you call it, one of the articles says that they use rowboats and went as far as, well, Point Fermin, Catalina, all close by; but I think they bought a little motor boat or something and went as far as San Clemente, and then the islands out that way and brought back. And then they used to dry it…I wonder if I have that picture, it was just….

Interviewer:
Do you remember seeing Japanese people drying the fish?

Seki:
Oh, no; that was way before our time.

Interviewer:
That's okay.

Seki:
But, they're drying the abalone and then Mr. Shoji, I forgot what his … Shohei Shoji He recalls selling the abalone; he used to be the salesman. He used to go as far as Sacramento and San Francisco with the dry abalone. I didn't bring those pictures of those abalone fishermen, but right at the corner, right around in here before all this was developed, you could see where they have racks and racks of abalones. And they used to boil them also, and I think they used to put them in jars or something, and take it with them. And then, according to the book that I had read that they sold these abalone shells as buttons, and they used to sell it overseas somewhere. I forgot.

Interviewer:
Was this a history book?

0H47M38S

Seki:
No, like this book that I picked up; I think I was at the library looking at some…about history of San Pedro, and I come across that and I was real shocked about that. But Kay [Tagami] remembers, the daughter of the owner of that White's Point, she said that she remembers that the lawsuit went on for many years, and he had a lawyer from San Pedro or something that took the case and all that, but it just went on for a long time. But she actually didn't remember too much about it, because it was---she was a very young girl at that time, but she remembered…

Interviewer:
This lawsuit---other people were trying to take the property away from the Tagami family?

Seki:
No, they wanted…in fact, they didn't…that was just bare land after the abalone fishing industry dissolved. They didn't want the Japanese back there, so I guess, maybe, just to aggravate

them or try to take that land away, or do something trying to make that lawsuit…extend as long as they did; but it never mentions anything about Ramon Sepulveda owning the land. They just wanted them off that property, I think, but I really don't know.

Interviewer:
When your family knew Ramon Sepulveda, how old was he? I mean, did he die; do you remember his death as you were growing up?

0H49M28S

Seki:
No, but he was, was it 85 or something? There was an article about those trees that Sam **?Damanshis?** wrote. And I think he said that he was 85 years old when he died. He gave the history of that area there.

Interviewer:
I guess I'm wondering, you know…your family seemed to have a very good relationship with Ramon Sepulveda, and then, if he were to die, then his sons or someone else would kind of take over the ownership of the land; so then I wondered if the relationship with the Japanese farmers changed in any way.

Seki:
Well, I know my mother---she despised Louie, because Louie, he'd drive by just like Ramon, every day; Ramon supposed to come down and sit and relax with the Japanese people, and all that. But Louie, he would just go in his car and just look around the property, and go back home... but no relationship with the Japanese, and then that $20 a month really hurt us because there's no vegetables or anything to pay him, you know they struggled to pay him, and $20 was a lot of money in those days. And so…but after the war, I went to Louie to ask him, "Do you have any rentals or anything, because we actually don't have a place to stay, Louie, can you rent a house for us?" He says, "Get out of my office, get out, get out." he said, "I don't have a place for you to stay." And when I first came back from Chicago to Long Beach, any relationship with the Japanese was that you're a Jap-lover, and we don't want to do anything with the Japanese.

And they just make you feel like we were the ones who started the war. And when Hugh Houser came out with that program where the Sanyo blimp was flying up here just recently, it just made

me tickled to death, because all these friends that I grew up with, they're the ones who gave me that silent treatment when the war broke out.

0H51M57S

Interviewer:
I guess we better talk about the effect of the war on your family and the community there. In 1940 you were…where were you…you were in high school?

Seki:
Yes, I was in the 11th grade---just started the 11th grade.

Interviewer:
What high school was that?

Seki:
This was San Pedro High School. And, well, not to be bragging or anything, but I got along good with the Caucasian kids, because we went to grammar school together, and we were very close, I thought. You know, just like any other student. And I didn't participate in any clubs or anything, but then as far as relationships, I got along fine with them.

But, December 7th was on a Sunday. Okay; Monday I went back to school, and we always used to gather at one part of the school, all … all … most of my friends here. But nobody was there that Monday, and I thought, gee, something is funny, but then I just went along, what do you call it, and then I go by the hallway and I says, "Well, hi, Elaine," hi, so-and-so, they just turned their head like I wasn't even around. And I was saying, how come they are giving me the silent treatment, but I felt that they just, what do you call it, made me feel like I was the one who signaled them to come over or something, and then on top of that, what MacArthur had that big airplane scare.

Interviewer:
What was that about?

Seki:
I think it was about one of two o'clock in the morning, it could be later than that, they had this identified airplane go by, and all the searchlights and guns and everything went off, all the windows in San Pedro broke, and then all the shells landed here and there and people got hurt from that. But it wasn't no

Japanese airplane that came by. And Huell Howser says he had all the witness there and they says no, they didn't see no Japanese airplane come by. And then…

Interviewer:
Do you remember that?

Seki:
No, because it was so early in the morning. But the next day when I went to school, they were all talking about it, you know. That was February. I think Hugh Houser says it was February 25 or something; okay. I think it was February 22.

Interviewer:
You're talking about 1942?

Seki:
1942... that Japanese submarine that shot the bullet to that refinery in Goleta, they call it Santa Barbara in those days, but it was Goleta. And that's when I, what do you call it, I was in…whose class was that **[Laughs]** can't think of it. He was teaching it up there, and he was talking about that refinery being shot and all that. So I went up there, and I asked one of the guards soon after this class that I went up there, because I was curious about "Gee, did the Japanese really come that close?" So it was change of shift, and the guard was just going down, and I said, say, "I'm a student at UCLA and I says I'm doing some history work, and I want to find out about this submarine that came to this refinery and shot so many rounds of big shells," and everything and came out in Life magazine and all. And he says, "Oh, there's no Japanese submarine that came over here." And it says it was on that night when President Roosevelt was giving that speech about…the name of that speech was, anyway, it was twilight something speech, and they said the submarine just went nonchalantly back into the ocean.

Boy, if a Japanese submarine came over here and do some damage, I wouldn't be nonchalantly going on top of the water. I'd sink myself in and I'd hide. And I find out that that was an old, old submarine that nonchalantly went---it wasn't a recent war submarine. And all that was propaganda. That happened, and then that searchlight deal, that airplane that flying over, and everybody was all hysterical, and then they were saying the lumber ship off of the San Pedro Harbor got torpedoed and all that.

All this rumor was flying, and it made us Japanese feel real bad; you know, like we were the ones signaling and everything, and all these kids blamed me, I guess, for it, because they wouldn't speak to me.

Interviewer:
Let's go back to the Pearl Harbor Day. What was your family doing?

Seki:
I was working on the celery ranch. I was watering it… helping my mother water.

[Begin Sumi Seki File 2; Track 4]

Interviewer:
Okay; let's go back again to Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941.

Seki:
Oh yeah.

Interviewer:
Tell me, what was your family doing? What were you doing?

Seki:
We just was ready to harvest celery--celery because we got that city water that came out to the White's Point area and we were watering and I think it was about 2 o'clock or 3 o'clock---I can't remember the time---and we didn't even know that Pearl Harbor had happened or anything, but the man, I think one lot---two lots over, he started shooting at my---my father and we didn't know what happened or anything, what happened, you know Pearl Harbor or anything. It was later that afternoon when our neighbors---the Japanese neighbors were telling us what had happened. And so we were real shocked and at that time, we just took it for a grain of salt that---we just thought that the Hakujins [Caucasians] don't like Japanese; so you know we just kept to ourselves and didn't pay much attention. But when Pearl Harbor... and then the Japanese were real shaken and worried, because they're aliens and the FBI is going to---or the government is going to come and pick them up. And they were, you know, like hysterical. And then I think it was around like February 9th that San Pedro, Palos Verdes on the people, they [Gov't.] came in a swarm and came and got all the Isseis at that time. But it just happened that my father was out selling tomatoes in downtown San Pedro; so he was spared. But all our

Issei friends were all taken to the San Pedro jail by the FBI and I think it was February 9th that---when they did, because according to Don Young's book-- it says it was February 9th, I think it was. So that's---I'm just going by that. But it was Don Young that, what do you call it---was teaching that. I didn't bring the book that he was teaching it from, but it wasn't a very good book that he was teaching it from.

Interviewer:
You're talking about*War-time in Palos Verdes*?

Seki:
Uh-hm.

Interviewer:
What does your---you said the Japanese were very hysterical, because they were aliens and they didn't have citizenship. What do you remember your parents saying?

Seki:
My parents?

Interviewer:
Yeah; your parents, within your family?

Seki:
They weren't worried of being picked up or anything, because we didn't know that the FBI was going to come. But, like I said, years before a Hakujin [Caucasian]fellow had told my sister to get rid of the Japanese things and so now is the time when maybe the FBI was going to come to each family and start searching for contrabands or anything Japanese. But....

Interviewer:
Did that ever happen before---someone taking a gun and shooting?

Seki:
Yeah; my next-door....

Interviewer:
It happened before?

Seki:
No, no; because this neighbor---it was the Plants that---is their name. They came from Oklahoma or something. and that house next-door, it used to belong---the Tagamis used to live there

but then they gave it up because they were staying at the hotel part and they were living down here and the house was vacant. And so the Plants must have bought it or was renting from I don't know who, but they came from Oklahoma and they never saw Japanese before. And then with all this propaganda and this war that came up, they thought we were the enemy and so that's why he got a gun; and my girlfriend, the one that I was talking....

Interviewer:
You were--you were outside when he tried to shoot at you?

Seki:
Yeah; uh-huh.

Interviewer:
Then what happened?

Seki:
There is nothing to do, but we all came inside. We turned the water off and we came inside and we said, "Oh my gosh, the war is getting serious." And when you talk about Pearl Harbor, where is Pearl Harbor? We've never even heard about Pearl Harbor. We don't even know where it's at. In Hawaii---to me Hawaii was just like going to Japan or some other country or something. We never even knew anything about Hawaii. So we just came inside the house and just let that Caucasian... I'd call him some kind of name, but what do you call---we just left him alone. And then the other Caucasian family that lived down there, they never even came over or said anything or something; they just---we didn't have no friends as far as the neighbors are concerned. And we never associated with them anyway, because the Japanese people just kept to themselves and the Caucasian kept to themselves, except this one lady, and that was Mrs. Bennette. [Bennett] And she used to come every day to our house and just to keep busy, she used to help us with sorting the tomatoes and putting them in boxes and all that. But anyway, to make a long story short with Mrs. Bennette,[Bennett] she willed me her house when she died. But when we came back from the war, she never gave back our furniture or anything that we stored in her garage. She just said, "Sumi, get off of my porch. I don't have your furniture. Get out---get out of here." And so I left her alone, and the more I left her alone-about 20 years later she wrote me a letter to Truman Boyd and she said, "Sumi, I want to talk to you; I've got something to say to you. So can you come over?" So I wrote back and said, "Yeah; I'll come over." And so you know, let bygones be bygones and I went over and she said,

“I’m making out the will.” So she says, “You and Masa is just like my own children; so I would like to leave this house to you and my financial house to Masa. So do you want it?” I says, I remembered back and I says, “Sure I want it. I’ll accept it.” And so when she died in 1975, she willed me the house and then, I turned around and sold it. So what do you call it-- that’s the way it goes.

Interviewer:
Was that from anger?

Seki:
Yeah; I couldn’t live in that house---not what she had said to me, and Louie Sepulveda said the same thing. He chased me out; he what do you call it... we rented from them for 20 some odd years and then they treat us like dirt and then he just---from his office downtown San Pedro, he just shoved me out, because he didn’t want to be seen with the Japanese. In those days, if you were seen with the Japanese you’re a Jap lover. So at first when we first came back, they didn’t want, what you call it... so in order for me to get a job or anything, I disguised myself as a Mexican and my name was Sue Seki. No, it wasn’t Seki; but Sue Seo---Seao---notSeo, but was Seal [as they pronounced it]; so that’s how come I got into Douglas because I didn’t want to be known as a Japanese see, because you can’t---you couldn’t get a job in those days. So if you’re Mexican or anything else but a Japanese, you could get a job. And they wouldn’t hire me as Sumiko Seo; they wouldn’t hire me. So I said, that was in Long Beach; so I’d go to Wilmington and I got hired in from Wilmington under Sue Seal and then what do you call it and then I got into Douglas. But other than that when... but before that there was no jobs in Long Beach. It was a tourist town. So you had to go to Los Angeles and it was just nothing but sewing factories and they were all owned by Jewish people. So I think I worked for about five to ten years. I remember I used to go on the Red Car back and forth to L.A. to work, but I could have got a job at Western Electric, but there was no way to get there because the people that had cars that lived in Trumen Boyd and everything was what do you call it was taking girls to the sewing factories and everything and this Western Electric was at Alameda and Seventh or Eighth and Alameda It was out of the way; so I just had to follow the crowd and work in the sewing factory.

Interviewer:

Let's go back to after Pearl Harbor and then you---when did your family first hear about evacuation?

Seki:
Oh, that was---we left April 5th; so---and they were picking up all the Isseis. So we must have heard about March, because the Terminal Island people had to leave. They evacuated them first; okay if they're going to evacuate them, we're next or something. We were getting kind of worried and everything. And we left April 5th; so they gave us a little time. But in the meantime, my mother had some money in Sumitomo Bank I think in Los Angeles. See, my mother had her own account because all the account that was in my father's name was in San Pedro, and if there was any money left that money went to Japan. So my mother opened up her own at Los Angeles. And, I give her credit, she used to take the PE [Pacific Electric street car line], the Red Car, into Los Angeles and into Little Tokyo and so what do you call... but they froze that money and she didn't get any of that money back until after the war and when they released the money it was to the lawyer. The lawyer got all that money or whatever and she only got a few dollars---whatever she had saved, because by the time you hire a lawyer and all that there's not much left at that time.

Interviewer:
People needed a lawyer to investigate?

Seki:
Yeah; everybody had to get a lawyer to get your money out of that bank. It was the Sumitomo Bank. I think I still have some of the receipts that my mother had. But the lawyer... in fact, the lawyer is the one who probably notified her saying he could help her get her money out of it or something I think it was. And you hire a lawyer and what's left is very little.

Interviewer:
Yeah; now you had--your family had a full functioning farm with a lot of equipment and....

Seki:
We just left it. You had to leave everything. Our dog, we had a pet dog and everything; we left it with the Army. They were staying in little pup tents, you know. All the boys were from Georgia---from down south that don't know anything.

Interviewer:

Wait a minute, Roman Sepulveda still owns the land or his sons, Louie, and then....

Seki:
Yeah; right on the cliff side and all over they had---when the war broke out or even before the war broke out they had tents and the soldiers from Georgia. All was in those tents.

Interviewer:
This is after Pearl Harbor?

Seki:
No; this is before Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer:
Before Pearl Harbor?

Seki:
Uh-huh; because I remember the soldiers never saw Japanese before and they though gee, we were real nice people. In fact, my mother, New Year's Day, she made some little Japanese food you know and put it on that little table and everything and I invited the soldiers to come over and they were real surprised that Japanese people... they're real nice people. And then they couldn't understand why we had to leave that April 5th when we had to leave. And then I think by that time, they were getting kind of used to the word "Japsm" you know. They were getting that and then I guess they were saying that they kind of---we were kind of outcast people you know. So they kind of was leaving us alone, but some of the people that used to bring their garbage to our chicken in the little red wagon, they were real nice thing and they couldn't understand why we were packing up to leave. They couldn't understand why---to them we were just Americans just like they were and all that. But we had to leave; but we left our dog there. I left my cat as it is---the chickens, whatever was left, is just left there. The horses had to be left there and I remember my father talking to the horse, he was petting them, and then spoke to them saying, "I hope the next family that takes care of you---you work as hard for them as you did me," or something like that he was saying and then he was crying because he had to leave his horses there. So it was sad you know---you know you just---you don't know where you're going or anything. They never told us, and what do you call it, they just leave your own possession that you started from way back in 1913. And I guess all the other people like Louie and all them, they just cared less, you know about us. And somebody

told me that Louie couldn't pay his taxes; so he lost that property because a Japanese farmer was paying him for the use of the land. What do you call it, And he had some rentals---houses downtown, but as far as White's Point and all that, I heard that the Government took it away from him. But I'm keeping the story alive saying that Ramón Sepulveda planted the trees there and they had to be preserved. In the meantime, I hope I can slip in about the Issei pioneers. That's my main goals is to save the trees.... We almost lost that property back in 1978 or something when they---I think the---no, the Navy or the Air Force, wanted that land and chopped it all up to put the Navy housing in there in the whole---whole San Pedro area and then we had some divers from I think, it was Hawthorne and somewhere; we got a lot of people involved to save it. They gave them the top part, but not the bottom part; [bottom of the hill] so.

Interviewer:
Okay; and then so---your family just packed things---what they could carry, I imagine?

Seki:
Uh-hm.

Interviewer:
What kinds of things did your family carry; do you remember?

Seki:
Yeah; bedding [Futon], you know your type of comforter and my mother had dishes and knives and all that, but in seven years they took most of that stuff away from us. You couldn't have any of that stuff because I guess they thought we would kill one another or something; I don't know. You couldn't have a camera. And then....

Interviewer:
Did the FBI or the military ever come by to your house and search?

Seki:
No, we just went. April 5th was the day that, I think Hideo and Art---Hideo Endo and oh... [interruption] They went around to the houses before evacuation telling the Japanese family they had to move and to meet down at the Pacific Electric Station and we're all going together.

Interviewer:

Hideo?

Seki:
Yeah; Hideo Endo and Art Nakahara; they---I don't know if they were in the JACL at that time and where they got the authority to go and---to the Japanese families, but Art was telling me that he---him and Hideo went house to house to tell the Japanese people, because otherwise, I don't know if the Rafu [Shimpo newspaper] had quit printing by that time, but otherwise it would be the Japanese paper, you know that---to be ready to move or what. But I think Palos Verdes and San Pedro, we all moved together. And Palos Verdes, they went on their own---a group of them went on their own and went to Lindsay [Central California], up that way and started farming over there thinking that they didn't have to evacuate, but they did.

Interviewer:
Okay; we'll stop there. Thank you.

Seki:
Yeah; okay.

Interviewer:
Yes; we'll stop there. I think she's ready.

[End Sumi Seki File 2; Track 4]

[Begin Sumi Seki File 3]

Interviewer:
It is 1:14 [PM] on March 29, 2004. This is a continuation and the third CD of the interview of Sumiko Seki on the same date being conducted by Dale Sato for the South Bay Oral History Project. The audio and catalog persons remain the same.

Let's continue the interview. Maybe we can start, Sumi, from the time…where did your parents have to meet for evacuation? Was it in San Pedro?

Seki:
We went with the Tagamis. They bought a great big truck because they had a lot of stuff that they want to take because they ran that hot springs and the hotel and all that down at White's Point. So, we got a ride with them, and we met at the Red Car Station, the Pacific Electric, downtown San Pedro, and we all had to line up. But those that didn't have transportation--- they had to wait and went on the train, the little Pacific Electric train to Santa Anita [Racetrack Assembly Center]. But we were fortunate enough.

But I remember that day very well. When we were lined up...there were rows, well, on the sidewalk, all people waving and saying goodbye. But I, myself, remember the day right after Pearl Harbor, that Monday when I went to school that everybody gave me the silent treatment. I could see all those people's faces saying... what do you call it... good riddance, you Jap. That's the feeling that I got, because to me, I don't think they really meant that they were really saying goodbye, we miss you or all that. I could just picture them saying, goodbye; because I had such a harsh feeling that day after Pearl Harbor that they didn't like me because I was supposed to be the enemy.

And so, when we were lining up going into Santa Anita, I could just see those people lined up down there on 6th and Harbor Boulevard saying, good riddance, you Jap. My own personal feeling that…because even when I came back, I wasn't welcomed, like they really were so happy to see me that I was gone for two or three years. No, it was longer than that I think.

0H03M55S

Interviewer:
What kinds of people did you see there at the Pacific Electric…?

Seki:
It was the people that was their neighbors or something. They probably meant real well, but then when I saw their faces, it just…I just back-tracked to the day that I went Monday morning to the high school…how everybody had shunned me and gave me that silent treatment. And a lot of people says, "Well, how come you can't forget about that, it's been so long ago?" But, how can you erase something that you was hurt by one of your best friends all through school; because I would never be able to erase it... It happened so long ago, but then, it's something

that was not my fault. I didn't start the war, and people still can't understand it. So, that's my own feeling.

But, it was sad. For me, it was sad. I was crying inside. I never came out and really wept openly, but I was crying on the inside, the day of evacuation. And then, when we went into Santa Anita and so many people…and it was such a hot day, and it was all out in the open, and then, when they give you ID number and, "Line up over here; line up over there;" and then at the end they give you a white sack. What's this white sack for? And then you take it over to your horse stall, and then they tell you to go fill it up with straw; that's your mattress. That's another heart-breaking thing.

And then... you've never seen so many Japanese in all your life. You'd think just San Pedro had enough Japanese, you know that you mingle around with, but when you go into Santa Anita and see all those Japanese, you just wonder, I never knew there was so many Japanese. It's just kind of a shock, you know; because, I guess coming from a small town, I guess you think that's all the Japanese there is.

0H06M20S

Interviewer:
How were your parents feeling about this whole sad period?

Seki:
Well, again, that word "Shigataganai" [It can't be helped]. That's…I've heard that many times. It's the government's doing, and since they're aliens, you have to do what the government tells you to do; so they went. But it's altogether different now. But in those days, I could understand that they didn't have citizenship; so I guess they just went orderly. And in those days, I think the Japanese people…you didn't hear too many crimes or anything, because Japanese people always was law-abiding and whatever they had to do, they did. They did it quietly.

And so…it's very heartbreaking…and another thing in Santa Anita, I remember and this is after a while…for a while we didn't have a job or anything. We didn't have nothing to do; you didn't have friends; you're making friends and all. In the evening whatever friends that you made, you walk around the little racetrack every evening, and you see the same people all the time, you know. But, I began to cough. I couldn't understand

why I keep coughing so much. And then, during the day, I go to the dispensary at the Grand Stand where the doctors had the little stall, but it was nice and dry and I wouldn't cough. And I didn't know for the longest…it makes me cough every time I think about …Kentucky Blue Grass is what I was allergic to. And all the hay was growing all around the side of what do you call it, the horse stalls, and the evenings when it's wet is when I used to cough, because I'm allergic to Kentucky Blue Grass.

But…and then after a while... oh, my girlfriend, Kay, she had a lot of money, so she used to buy a Coke, and she got hooked on that Coca-Cola. And she used to have to drink two and three bottles of Cokes all the time, and we couldn't even afford that one Coke. But she used to drink a lot of Coke. And in those days, they had that, I think, caffeine in the Coke because it tastes different today from it did then, and it used to go up our nose and all that, so… **[Laughs]**
Interviewer:

This is Kay Tagami?

Seki:
Yeah. We used to just sit and do nothing for I don't know how many weeks. It's just…well, today, we would call it boring. But then, we just started making new friends and just do the best we can.

And then I got a job; I think the girls that used to walk with me around the racetrack, we got a job taking care of the main shower. There's only one shower in those days, and it was where they used to wash the horses, and it was all open and then, in the center was plywood. And that side was for the men; and this side was for the lady. And they had a square box where they had disinfectant; so you wash your…you go there before you go into the shower, the disinfected. And so…but there was a long line and it was hot, real hot, and this one Issei lady, I could just see she was a nice, high class lady and she must have come from a wealthy family and everything. She just started crying and she says, "My gosh, they're treating me like a horse." We're being treated just like an animal the way we have to take a shower in this old place and everything. And there's nothing we could do; we just had to take ten people at a time when they came vacant, because it was hot and everybody wanted to take a shower during the daytime, and then once in the evening. And you couldn't let a whole bunch of people go in at a time, because it wasn't any vacancy. So, we just let them ten at a time. And

this one Issei lady was just crying, saying that they're treating us like animals and all that.

And then, makes you sad because she probably was a rich lady and everything, and then we go into Santa Anita and we're all one---one class of people, rich or poor, it don't make any difference. And then, I remember, one time I got to know a lot of kids by that time, and I got kind of bored, so there was three of us…about four or five of us; but three of us were the most daring. We got a hold of a trash can that was down the main aisle on each barrack. We were so bored that we just went and dumped all the trash---this was one evening, it was dark---And then, all of a sudden, the guard starts coming. And I started running real fast and the other girls couldn't get the…run, I guess they were kind of hesitant as first. And then, all of a sudden, they realized it was a guard; so they got caught, and they had to pick up all the trash and put it all back into the trash can. But I didn't have to, because I already ran away. And so…but that's the only rascal thing that I could think of doing.

But we were bored. We just wanted to get that frustration out and so that was the only thing that we did bad. And then, we'd go out to the main…Visitors had to come to the main part, and then it was alongside that Huntington Drive; we'd see all the cars go by, but we couldn't go, because the barbed wire fence was in between…and the visitors come. Mrs. Bennette came once to see us, but they were on one side the wall, and we were on the other side, and we just conversed through this little opening. But, we were treated like we were prisoners or something.

And none of the…it was raw wood, like it was still open…it wasn't anything fancy, they just built it. It was like a little partition between the visitor and the…I called myself, the inmate. And so…and then…they searched whatever she brought us. They searched it and make sure it wasn't contraband. But, it was culture shock to see all the Japanese being put in one place like that, especially in the horse stalls like that. And the top was open, so the people on the other side could look into our side, and you couldn't talk very loud and you couldn't fight with your parents or anything, because everybody down the line could hear you. So we had to be real quiet and all that.

And later on with the LA people and all the other people start coming in, it start getting better. They had activities for us.

They started schools, and what do you call it, things for us to do. During the day it was so hot and everything, we'd go to the Grand Stand and they had the Red Mess [Hall] in there, but we stayed there all day just doing nothing, and then go back to the Blue Mess, and if they had food that we didn't like, we just ate the dessert and go from one mess hall to the other and eat only the dessert. And then I got real fat from the dessert, and everybody thought I was pregnant. And, what do you call it... but it was because we didn't like the food that they gave us and then we would find out what the other mess halls would have and if they had better food, we'd go to their mess hall.

And then, later on, they start giving tickets out, and then we would tell them that we forgot our tickets. If you're from the Blue Mess, they give you a little ticket with a blue card on there, but we want to go to the Orange Mess or the Yellow Mess or something, we'd tell them, "Oh God, we're hungry" and we forgot our ticket, gosh-darn-it, we acted like we, you know, we just forgot our ticket, but actually we just wanted their food…better than the Blue Mess.

And then, I remember the first day we went, they gave us navy beans and bread…the first day we went into Santa Anita. Boy, we couldn't eat that food, because we weren't used to beans. I never ate beans before like that…and bread. And then, later, later in weeks, the food started getting better. But a lot of people said that they had Spam. They can't eat Spam today, because they served it to us in Santa Anita, but I don't remember. I remember the fish…the white fish that they gave us, and I didn't like fish at that time.

0H16M20S

Interviewer:
Your family, were they able to eat together?

Seki:
At first, we were real quiet and we did everything our parents told us to eat, we ate as families. Then, well, we made friends and we started eating with our friends and forgot about our parents. And then, the parents couldn't tell us what to do, or anything, because we wouldn't listen. They just lost control of us. And our friends meant more to us than our parents did. And sometimes we didn't even see our parents only at night when we went to bed. And then, I remember my sister had something to do with this. This was when the LA bunch was already planning

community activities for us. They started holding dances and stuff at the Grand Stand, and then they had a band and everything. And everybody was going to it; so I wanted to go too.

So I went with my girlfriends and, what do you call it, I come home and they locked me out. They put a small rope around the door knob and locked me out. And so, one of the fellows that was walking by had a knife, and which he wasn't supposed to, he cut the rope, so I was able to go in, but I was scolded, but they couldn't talk very loud because the next door neighbor could hear me. But they told me that I should never go out at night like that, because I was going to turn out to be a no-good. But everybody else is out there.

Later on, the big dances and stuff and then, they started breaking down and saying, yeah, you could go, but that was because the other Issei people had…had, I guess, broken down and seen their daughters and sons go out to the activities. But, at first, my mother and my sister wouldn't let me go out.

0H18M26S

Interviewer:
Your older sister?

Seki:
Yeah, my older sister. She wanted me to come home and sew my dress and do different things like she was doing, but I wouldn't do it. **[Laughs]** So, it was hard and then in a way, it brought the Isseis' minds out a little bit, because they were controlling us and when we went into Santa Anita, they couldn't control us no more. We had a mind of our own.

But, one thing, they wanted us to finish school and when they opened up the school in Santa Anita it was in the Grand Stand. We couldn't learn too much, because one group of people was talking too loud, or this group was having a singing class or something and we couldn't study. But then, we went, we sat down and everything.

Interviewer:
Who were your teachers?

Seki:

The local people, like Art Nakahara was one of the teachers there.

Interviewer:
So other Japanese-Americans?

Seki:
Yeah, people that was interned; because I don't think they had real teachers...qualified teachers before the war, did they---teaching school... I'm not sure. And then, Sunday school, Reverend…what was his name? He came from Terminal Island. He was one of the ministers, I remember. I can't think of his name.

Interviewer:
Was it Paul Nagano?

Seki:
No, no; he was from Clearwater before the war, and once in a while, he used to come to our Friday nighters. And, what do you call it, but I don't remember any real fights among two students or two people fighting. Only when---just before the riot that we had in Santa Anita that we used to see or hear rumors about so-and-so is an "inu" or so-and-so…just little rumors like that.

And then, I remembered that the riot.... See, every weekend I think we had to put…they gave us mattress after a while there, because I was in Santa Anita six months. And the straw that we had to put into this sack, I think they did away with it, and they gave us a real mattress. And we had to dry it outside, and so…but…they had the outside people---I think they just hired anybody to come and check for contrabands or whatever things that---hot plates and things that we're not supposed to have---checked it. But somebody said that one of the people that came to check stole some money from somebody, and then, the little boy saw that man steal the money. And instead of him putting it in his pocket; he put it in his hat, and what do you call it, the woman went hysterical to find out that her money was gone.

And then, I guess the other people heard that or something. But, I really don't know what really started that riot. But then, they had a riot. And then, I remember the jeeps used to come around with machine guns on there, and then, later on, the big tanks used to come around. But, they took away most of the hot plates. But then, somehow, they managed to get some more, because the man next door, the Yuwasas he worked in the kitchen

and he was a cook. And every night about eight o'clock he'd come home and they would be frying the steak. And we could smell that good smell of the steak. And the ceiling of the horse stall is all open; so the smell would go all the way down. And frying a piece of steak, it really smells good when we had to eat some fish or something else, you know **[Laughs]**.

0H22M57S

Interviewer:
How did the other neighbors feel about that---that he got steak and...?

Seki:
You don't work at the kitchen, or you just take it for a grain of salt that you eat whatever they feed you. And what they bring home is their business, because they didn't want to tell on other people…what they were doing.

And then we had a lot of merchant seamen---bachelors, living in Santa Anita. I think they plucked them off the ships when the war broke out.

Interviewer:
Japanese seamen?

Seki:
Japanese, yeah; they're Hawaiians, mostly. And they kind of talked funny. At first, we didn't understand what they were saying. But right next to us was a bachelors' quarter, and that's where they had all the... what do you call it? But they used to…I guess somebody worked at the kitchen or something, but they used to bring home these big gallon, can of fruit, and they used to ferment it under the bed. And they used to get drunk on it and they used to feel high all the time. And so, I remember…but they were such nice people, you know, after you get to know them, you know that they are very nice….

And then, all of a sudden, we start saying well, where's Rocky, where's Bosan where's so-and-so? Well, they must have done something that they plucked them up and send them to some other camp.

Interviewer:
These are other farming families that you're talking about?

Seki:
Of the Hawaiian merchant seamen.

Interviewer:
Oh, I see uh-huh.

Seki:
Because they must have either fought or they were a nuisance to other people or something; I don't know. I don't know who told on who or what, but all of a sudden you start seeing people missing from the camps. And then, my brother took a picture at one of the copper mines, and Harry Nishimoto, he took a picture with Harry Nishimoto, and I start thinking, oh yeah, whatever happened to him? Well, they must have shipped him…you know, off to another camp. But in those days, you never know who's missing, because they take you away real quietly. You just don't know.

Usually, when you leave, you pack different things and people are following you to say goodbye to you or to the bus station or something. But, all of a sudden, you just don't know. And one day, this was several years ago, we went to San Francisco, and I wanted to look for George Takeshita that was one of the boys that ran away with my brother from Santa Anita. So, I wanted to go interview him and find out what the story was on him and why did they jump the fence and all that? So, I was at the Japan town at the square there, and so I was asking different people, "Do they know George Takeshita", we were told that he's always hanging out here, and just wasting his time with the boys here; just talking stories and all that. And they says, no he hasn't been here for quite some time, we haven't seen him. And they say he used to work at the post office, and we haven't seen him.

And then we started talking to one of the fellows, and the fellow said his name was Bosan Masuda and he said he was in Santa Anita. I says, you know, I remember that name, Bosan and then, what do you call it, he's a good friend of the Yomagitas in Long Beach, and they write, exchange Christmas cards and everything, so I come home and I tell Mrs. Yomagita that, and she was so surprised that he's in San Francisco. And so, it's just a small world. But I never got to see George Takeshita **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
Could you see guards all over?

0H26M48S

Seki:
Yes, the guards…see, ours was I think Barrack 88---stall 88. It was almost at the end of the Santa Anita horse stall. And the tower was right there. And some of the girls were talking to the soldiers up there, but I never got to talk to them. They had real guns and everything up there and the searchlights. And another thing…I was too ashamed to go to the bathroom in the little…what do you call that chamber?

Interviewer:
The stall?

Seki:
It's a bucket, anyway. And so…because when you go, it makes noise as you hit the bottom. And some people say they still hear that noise that they can remember Santa Anita, and at night everybody's using the chamber. But, you know at night, the toilet is way down there at the end of the barrack, and over, and that searchlight follows you as you go. And it's, you know, two and three o'clock in the morning; it's kind of scary. Nobody else is walking around, but yourself, you know. And that's another thing that I remember. That you almost didn't want to go at night, because it's so far away and the searchlight follows you and all that.

And then, another thing I remembered was that every family isn't obedient and they don't argue and stuff, but you do come across an argument. And there was a daughter and mother… this daughter came back from Japan just before the war, so the mother and her wasn't close, and then when they had to evacuate, they argued all the time and you could see them fighting, you know through the mouth, you know and all that. But that's the first time that I seen an argument like that. I guess there was others, but then that one that I noticed the most was that.

Interviewer:
Did you notice people crying or complaining?

Seki:
Yeah, you hear a lot of complaints of just different things---wasn't what they're used to, Like, like, us. We're used to outside toilets, you know and all that. But then, some city people that come from a good family, a rich family or something, they're not used to all that. And you hear a lot of complaints,

but there's nothing you could do, because with all the barbed wire and all that, there's nothing you can do.

And then, I think when we first went to Santa Anita, we were more scared of the guards than anything else, you know. We just, like, what do you call it, yes, yes, we'll do whatever you tell us to do, you know. Nobody ever rebelled, because if you did, you'd be treated like my brother.

0H29M56S

Interviewer:
I think we'd better talk about your brother, again. So he and his friends tried to escape, is that what you were saying?

Seki:
Yeah, we were…I think it was in May. We went April 5... May---maybe the last part of May. He met George Takeshita from San Francisco. There was Tom Shiroishi from Long Beach and there was William Kato from Long Beach. They were all teenagers. So, I guess they said, "Hey, let's jump the fence and get out of here or something." So the boys all agreed, and they did. And I think it was about just after dark when the searchlight was dark, they jumped the fence. And what William Kato told me over the phone that they were going to plan on going to Salt Lake City, because a train goes by the back end of the parking lot of Santa Anita. So they were going to hop the train and go to Salt Lake City. But once they got out and tried to catch that train, the train was going too fast. So they couldn't. So, what are they going to do…was just linger around town of Arcadia, because from the back side of the parking lot, you could see Arcadia right across the street.

And so, they went into a used car lot, and my brother's real handy. He knows how to pick those key locks. So they got inside; they stayed there for a while and they got bored and cold. So somebody in the group had a little money. So they said, "Let's go to the movie." So the ticket lady let them buy the ticket and go into the movie and she called the authority. Then they got picked up and then they put them in the Grand Stand in the ladies lounge that was all chicken wire, all around so they couldn't escape.

And then, I think… we didn't know where they were. They never came to tell us nothing, because I asked Tom Shiroishi. "Did your father know where you was?" And he said, "No, nobody knew

where we were and they never told us." And then, I think they were in there about one or two weeks, and Kay tells me that Masa dropped a note down from the ladies lounge down in the bottom, and say that I think we're going to get moved. They're going to move us, but he didn't know for sure.

And they moved him; they moved him down to Poston, but on the way Tom Shiroishi was telling me that they had a guard in the front and a guard in the back and they all had guns, and then, my girlfriend, Fumi's sister, Ineko saw them in Poston. Well, first, they said Poston wasn't ready yet; so they kept them in the guard…security guard outside the fence and then they used to eat their food. And so the guards were being charged for their food, but these prisoners---these four boys didn't have to pay for their food, so they said that wasn't right. Then Poston mess hall was already being made; so the guard used to march them, and they had chains on their ankles, and then there was a guard in the front and guard in the back. And they used to march them to Poston. And then Ineko, Fumi's sister, saw her while they were being marched, because that's unusual for Japanese being marched to a mess hall.

And everybody used to watch them, and my brother waved to Ineko. And then, the people around Ineko says, oh, do you know all those bad boys... they're prisoners. And so Ineko says, "Yeah I know them." And so, what do you call it... she said everybody made her feel like she was one of the prisoners, also, because nobody ever did anything against the government. You did…anything…so they were considered one of the bad boys, because they did jump the fence.

And then, what do you call it, after a while, they released them in Poston. And so he stayed in Poston, there until he got released and went to Utah. And one of the letters in the archives, it says that my brother…he's supposed to report to the WRA wherever you went, and my brother wasn't reporting. And, in fact, he used to go all over…he was working at Roosevelt Copper Mine, I think it was. But he would leave the copper mine and go wherever he wanted to go. And so, in the xerox copy it says that if Masa doesn't obey, we're going to burn him. And so, he better…in other words, report to the WRA wherever he's at. And he used to go all over. And then one picture we saw, I think one of them is Atsushi Sakamoto He was the one who got killed from Palos Verdes in the war, that is. He's in the picture together with Atsushi and he went to, not where the Fukuzamis were.

Fukisaki was in Gunnison, but the Nishizakas was just a few miles down in Utah during the war; and he went to look them up.

So, he just did whatever he did, and I guess he felt like, well, why should I report? I'm free, you know; **[Laughs]** so. But it says in the archives saying that if you don't report and tell me where you're at, we're going to burn him. So, they really…the government really had one over you that if you don't obey, we'll just do something to you.

Interviewer:
How were your parents…they were of an older generation, how were they taking this?

0H36M25S

Seki:
If Mr. Tanaka never wrote to us to tell us that Masa was down there, we wouldn't know where he's at, because the government never came to our house to tell us that we moved Masa over…or Tom Shiroishi, or the other two boys. Nobody told us nothing. And when I think about it, the guy that was managing the mess hall in Manzanar and the sugar wasn't being brought into Manzanar, what's he's charged for. It was stolen before it came to him, but he was charged for, I don't know how many pounds of sugar. We went to Moab to look for that place where he was in jail. And they made a restaurant out of that jail, now. And then they had another camp of Moab, but further down. They have a plaque; it was a CC camp where they kept the boys that... well, I guess they almost started a riot at one time, but it wasn't their fault, it was somebody else's fault. But the government made it so that we would fight among ourselves in the camp. You know, but, you know with ten and 20,000 people, nothing is going to run smoothly, you know. But I'm surprised that there wasn't more riots and stuff that they did, and things like the sugar wasn't coming in and charging somebody else for something…that's no fault of the Japanese, it's on the outside that does all those things.

Interviewer:
So, when were the people in Santa Anita notified that…I mean, you were wondering where you were going to go; right?

Seki:
We didn't know. All the other people was leaving before…we were the last ones to be moved to Arkansas. Everybody, the Los

Angeles group was leaving; they came in later than we did, and they were moved to Colorado, or here or there or something, you know---whatever camp. And we were the last ones; we went in April 5 and in October they moved us to Arkansas, and when we were on the train, they pulled the shades down; we couldn't see until, I think it was in Yuma, Arizona, or somewhere.

My friend from San Pedro gave me a card that I sent to his sister from that---the station stop, and we couldn't go run into the store at the station…we had monitors go and buy our postcards for us, and then we write something little, and then send it at that time. But, anyway, my friend gave me back my postcard and it says…I think it was Yuma or Blythe on there; the postmark on there. And I think the stamp was only, was it two cents or a cent and a half of something like that... it was, you know.

But, we couldn't run into the…we had to have our monitor go, I guess one out of each train go and.... And then another thing that I remember from the train was that when we hit Oklahoma City, they had our---they wanted our blinds down because we're going into the city, but when it was open space; we were able to pull up the shade. But I looked between the shade and the Red Cross lady had the little cart with coffee and donuts on it, and they all came out and they were going to greet us, and then when they saw what was inside the train, they pulled the cart and went back into the station. I saw that myself. But, because a lot of GIs, you know they were on the trains going to war and all that, and I guess they thought we were on that train, but then when she saw all the faces from the outside, she just pulled the cart and went back into the station.

0H40M47S

Interviewer:
Did they give you lunches---or food on the train?

Seki:
That I don't remember. I don't know if we went to the dining area…I can't remember if we went. I don't think they gave us lunches, so they must have gave us…we went to the dining coach. That I don't remember. I know that we had a Pullman; yeah we were able to sleep up because I think an officer, or some officer was on there. I think we were the only one that had that Pullman coach. Yeah the whole thing…I think they wanted to show the government that, oh, they're treating us good or …but I

don’t remember the other people telling me that they had coaches.

And then one of my girlfriends, she was real pretty and cute. Do you know Miwako Miwa? You know, she was real lively and _____. She was making hits with the soldiers, the guards and all that; so I think a lot of us got, what do you call it... pretty good treatment by the porters. Yeah, she was a cute little girl, and she was always making fun, and happy, and what do you call it, I think our coach was fairly decent as far as traveling. And then, I remember we went to Memphis and we were passing over the Mississippi River and that was a great thing; because all we did all our life was to read about the Mississippi in a book. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
It took how many days to get...?

Seki:
I think it took us five days to get there, because we had to sidetrack and let the troop train go by. Yeah... and so it took a long time; but it was nothing but barren, open land all the way. I think we went through Oklahoma or something, and the only reason why I know we went the Southern route is through that postcard, because I don’t remember how I got to Arkansas. But I do remember the Mississippi River and Memphis, because we studied those places on the map and to cross the Mississippi River is another big thing that I thought, you know.

Interviewer:
What other kinds of people were on the train? Were there other San Pedro PV farmers on the same train?

Seki:
No, they were all strange, you know, from Harbor City, Torrance, just all new strangers. I don’t remember... what do you call... being with my San Pedro people. I don’t even know if...see, I don’t even know if they went on the red car or what day they evacuated or something; because I was with the Tagami family and we went on our own. And everybody was hysterical, anyway. We had to take care of our own selves you know and not run over to see our neighbors or whatever; because I really don’t know when the other people evacuated…or where.

Interviewer:

So the Tagamis didn't go…they weren't on the train, either? The Tagami family…they weren't on the train with you?

Seki:
No, no; I don't think we were on the…I really don't know. They were in a different block. We were in Block 20, and they were in 17.

Interviewer:
I see….

0H44M50S

Seki:
Oh, another incident I remember. Well, this is in Jerome, but the Tagami, the cousin, Tagami ..she was a young girl that just got married to the cousin of the Tagami, and she had a baby, this is her second child, I think. And I think the baby was just a few weeks old when the evacuation came. And what do you call it... when she went to Santa Anita---I don't think she was feeling too well at that time. But in Jerome, they put her in an isolation ward, all by herself in this glass room. And they said she had tuberculosis. And so I was a dietician helper and I used to bring her food and everything. But, then, tuberculosis was a no-no in those days, and I used to hold my breath and we had a mask and everything. But I used to talk to her and all that. But she didn't have tuberculosis is what I was thinking. I think she had a nervous breakdown, because her baby was just born and we had to evacuate and we didn't know where we were going and what we're going to do or anything---she was just hysterical, like. And she finally died in Jerome; but it was a sad thing. They kept no visitors, no nothing, just all by herself in that room, and it was a sad thing to see her suffer like that. And even her own daughter, the little baby that was born, she's well in her 50s, I think, and she didn't know too much about her mother. And she says all her relatives told her that she died of tuberculosis. And I told Amy, I says you know Amy, to my own thinking, I don't think your mother died of tuberculosis. Everybody that was sick was--- they used to say they had tuberculosis and all that, I think your mother was sick from nervous thing, because evacuation is just a terrible thing. You don't know what's going to happen to you or what, and she was just lost at that time. And so I think the nervous breakdown is what got her. And the sad part of it is that nobody…she never had no visitors to talk to or anything. The only one that used to visit her was the doctor, her doctor. And

that's just a few minutes and they would have to leave, you know. So, it was sad.

But, the other tuberculosis patients and all that…they were very nice. And Mr. Sugiyama used to be in there and he was Issei Japanese school teacher and he spoke English; so it was very good. And he says, "Oh I know y our father very well," So, it was really…and I meet a lot of Hawaii girls that were nurse's aides in Jerome and we talk about the time at the hospital. And then, Mr. McFerrin was our supervisor and he was from Pasadena, a Caucasian director at our hospital there, and I was a messenger.

My first job after high school graduation was a messenger, and we would sit... and what do you call, until there was something to be brought to the ward; and so I was a messenger. I'd pick up the message and bring it to different wards and everything. So, one day I was sitting there---I was getting tired of just sitting, waiting---so, I said, Dr. McFerrin, I says, you know, I never went out of this camp and do you think you could take me out to Little Rock one of these days with you? Because I knew he was going to Little Rock once a month. And so I went with him…and so he says, "Well, wait a few weeks and I'll see what I can do for you, maybe I could get you out, on a pass and everything." So, he did finally get a pass and so him and his nurse secretary and I…the three of us went to Little Rock.

And I did a little shopping and everything, and then I came back to the hotel, and everybody kept looking at me…and the maids and everything. And so, one of the maids got enough nerve to ask me, she says, "Where are you from?". And then I says, oh, I'm from California; and she says, where, Hollywood? I says, yeah Hollywood; I'm from Hollywood. You think I'm going to tell them I'm from a camp down there---a prison camp? I'm not going to tell them; I'm out of camp now; I'm going to live it up. So, she says, "Oh, you're from Hollywood, are you a movie star?" "Oh, yes, I'm a movie star." **[Laughs]** I'll never live it down because I had to lie out of that, because I didn't want nobody else to treat me like they did when I left San Pedro, you know. So I thought well, I'm going to be somebody. So, that one day, I was a movie star **[Laughs]** and I'll never live this down.

And then, the next day they took me to the Red Cross office and being introduced to the secretary and the head of the Red Cross in Little Rock, and then I never seen a magnolia tree in my life, and there were in full bloom just all over. It was so

pretty and I was just so amazed, and then I just felt so free, and so what do you call it... I told them how beautiful they are, and then they said, Oh, you think that's pretty, well, I got to show this … and I got to show that, and they just gave me a tour all over Little Rock, and I've just never forgotten that. But I'm sorry I had to lie, but I just couldn't face another day of being down in, you know camp, saying that I'm in the prison camp down in Jerome. I just thought well, I'll just live it up and make myself.... **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
Let's go back to camp, although it's **[Laughs]** hard to do that. What would be a typical day? You mentioned you had a job as a dietician helper.

0H51M21S

Seki:
See, I got tired of being a messenger. You just wait until a message…and then, it's just a ward among ourselves. There's not that much work, you don't run around. And then, when I got tired of doing that, I used to go to the supply room or just wander around looking for different things that I never saw.

Interviewer:
What did they pay you?

Seki:
What?

Interviewer:
Did they pay you?

Seki:
I think it was $16 a month. Yeah, I think that's what the pay was. I think in Santa Anita it was $8. And they…at first they gave you $2 allotment and you could buy Sears and Roebuck clothes or whatever. And then it was $8 because I think we were watching that shower. And then when we got to Jerome, I think it was $16... I'm not sure. And then, a doctor got $19. I don't think we got $8 in Jerome. I forgot.

Interviewer:
Was the climate in Arkansas quite different? I'm imagining it must have been.

Seki:
Yeah, I do remember; it was nothing but swampland when we went in.

Interviewer:
Did the people have the right kind of clothes?

Seki:
No. We had California clothes on…because I took a picture and I have the Mexican huarachies on. And then I had Sears & Roebuck raincoat on. But, I think, when we got used to that climate I didn't notice the clothes. And they gave us the Government Issue---that Mackinaw, the black/navy blue pea coat? I think we wore that for when it was cold. But, other than that it was through Sears & Roebuck clothes that we bought for $16…you know, we used that money.

Interviewer:
So, how old were you at that time when you were in Jerome?

0H53M29S

Seki:
When I first…see, my birthday is November. December 7th was a month after, so I just turned 17, and in those days, we weren't mature like they are today. We were still babies, you know compared to today. So, whatever our parents told us, we said yes and we did. But you think that today's kids would do that? They wouldn't listen to the parents like we did. We didn't have to do it, but we had couple of Japanese girls that were real hefty young girls; they were not teenagers, they were already in their early 20s. But they picked up the pick and shovel and started making ditches. You see, it was such a swampland that we had to raise the walkway and made the drainage on the side. And so, they started and then they said, "Well you ladies finish this." So us-ladies had to make all the levy, the walkway; and then from the barracks to the walkway, they built little bridges, like each one of them.

But actually, we didn't have to do it until these two girls said well we could do it or something. And that's just like that woodcutting. We didn't have to saw the wood until some lady starts saying, "Well, we could do it, let us do it." And before long, the women started cutting the wood for our fire…we had that little pot-belly stove.

Interviewer:
Is that what you had for heating is a pot-bellied stove?

Seki:
Some people had coal and stuff, but our camp we had the forest in the back so, what do you call it... they made us cut the wood and what do you call it... use it for the pot belly. But the women didn't have to open their mouth, the men could have done it, but the men went to the forest and they got poison ivy and all that kind of stuff to get the wood for us; so I guess we did our share. But that was the beginning when we first went into Camp Jerome, and so....

Interviewer:
Was there furniture in the room?

Seki:
No, just the bed cot; but then, they made their own furniture. They had a lot of scrap wood laying around and everything. So the men folks made furniture…real nice furniture. And I think we had the four beds lined up and then we had a blanket for a partition, and then the other side of the blanket, I think…I don't know what we used for a table…we had a table. And a lot of folding chairs, I think that was bought by Sears & Roebuck or something.

Interviewer:
So your mother, your father...

Seki:
My sister and I.

Interviewer:
…your sister and you?

Seki:
And Masa was in Poston. So we had the middle barrack. And the Shimatsu family had the end barrack, and across the next barrack in the big unit was the Tanouye the Ted Tanouye family.

Interviewer:
Was there a barrack number? Do you remember the barrack number?

Seki:
No, I don't remember that. I could in my records---in the strongbox where my mother had kept all her stuff. See, the

Issei people couldn't read English; so my mother didn't throw away anything. She kept most of that stuff, and so that's how come I inherited most of the stuff.

Interviewer:
How were your parents feeling about this---another relocation into Jerome?

Seki:
They were very saddened about this, but then, like they always said "Shigataganai", and then the other Isseis had the same problem. So it was a struggle when we came back. Well, I came back from Chicago first, and then landed into Truman Boyd; but it was a struggle to find a job and to go work, and as soon as somebody found a job, right away they'd go into the same type of job and that was gardening. Everybody went into gardening.

Interviewer:
But in the camp time, what did your parents do to pass their time?

0H58M21S

Seki:
I think my mother worked on the farm. I think by the time…

Interviewer:
There was a farm there?

Seki:
Yeah, I think she grew vegetables and stuff for the farm. I think she used to go up…and my father was…he worked in the kitchen, and my sister also was a waitress. It's funny that when we went to Denver, I met one of the same waitresses that was working with my sister; but she don't remember me because we were younger, we went on our own way. But then, the waitress people, they stayed together. And so, what do you call it, it's just a small world, you never know where you're going to meet somebody. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
So when you got to Jerome, then did you start classes? You were in high school?

Seki:

Yeah, I went six months and they said I had enough credits from San Pedro High so I could graduate. Boy, I was never so happy in my life. I couldn't study in that classroom. It was just a plain barrack, and you could hear the next teacher talking. You can't study in there. I don't know how Jo [friend] ever managed it, but I couldn't study.

Interviewer:
Did you have textbooks and Caucasian teachers?

Seki:
Yeah, we did. But, I don't know if it was our grade level or what, but then they had books and stuff. I think it came from, was it, what do you call it... Little Rock or something, but we had books and stuff. And we could take Spanish, if we wanted to. But it was our own people that was teaching us. So, what do you call ... I couldn't learn, because I didn't have my heart in going to school. I just wanted to get out. So I never was so glad when they said I had enough credits and I could graduate. And then, my first job was at the hospital, and so I started from the bottom up. And after I got to know the ropes, and what do you call it... I really didn't work. **[Laughs]** I just played around.

Interviewer:
You have a picture of your graduation; there were quite a few graduates in your class.

Seki:
I forgot how many people graduated with us, but it was big and the first graduation and they all let us have caps and gowns, and it was really a nice graduation is what I thought. And then, we had another graduation here in San Pedro High School. Those that didn't graduate from San Pedro High School, they had it--- but it didn't mean nothing. The one in San Pedro, it didn't mean anything. They gave us a diploma and everything; it didn't mean anything.

It's…it's…you want to graduate with everything with caps and gowns and be with your people and all that, but then this time, they just had it in the cafeteria, and handed our certificate of diploma and all that, it didn't mean nothing. I think the camp graduation meant more to me than the high school in San Pedro.

1H01M37S

Interviewer:
Were you able to send letters to your brother in Poston, or receive letters?

Seki:
Yes, my brother wrote to me and…but at first we didn't know where he was, and Mr. Tanaka is the one who said that he saw him down there. Then we knew where he was; but I asked Tom Shiroishi, if his father knew where he was and he said, no they didn't know where he was. And he never wrote to them and so... but my brother did. And…not regularly, just once in maybe six months and saying that I me so-and-so or something, and then while he was in Utah, he got drafted, and he went into the service in Utah. Douglas, Utah, I think it was. And then he went as far as Germany and the war ended, and then he signed up for MIS and he wanted to go to Japan to see his relatives, but he never got there because the war ended in the Pacific.

Interviewer:
Was he in the 100th or 442nd?

Seki:
No, he went to Camp Blanding; so that was the last batch, I think. And I think the war was just about ending when he went overseas to Germany, because the other boys went to Italy or France, and he went to Germany, so I think the war was just beginning to end at that time. And then, he never got to go to Japan. But, my brother was a ham radio operator, and he learned that before the war all by himself. I mean, he's a self-taught, what do you call it... and he used to talk to King Hussein. Not the kind today, this is that one that's married to that Caucasian lady; he died already; but he was a ham operator also, and he used to talk to him. And my brother had the morning control; early in the morning he had the control. He used to talk to everybody all through the country, because he had the early morning control.

And then, when he died, I think they had three-minute silent all the radio waves were quiet. So, but he was self-taught. He, I guess, had to go through that Morse code and all that stuff, and then he worked himself up, but the ham radio operators, they had a reunion once a year from one state to the another, and I was invited to a couple of them, and they were very nice people.

1H04M20S

Interviewer:
So, now you're a dietician helper, and then how many years were you at Jerome…or when did you leave?

Seki:
But I must have been about six months as a dietician helper. And before that a few months as a messenger, and then I tried to go out to Chicago, but the report back from Chicago in those early days wasn't very good. The girls were going wild. And so my father says, "No you're not going."

Interviewer:
What do you mean by "going wild?"

Seki:
Well, with some girls, you know I guess, just happy-go-lucky and having a good time, you know. They go as domestic. You had to have a sponsor when you first go out; so I guess the report back was, oh, we're having a lot of fun, or come on out, or something and so some of the parents took it wrong, you know, they just thought they were going out with a bunch of boys, or having a good time with the boys or something like that. But my father thought that I might turn out to be one of those that would run around or something, so he says, no, don't go to Chicago---you can't go to Chicago.

And so, I think I was supposed to go out in March, because my girlfriend, one of the girls that lived in our barracks, I think the two sisters were already out, and they what do you call it, called me, I mean, wrote to me and says, "Come on out, gee, I can get you a job real easy" and all that. So that's why I wanted to go, but my father says, no, don't go. So, I think I went out around June or July or something, and I was going to work at Edgewater Beach Hotel as a salad girl, but that fell through. Then I was going to go as a domestic helper. I tried all kinds of stuff trying to make my parents think I'm going to be a good girl, and go out.

So, I went out as a domestic helper, and one day I worked for that doctor's family, and I says, I'm not taking this anymore.

Interviewer:
Why, what happened? **[Laughs]**

Seki:
She wanted me to clean the whole house all in one day. She had newspapers stacked up on her porch, and she wanted me to take that all down, and then she wanted me to sleep in the dining room, so that day, I left. That one day I said... and then I went to the husband's doctor's office because his office was right across the street from where the two girls that lived in our barrack in Jerome lived. And I says, I'm not working for your wife, anymore. I says, I've had enough, and I'm not working. And so, he says, "Well, that's all right." So he paid me, I don't know how much it was, but he paid me for the day, and then I lived with the two girls for a while until my other girlfriends from camp came in, and we got an apartment together.

Interviewer:
Was this a boarding house or a hostel?

Seki:
No; it was an apartment.

Interviewer:
No; before that as you were waiting when you went to stay…?

Seki:
No; it was an apartment where four or five girls all lived together, and it wasn't downtown, it was on the North Side of Chicago. And so, what do you call it... I stayed there until my other girlfriends came out from Jerome, and then I joined them. And then we were at the hostel. Yeah, the Quakers had a hostel first. So we stayed at the hostel for about a week until we found an apartment that the Japanese people…I forgot what his name…they were from San Diego. They bought an apartment on 28th and Clark Street or something. So we rented from them, and I think there were about five or six girls living there.

Interviewer:
A Japanese-American who came out of camp bought the apartment building.

1H08M49S

Seki:
They're formerly from San Diego. And I think the son's name was Kenji, but I can't remember their last name. But we stayed there for a long time until the war ended. And then when the war ended, I lost my job. In fact, I had two jobs. One was

condensers, lining the condensers with solder…you put it on the hot stove, these little cans, before they filled it up with tin foil, but I had to line it with solder. And I was getting all the smoke, and I says, I'm not doing this no more, and so they says, either you do it, or you lose your job. And I says, "Qell, I'm not staying here; I'll lose my job." So I quit.

So, I go to the employment office, and then they sent me to another place winding coils. And so I was winding coils until the war ended, and what do you call it, I think it was 65 cents and hour, and that was good money in those days, you know; so, I was real happy. And then the war ended, and then they never told us that in January we could come back to California. It was August 25th, I think, when the war ended and they told us that we could go back to California. And that was the time that I says, "Well, I don't have a job, so let's go back to California." I told all my girlfriends, I think it was about four of us all came back together. So, still Los Angeles was a big city. I didn't know anything about Los Angeles, so... **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
And your parents were still at **[Jerome]**?

Seki:
In camp---they were in camp.

So, after I got into Truman Boyd, I wrote to them and told them I got an apartment. So my sister came out first, and then my mother. Then my dad stayed until the very end; I think it was October of 1945, he came out…the last person that came out---him and a couple of bachelors and a few others. They didn't want to come out of camp, because they were too old. They couldn't work again, or anything. But the camp closed, so they had to come back.

Interviewer:
So what did your sister do? You said your sister went out first and then your mother came.

Seki:
Yeah; after a while…after being here, the only job that was left open at that time was domestic help. So she went to work for Lee J. Cobb's at Beverly Hills. He wasn't as popular as he was later in years you know. At the very beginning everyone was doing domestic jobs, the girls that came out. And, what do you call it, she stayed with him until she got married. I think she

got married early part of 1946 or 47. And then they went to work in Fontana. And then their job over there was taking care of an orchard and this house. And that house belonged to Mrs. Doheny's bookkeeper. Mrs. Doheny lived right here on 23rd and Figaro or somewhere in that mansion area where it's all gated in. I think the Catholic Church…she willed her house to the church. But in there, her boss lived there, and he must have taken care of her books or something…something to do with bookkeeping. But that house, before that belonged to Al Capone. And that story told that he used to bring people on that Santa Fe trains and they used to stop right there where that house was, because the train…the big orchard, I think, was seven acres of grapefruit and oranges. And in there on the side was a Santa Fe train used to run there. And the story says that he stopped the train and he had a tunnel from the train underneath to his mansion is what the story was.

And then, I guess in the olden days he used to have something up there at Lake Arrowhead Hotel or what not for those gamblers to come up there and all that. But that was way before the time, but then, I remember when my sister was there that she never explored whatever…but I heard he had a basement. This is afterwards that it came out in the paper about that house and they said they had a basement that was all supposed to be stored with liquor and all that kind of stuff; but I don't think my sister ever went down there to really check.

1H13M54S

Interviewer:
Did they have trouble finding housing when they came back from the camp?

Seki:
Yes; in 1953, I think it was…early part of 1953 since I had a few dollars to make a down payment; we went looking for a house on the west side of Long Beach. And when the sign says for sale, we thought, well, we'll enquire and see how much this house is and everything. The owner of the house; he looked at us and shook his head, and says, "I'm sorry; we can't sell you this house. And he says, even if I wanted to sell it to you in the deed, it says we can't sell to any Orientals, and that was to the Negros and the Mexicans and the Japanese or Orientals.

Interviewer:

Was that all over San Pedro---Long Beach, or in certain sections?

Seki:
No, it was…the west side is where we looked, because we wanted to stay with the Japanese community, and the little community of Santa Fe, they had a store, drugstore, and a restaurant. There was a little Chop Stick Inn, an oriental market, and all. And so, we just wanted to be close by. And then, my mother's church... and so we were looking on the west side, and we couldn't buy a home. They wouldn't sell it to us. And so, it just happened that the contractor…the house that we bought was bought from a contractor and he wanted his money so he could keep building it up. So we bought through the contractor. So, it isn't a fancy big house, or anything. It's just a little comfortable house for us two; so. And then, we bought the back lot from the neighbor in the back for $500 and we built a house for my mother in the back; so. And then we have a farm in the back and we get all our vegetables back there for "tsukemono" [pickled vegetables] and everything.

Interviewer:
And then did you meet your husband? You kind of skipped over marriage? **[Laughs]**

Seki:
Oh, yeah.

Interviewer:
Well, maybe we should stop here.

[End Sumi Seki File 3]

[Begin Sumi Seki File 4]

Interviewer:
It is 2:45 in the afternoon on March 29, 2004. This is a continuation and the fourth CD of the interview of Sumiko Seki on the same date being conducted by Dale Sato for the South Bay Oral History Project. The audio and catalog persons remain the same.

authorization from the South Bay Chapter of the Japanese-American Citizens League. Let's continue the interview.

I want to take one step back again and then we'll go on with coming---leaving the camps. And there was also a big issue that when the WRA passed out questionnaires to all the families, and I wondered if your family had any discussion of that or how you felt about that questionnaire.

0H01M18S

Seki:
Yeah; the family all got it---whoever was in camp. And I remember, I just wanted to retaliate, and I wrote down just anything just to see what they would do to me. And then, when I almost had to hand it in, I changed my mind and---better behave like I'm supposed to; so I wrote... and I didn't even understand what they were telling me, anyway. And I had nothing to do with the Emperor because I never even met him or seen him. I didn't even know who he was.

Interviewer:
Was that the question that bothered you the most?

Seki:
One of them yeah; one of them, it says something about Emperor of Japan of something. I was thinking, well, what does that have to do with me? And the questionnaire, number 27 and 28, I don't know. So I just … I don't even know what I wrote, but I remember at that time that I just wanted…I was real…In fact, I think everybody was talking about it. Maybe the boys were talking about it or something, but then, I just figured that I'll just do just the opposite what they're trying to ask me or something. But, anyway, whatever my answer was, they never did anything to me, anyway. Otherwise, they would have deported me. **[Laughs]** I wouldn't even know the first thing about Japan.

Interviewer:
Did your mother and father feel anything about that?

Seki:
I don't know what they did. I just did my own paper; so I don't know who filled…maybe my sister filled it out for my parents. But I really don't know. But I do remember at that time that I was so aggravated and stuff, and being in camp that I just wanted to do everything the opposite of what they're telling me

to do. And that's a typical teenager, I guess---retaliating things for what they had done to me.

Interviewer:
Okay; I wondered when is it that you met your husband.

Seki:
Oh, in Truman Boyd, we had a girls' club and we were inviting all different types of clubs, but we ran out of clubs, and we didn't know the Hawaiian boys at that time. And we knew that they all hanged out at 1st Street there, but somebody mentioned somebody…I think somebody was going with one of the Hawaiian boys or something; so we thought, well, why don't we invite this group that used to meet over there, because so-and-so is going around with somebody, and she says that they're real nice boys over there. So we invited this boys' club, and I think there was three of us that married the Hawaii group.

But, at first, we weren't used to the Hawaii boys; so we didn't really associate with them at first---until we got to know them, and we learned their language, too. We didn't understand what they were saying at first, but then, once we got used to it, what do you call it... it was all right. And we're going on, I think … 52 years, yeah; we've been married 52 years, I think it is. So I guess it's all right. **[Laughs]** I think it's too late to start over again. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
Were these Hawaii boys sent to Europe…were they soldiers?

0H05M11S

Seki:
Yeah; they're all veterans, yeah. And, Kaz anyway, she passed away…Dohara … she married a 100th Infantry boy from Hilo; yeah. And that was a sad case. He lost... I don't know if it was both legs or what; but then every time the doorbell would ring, he would have to get his crutches and all that. It was very hard for him. And so, finally, he committed suicide. I think he was very disturbed for the inconvenience and all that. We didn't go to the VA or something like the boys do today, or we have classes where the boys could talk and all that. [counseling]. It was back in the '50s that was... so it was hard for him. And then no sooner than---two years or something---his son committed suicide. And he jumped off of the Heartwell building in Long Beach; he jumped off. So I think he was very lonesome after his

father died, or something. I think it was a very sad thing at that time.

But, at first, the closeness of the Hawaii people wasn't as close as it is today, you know. They were Hawaii people and we were the mainland [continental U.S.] people, or something, you know, we just kept to ourselves until the ice was broken and then it was different.

0H06M45S

Interviewer:
Were your husband's parents and family also incarcerated in the camps?

Seki:
No. My husband's family is from Hawaii. And his mother and father left on the last ship to go back to Japan. And after….

Interviewer:
Was this after the war?

Seki:
This is before the war, in 1942, no---1941. The last ship…and that ship was supposed to come to Los Angeles. And they said the ship was painted all black and everything, ready for war, but the ship never came to Los Angeles, and my sister was going to go back to Japan on that last ship, and she bought a trunk and everything. We still have the trunk in the back house. But she was ready to go back to Japan because we knew the war was coming. That rumor was going around already.

But, anyway, after Don [her husband] got shot and lost his arm in Biffontaine, between Biffontaine and Bruyeres and at the "Lost Battalion" rescue, and he was in the hospital at Utah for two or three years, and at that time there was a fellow from Brazil; his name was Sadahiro Hino. And he always used to talk about it and then in 1978 when the…what's that Nishihonganji they had that World's Buddhist Conference, I think, and it was in Sao Paulo, Brazil. So we tagged along with them, and we went looking for Sadahiro Hino. And we couldn't communicate with the veterans' group down there, because they didn't speak English, and our tour guide told us to go there. And so we went, and they couldn't understand what I was trying to do, and he said, "Madam, may I help you---Can I help you?" And that's all he knew how to say, so finally, I says, gee, this is a lost cause.

So I wrote down in the piece of paper that we're here to look for World War II, the Brazilian Army was in Europe fighting, I think, alongside the Japanese-American soldiers or something, and then he says, ah, wait a minute, so he ran upstairs and got Sadahiro Hino's...one of his good friends from Sao Paulo. He was from Sao Paulo---not in Rio. But after the war he had two sons that was a dentist there and which we didn't even know. But anyway, he said that in Sao Paulo is where his family lives. And so he's not here... so that was our next stop.

And so we went, and then Don's cousin spoke in Japanese to his family, and it happened to be the mother's 49th day and they were having a [memorial] service, so we couldn't even talk to the mother about Sadahiro Hino. So, it was really something; but they were both in the hospital together. And then, what do you call it... Don says that he used to push him in the wheelchair. I think both of his legs were shot off…and take him to Salt Lake and all that. But they had to converse in Japanese because he didn't know how to speak the Brazilian language, and so the Japanese language came in handy.

But we missed him. He died five years, you know, prior to when we were there. If we had known, we'd have gone sooner to look for him. But Don kept talking about him, and I says, well, let's go look for him.

Interviewer:
Now, when everyone's coming back to California, you were in Chicago?

Seki:
Yes.

0H10M48S

Interviewer:
And then you sister, then your mom came back, and then you came back; was there any talk about going back to farming?

Seki:
No, no; because they lost everything... they didn't have nothing. And my father was too old to drive, and so everything was on the bus, and no. I think they remembered farming was a hard life. So he worked at the fish cannery. The fish cannery was being opened. At first it wasn't open. The Japanese

people, I think…I forgot how many months, but then, what do you call it... all the wives were home, and then when one person got a job at the cannery, then they all got a job at the cannery. I think fishing was the thing in San Pedro at that time, but I think they all moved out, now they're in San Diego.

Interviewer:
Did you feel some negative…I mean you talked about trying to get a house and how there were housing or restrictive ordinances or covenants. Did you feel some negative feeling from the neighbors?

Seki:
Yeah; only to ourselves…we never try to buck them or anything, because that wasn't our culture, and we knew we couldn't have that house…the law says we can't buy it; so we just turned our backs and what do you call it…. But today, the [third generation Japanese American] kids wouldn't let them do that, you know. But then, in those days…just like going to the park, down at Royal Palms and White's Point, if we knew we weren't supposed to be there, we don't go and try to buck them. We just….

Interviewer:
Were there other places where you couldn't enter?

Seki:
They tell me the swimming pool at Redondo Beach, they weren't accepting Japanese.

Interviewer:
But in Long Beach, I'm talking about.

Seki:
No; Long Beach was a tourist town and I guess, what do you call it... I don't know too much about being prejudiced, but then, they had their own sections and everything that we weren't allowed to even buy a house in Bixby Knolls Or, well, Lakewood wasn't even built then; it was still swamp land…salt land, I think you'd call it. But….

Interviewer:
You mentioned Truman Boyd; tell us about Truman Boyd.

Seki:
We were there fifteen years.

Interviewer:
This is after you got married?

0H13M36S

Seki:
Yeah; we got an apartment after I got married, but then we were there fifteen years, because I think when you don't have any money, you build up little-by-little; it takes time. And I don't think we bought on payments at that time---or did we? Yeah; I think we borrowed some money from the Security National Bank, I think for down payment, and then we paid it off as soon as possible, because I think that payment was a lot of hassle every month or something. I think we paid it…but the house was what do you call it... we could have bought it for $10,000, but I heard that Doharas went to look at that house at first.

But that was really country out there where we lived. And so they all wanted to get closer to the Japanese community area; so what do you call it... and another thing, there used to be a trailer camp down there below Willow, [Street] and I think…Webster, I think. But they had a big auditorium and then lots of open space, because they took away the trailers, but that was a community center. But they put a what do you call it, eminent domain and took that land away from us. For a long time it was vacant, and then, I think it was Fred Ikeguchi told the Board of Education, give that land back to us; it's not being used. Then they went and put a small, little grammar school there, Hudson Grammar School there.

And then the other part of that land was still vacant and then, now the Board of Education built a storage yard there. So now it's all filled in, but then that all used to belong to the Japanese community.

Interviewer:
It was owned by the Japanese community?

Seki:
Yeah, they bought it from the government when the trailer park what do you call it, disbanded. And it had a big auditorium and then I think it had a lot of extra rooms for business and all that. It was a nice little place. But they lost it. And then after that they went to the…I call it the warehouse where they have the area now.

0H16M10S

Interviewer:
What kinds of activities were held in that culture center? You talked about the building that they lost…what activities did they have?

Seki:
Oh, they were just beginning…you now like, kendo and judo and all that. And then, I think Mr. Aoto they had a funeral and different things. That was even before the Japanese Buddhist Church was built. And I think we had a lot of Japanese because they had Truman Boyd, the three Cabrillo homes; and then they had trailer park over there where the Pacific Coast Highway and 9th Street or something. And then I think…was the harbor area real close to us at that time? I don't know, we kind of…we had our own community here. Long Beach had their own. It's just like today, the San Fernando Valley people or the San Gabriel people; they had their own community center. So I was just wondering, maybe San Pedro was included in the Harbor District at that time. I can't remember.

And then I still have a plaque from the Pioneer Center, because the Issei, the young Sansei people used to give the Isseis tours, and we used to go all over, and I used to go with my mother. So they asked me would I be --- what do you call it... on the Board of Directors or something at the Pioneer, but and that…I have a plaque from them and it says 1976. So we used to go wildflower seeing, Descanso Gardens, poppy-viewing. We used to go all over and it was nice. And they used to ask me to be the tour guide and I used to guide them with Japanese, and my Japanese was terrible **[Laughs]** but the Isseis understood me.

Interviewer:
Now I understand that you were somewhat involved with the reparations, the redress movement.

Seki:
Oh, yeah; I have a picture. And that's the highlight of my life is that I was glad that I was able to help out there. I think…

Interviewer:
I think a lot of people don't understand or don't remember because they weren't concerned about that; so maybe you could….

Seki:

Well, we had a time. It's just like anything else.

Interviewer:
What were the reparations? What did it mean?

Seki:
At first, nobody believed that it could be done. They thought, oh, you kids are all climbing up the wrong tree. You guys, are never going to get that reparation. But all the young college kids from Long Beach State, they what do you call it... they gung-ho, and they used have meetings at people's houses at first. And then, I remember they went to the Gardena JCI, [Japanese Cultural Institute] downstairs we had a meeting. And what do you call it... still people didn't think that it would be a reality. And what do you call it...?

Interviewer:
What were you asking? Were you asking the government to give you some kind of compensation?

Seki:
No, they were asking people at the very beginning to tell your story. Go around and tell your story, and then afterwards the young people start writing letters. But at first they wanted to tell the next generation what has happened and all that. And then when they heard about it, then they got real involved in it. But then, when we first got exposed from these little meetings and stuff; from Little Tokyo [Los Angeles], they had plaques [placards] and we were marching up and down Little Tokyo. But not too many Niseis are out there, and then I used to hide behind the plaque, because I was one of the…I call it the older ones that used to do that **[Laughs]** because they didn't have the Niseis come out, you know.

And then later on, then... what do you call it, Bernadette and Mrs. Okazaki and other people started coming out. But at first it was hard, because nobody ever believed that it would become a reality. And then I used to ask my husband, "Get the vets out there; they need the vets to get this thing going." The vets says, "No, you guys are never going to get that redress." Oh, you guys are bucking up the wrong tree and they didn't believe it. So it…but the day that Reagan signed that paper, I read it in the Press Telegram at 5:30 in the morning that it was passed and nobody believed it.

So I called Mia. I called her up; she wouldn't answer the phone; she was sleeping. It was, you know early in the morning. I just wanted to tell her that they signed that paper, and nobody believed it. And then finally, she got up, I think it was about 8 o'clock I got her. And she didn't believe it. She called Washington. And then, sure enough, it was fact. She said, "Sumi, Sumi, get the vets, we got to have a press conference. Get the vets." **[Laughs]** And so, they were there.

But nobody believed it. And nobody knows the story. They never believed that they would ever be signed or anything. But it was through the young generation that we had to send papers in, they went to Washington; they went all out just for us, you know. And today, I don't think too many Niseis know that it was the college education kids that really worked hard for us, even if it's impossible; they went ahead and did it.

And then Bert Nakano and I told Lillian, I says, "Oh, gee, I think we're bucking up the wrong tree. I don't think we'll ever get it. Don't give up hope, Sumi, just keep going, keep going. So, what do you call it... it was through them that we won. But it was really… and then they were using their time and their money on a lot of that thing that they were doing.

0H23M06S

Interviewer:
You're talking about the Sanseis?

Seki:
Yeah, the Sanseis.

Interviewer:
The students.

Seki:
And Alan Nishio he's still at the what do you call it, Long Beach State, but he was one of the thing…and then I think our first meeting---a big meeting---was at Cal State Long…no, LA, Cal State and Gordon Hirabayashi he came. I think he was from Seattle and then from there he went to Canada to teach or something. We had a special guest that came from far away, and then what do you call it, then after he got through speaking, then all the more, you know, you want to keep pushing, pushing. And I think he said don't give up hope or something. And then Bert Nakano also kept saying, don't give up hope. He would tell

his story, and it's a sad story, and then so-and-so would tell his story, and what do you call it, and then the more you hear all the stories, they'd say hey, that isn't right.

And then, we knew that we were Japanese-Americans; but it was at that time to me it was just name only. But today, it means a lot; you know but in those days, we're still Japanese. Now you're Japanese-American. But it just goes in this year and out the other; didn't mean too much until this redress. And I think that was the---footsteps of us more or less fighting for our rights, now.

So now it's getting better and better and easier. But this was, I think in my life, that this was passed and to let everybody know that it was wrong, what they had done to us. And all my friends from school should know that I didn't have anything to do with the war. And then now, it's in the Internet. And I was telling one of my classmates from the computer school to get on to the Internet and listen to it. And she wrote back and she says, I don't understand what pidgin English and some of the Hawaiian words she wrote down that she saw that and she said... and so I had to explain to her what they meant. And I says, I felt the same way when I first met the Hawaiians because I couldn't understand them. And they talked funny. **[Laughs]**

0H25M46S

Interviewer:
She has an article here, and it's a newspaper article on August 11, 1988, and it's titled "Celebrating Redress Victory." Members of the Southern California Japanese-American community gathered at a news conference Wednesday to celebrate President Reagan signing into law legislation to compensate Nikkei who were interned in concentration camps during war. Happy celebrants include, left to right, Tom Shiroishi, Mia Iwataki, Tim Nambara and Sumi Seki. Yes; there's another one?

And another one--- an article…were the local chapters of JACL also involved? Were you doing your…were you involved in any of the local JACL chapters at that time in Long Beach?

Seki:
No, it wasn't Long Beach; it was from all over.

Interviewer:

I see okay; then another milestone in history was 1952, when the Issei could be naturalized. I don't know when your parents died, or passed away.

Seki:
Oh, the mail. **[Laughs]**

Interviewer:
Did your parents ever apply for citizenship?

Seki:
No; my mother tried to learn English in camp.

Interviewer:
Was she thinking that she wanted to try?

Seki:
No, that was just a thing that they had in camp, so she went... but she says she couldn't learn, because the "Rs" and the "Ts" and all that was hard for them to learn. And then, of course, she uses that excuse of age, at this age, I can't learn. But on the farm they learned Spanish easier than they did English. And, it's funny that Mrs. Bennette used to come every day and they understood each other; you know.

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Seki:
And she spoke English only, and my mother spoke Japanese, but still. And then, like Benny and all the other people, they understood my mother and my mother understood them; so. I guess there's a way to communicate, if you have to.

Interviewer:
Okay; we're nearing the end of our interview, and I wondered, you know if there's anything else that you'd like to say, you know, looking back on all the milestones of your life. Or if there any lessons to be learned; although I think you've been very good at expressing your thoughts about that. Is there anything that we've left out that you would like to add?

Seki:
No; like when we first moved into the [naval housing] project---the Truman Boyd---the outside community didn't know us, but the people that lived in Long Beach, the old timers, they knew the

Japanese and they still had some of the hatred in them. But the ones that lived in the project came from all over the country, and they didn't know the discrimination on the Japanese. So they were very nice to us, and we felt real comfortable living there, because they were so nice to us. But then, if we bought a home right after we came back from camp and then lived in one of those homes, I think we would have been discriminated, because we did supposedly---was discriminated from the society at that time during the war.

But then, another thing that I remembered when the product[s] from Japan was being shipped to the United States, our trade was getting better, and I remember that May Company when I was at the glove department… people used to wear gloves and hats when we first came back. And this one lady, Caucasian lady was looking at this nice, white glove and it was made real well and everything and she says, "I wouldn't buy one of those gloves; it's made by the enemy," and I wouldn't support them or something. But I was afraid to speak up and tell her that I was Japanese and there's nothing wrong with this whatever---but, just different things.

And it happened even at Douglas when I first was making those airplanes. They kept telling me about so-and-so, her husband got wounded in Guadalcanal or something, and I didn't have anything to do with it. But she made us so miserable that what do you call it, I just wanted to fight with her. And even our lead man didn't want to get involved in it, because he didn't want to take sides. But I just try to tell her that I didn't have anything to do with the war and so quit bringing up the past all the time, because I didn't have anything to do with it. But I think the lead man tried to keep us apart. He says I don't want to get involved in this; "I don't know what this thing is about, you know."

But, if I didn't speak up, I think I still be in a shell. But that's why I kind of speak out of my tongue a lot, and then I kind of regret it later on. But then I just want to tell them that, you're wrong. But I still laugh about me telling Don Young **[Laughs]**... But then, I even brought Harry Akune and Jim Mita the MIS because he didn't know that the Japanese was in the Pacific, interpreting. In fact, I think I went to the Press Telegram, one time, because, what's his name? Hennessey. He kept talking about Guadalcanal and all the Pacific and he was, more or less raving about the thing. So one day I went to the Press Telegram and I says, "Do you know that the Japanese-

American s fought in the Pacific just as much as they did?" And what do you call it... they were real surprised. They didn't know that the Japanese were interpreters there.

And so, now the reporter and I are good friends. And so, I think that's how come that they put it in…it's more or less like a historical book that they got my picture in there when I was in camp I think it was. But that was way back in the 60s, I think, when I just thought, well hey, I better let them know that the Japanese fought in the Pacific just as much as the Americans did or something and they were real surprised.

0H33M20S

Interviewer:
Well, we really thank you for all your outpouring of your life events, and we're always so happy that people can recognize the value of it. So we thank you so much for your oral history today, and we hope to make sure that future generations hear your story.

Seki:
Anything else... if we don't tell the story, they wouldn't know. And so I figured, well, I'll just open my mouth.

Interviewer:
Thank you.

[End Sumi Seki File 4]